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2025 Field Study in Peace and Conflict: **THE BALTICS**

Norwich University Peace & War Center

Thank you to the George and Carol Olmsted Foundation

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MISSION STATEMENT:

The Olmsted 2025 Field Study Team will broaden their cultural and diplomatic perspectives while representing Norwich University, the Olmsted Foundation, and the United States Officer Corps; honing their planning skills, cultural awareness, and developing a nuanced perspective; stewarding the Olmsted Field Study program for the next class.

OVERVIEW:

Norwich University's Olmsted Field Study began in December 2024. Ten Norwich cadets and one faculty member were given the opportunity to travel to and learn about peace and security in the Baltic States, made possible by the George and Carol Olmsted Foundation.

The goal of the field study is to provide future officers with intercultural competency-building opportunities in an immersive environment. In the current global battlespace, international cooperation is a critical skill that must be understood, from the African Continent to the Indo-Pacific region. Our team consisted of four United States Army cadets, one Republic of China (Taiwan) Army cadet, two United States Navy midshipmen, one United States Marine Corps officer candidate, one United States Air Force cadet, and one United States Space Force cadet.

The Baltic region is extremely topical in the geopolitical state of the world today. The Baltic States each have a distinct cultural identity reflective of their complex history and ethnic makeup. In recent history, the nations of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania have been occupied by Tsarist Russia, Nazi Germany, and Soviet Russia. Since gaining independence after the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the people of all three respective countries have fought fiercely to gain and maintain their voice and influence on the European continent and world stage.

Starting in December 2024, our 11-person team scheduled meetings, made travel arrangements, and met with locals in preparation for the two-week-long field study. This phase also included extensive research on the history, culture, politics, economics, and current events of all three Baltic States.

After months of prep work, we arrived in Tallinn, Estonia, on 5 May 2025. Over the next several days, we made our way from Tallinn down to Tartu, Estonia, Riga, Latvia, and finally, Vilnius, Lithuania. At the conclusion of the study, we were able to analyze all the data we had collected following 21 meetings over 13 days in-country.

Meetings included entities at all levels and covered several nationalities. These meetings included anything from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs for Estonia and Latvia or NATO's Center of Excellence for Strategic Communications in Riga, Latvia, to the Financial Crimes Investigation Service of Lithuania, covering all instruments of national power (diplomatic, informational, military, economic).

We observed similarities and differences between each Baltic State's perspective on transregional issues like Russian aggression in Ukraine, Russian hybrid warfare tactics projected on NATO members, and migrant instrumentalization in Eastern Europe.

The team also noted the critical role that Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania play and could play in the region. Below are some of the most important data points:

- The Baltic States have smaller GDPs compared to other NATO members, yet they all rank among the top six in defense spending as a percentage of GDP.
- Russian-speaking minorities make up a significant portion of each Baltic State's population, especially in large cities and eastern subregions, but never make up the national majority.
- Conscription is mandatory in Estonia and by lottery in Latvia and Lithuania.
- Following the events in Ukraine in 2014 and 2022, each Baltic State increased spending on civil defense initiatives to educate civilians on topics ranging from civil disobedience to organized resistance and basic survