

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

MetMUNC XLIX

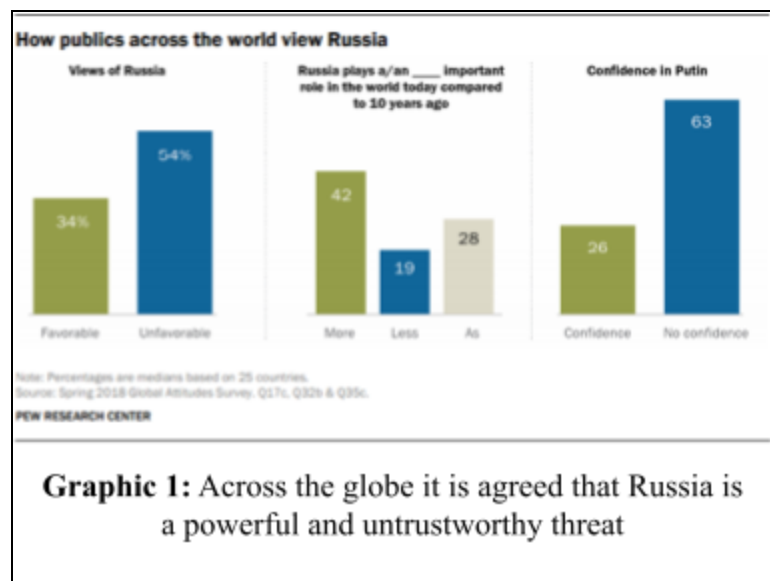
Topic: Expanding Russian Influence

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Russia is a country with ever growing reach and power in Europe and the Middle East. Ever since Vladimir Putin was elected president, he has taken steps to lessen democracy's grip in both the northern region of Russia and surrounding European and Middle Eastern nations. Russia's interest in the two regions is not anything new.

Since the Ottoman Empire, Russia had an interest in power in the Middle East. Vladimir Putin's returning of attention to the Middle East after previous rulers had withdrawn in the 1990s is in fact a return to normality, not something



odd, as many think it is.¹ It is clear that Russia wants to challenge NATO's power in the region, which is concerning at best. In Europe, many so-called "Satellite States" of the Soviet Union feel the pressure of Russia acutely. Russia sees NATO's taking in of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania as a threat. When NATO declared their intentions to involve Ukraine and Georgia in NATO as well, Russia was quick to attack the two nations. In Northern Europe and the Balkans, misinformation campaigns have been

¹ <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/10/24/brief-guide-to-russia-s-return-to-middle-east-pub-80134>

consistent. Many believe that Russia has played a more prevalent role in foreign affairs in the past decades, but few think they are a trustworthy ally.²

NATO in The Middle East

In the Middle East, the situation is not any better. The war in Syria has been going on for nine bloody years, and Putin has been supporting Bashar al-Assad in his brutal suppression of the Syrian population. Thanks to the help of generous Russian and Iranian military enforcements, Mr. al-Assad seems to be at the cusp of a military victory. The rebel forces have been all but defeated, with the exception of a couple of pockets in the north and most of the northeast.³ There is also the question of the Kurds, an



Graphic 2: President Putin and his Secretary General meeting with Mr. al-Assad

indigenous group that populates Syria, Iran, Iraq, and Turkey. They have been mercilessly persecuted in all the countries they reside in and wish to form their own state, Kurdistan. The Kurds have been fighting against the Syrian government alongside NATO for much of the war, but they may be priming to stop doing so. The Kurds believe in democracy, but when faced with Turkey's aggressive behavior, and deals from Putin and al-Assad that could save millions of lives, they may have to turn

² <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2018/12/06/image-of-putin-russia-suffers-internationally/>

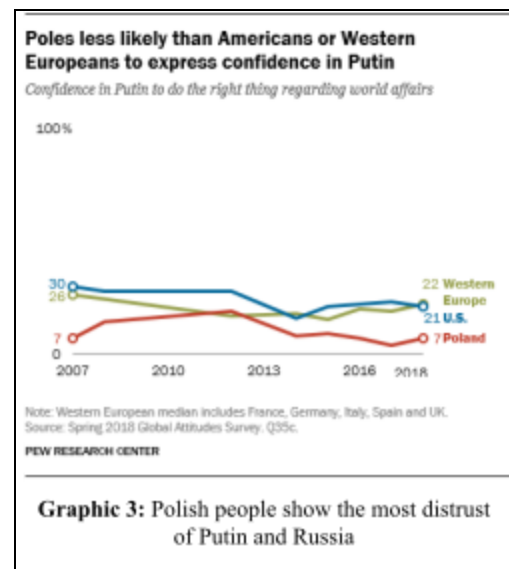
³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/15/world/middleeast/syria-economy-assad-makhlouf.html>

away from the US and NATO.⁴ The question of how many troops and how much support we are willing to give to get them a homeland without being indebted to Russia is a hard one to answer.

Russia is also strengthening ties with Turkey which has led to tension between Turkey and the rest of NATO. Turkey, though a part of NATO, has begun to go against its morals more and more consistently, building a close relationship with their northern neighbor across the Black Sea. Turkey has been making arms deals with Russia, invading Syria, attacking the Kurds, and planting anti-American propaganda. President Donald Trump threatened late 2019 that “if Turkey does anything that I, in my great and unmatched wisdom, consider to be off limits, I will totally destroy and obliterate the Economy of Turkey.”⁵ Tensions are high, and some have even suggested reassessing Turkey’s membership in NATO.⁶

NATO in Europe

In northern Europe, Poland has felt the constant threat of Russia, though not just militarily. Putin has repeatedly made claims overstating The Soviet Union’s helpful role in WWII and placing some of the blame for the catastrophic event on Poland. Stanislaw Zaryn, the spokesman for the head of Poland’s security services also believes that Putin is waging an information war to weaken and undermine the West’s alliances. In one interview he



stated that “The claims made by Putin are part of a comprehensive disinformation effort aimed to

⁴ <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/10/13/kurds-assad-syria-russia-putin-turkey-genocide/>

⁵ <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/natos-turkey-ties-must-change>

⁶ <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/north-atlantic-treaty-organization-nato>

destabilize the West, pit NATO member states against each other, undermine the credibility and reliability of the Alliance, as well as to paint a false picture of Russia as a global defender who should sit at the table when the decisions on the world order are made.⁷” Russia poses large threats outside of arms deals and invasion threats, and their pinning the blame of the holocaust on Poland all but proves it. Russian pressure can be seen especially clearly in Poland’s fellow northern nation, Ukraine, where in 2014, Putin sent troops in to annex the peninsula of Crimea. Seizing Crimea allows Moscow to get a stronger hold of the Black Sea, and therefore a stronger hold in the Mediterranean, Middle East, and North Africa. Ukraine has stated they would like to join NATO, but Putin has made it clear that accepting Ukraine would be seen as a hostile act towards Russia.⁸

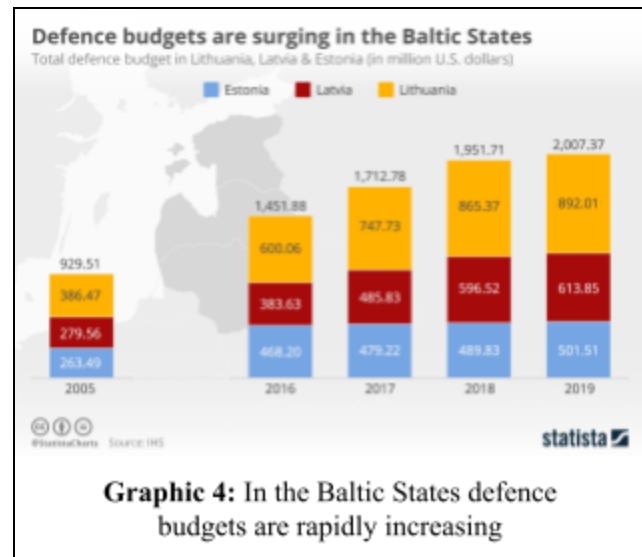
In the Balkans, Russia has also spread large amounts of anti-west propaganda. Much of the propaganda is focused in Serbia, as they are the only Balkan country that has yet to announce intentions to join NATO, but every Balkan state has felt its effects. Moscow has been known to attempt to stir conflict in regards to to Greek-Macedonian name deal, as well as using the prevalent Orthodox churches in the region to try and gain cultural leverage. In 2016, the Russian Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU) took part in a well documented and failed coup to assassinate the Montenegrin Prime Minister, throwing the country into chaos and preventing them from ascending into NATO the next year. Luckily this attempt was found out and prevented, but it shows just how far Russia is willing to go in order to sow seeds of chaos and prevent the furthering of NATO. The Balkan region is known to be one of the most susceptible to “fake news” due to lacking education systems and poor political literacy, and though many countries in the region have invested in Western cyber-security, propaganda and the spread of Russian misinformation remains a crucial issue.⁹

⁷ <https://www.timesofisrael.com/poland-says-putin-falsifies-world-war-ii-history-to-weaken-western-allies/>

⁸ <https://www.cfr.org/background/ukraine-conflict-crossroads-europe-and-russia>

⁹ <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/02/06/russia-s-game-in-balkans-pub-78235>

The Baltic nations, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, find themselves under constant Russian threat. As neighboring states that were once part of the USSR, they are countries that Russia would love to incorporate back into their domain. If they were to attempt to war against these countries, NATO would risk the start of a nuclear war due to Russia's "escalate to de-escalate" strategy. This states that they would be willing to let out a nuclear warhead to attempt to force NATO to oversee a peace-making alliance more favorable to Moscow's wishes.¹⁰



Russia poses a serious threat all throughout the European continent.

Current Efforts

NATO has taken little initiative in the Middle East as a whole. Though Turkey, who is at the forefront of the fight, has requested military aid from NATO, they are not in a situation where they are able to invoke Article 5 and call all of NATO to their defense. Turkey making arms deals with Russia and buying armaments not compatible with Western systems has not helped their situation with appealing to NATO. The countries of NATO have given Turkey political support and helped upgrade their air defense, maritime presence and information sharing, and some individual countries have taken up arms in the war, but NATO as a whole will not be waging war anytime soon.¹¹

¹⁰ <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2019-11-07/nuclear-war-in-the-baltics-russia-could-force-one>

¹¹ <https://theconversation.com/why-turkey-cant-expect-military-support-from-nato-over-attacks-in-syria-132838>

In Europe, NATO has helped to bolster both military and cyber defenses in Slavic nations, the Baltics, and the Balkans. In these areas, the Russian nuclear threat is also very real. NATO has thousands of soldiers in the Baltic states, and the three countries there have radically increased military spending.¹² In the Balkans, NATO has helped install security against Russian cyber attacks and helped to restore political order in the region. Many of NATO's most recent members have been from the Balkan region (North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania, Croatia, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Romania), and Bosnia and Herzegovina is currently participating in the Membership Action Plan (MAP).¹³ By involving more countries from these regions that are susceptible to Russian misinformation, NATO is better able to protect the truth and bring about an age of equality. The Slavic region has been a sight of NATO participation since the 1999 expansion, when Poland and the Czech Republic joined NATO's ranks. Since then, Poland has been a critical military sight due to its proximity to Russia. NATO has been in support of Ukraine joining NATO for a long time, and has condemned Russia's illegal behavior in Crimea. Western countries have imposed sanctions on Moscow and put strain on the long-term oil business of Russia, hoping to solve the issue peacefully.¹⁴

As NATO, it is our responsibility to try to reach a solution on what should be done regarding Russia's many threats on both the physical and cyber security. We stand for peace and democracy, and the issue of Russia's threat to both of these must be solved.

¹² <https://www.statista.com/chart/amp/6626/defence-budgets-are-surg-ing-in-the-baltic-states/>

¹³ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_37356.htm

¹⁴ <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2020/07/08/an-independent-and-sovereign-ukraine-is-key-to-euro-atlantic-security/index.html>

Helpful Links:

1. <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2015/06/10/1-nato-public-opinion-wary-of-russia-leary-of-acton-on-ukraine/>
2. <https://www.cfr.org/in-brief/natos-turkey-ties-must-change>
3. <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2019-11-07/nuclear-war-in-the-baltics-russia-could-force-one>
4. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/02/06/russia-s-game-in-balkans-pub-78235>
5. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/15/world/middleeast/syria-economy-assad-makhlouf.html>

Questions to Consider:

1. Turkey, though a part of NATO, has a tendency to make decisions against NATO's values. What should be done about these differing views?
2. Should Ukraine be allowed to join NATO despite Russia's threats? Why or why not?
3. How should Kurdish dealings with Syria and Russia be handled?
4. How should NATO counter Russian misinformation?
5. To what extent should NATO be worried about possible Russian cyber attacks?
6. How can nuclear threats made by Russia be resolved?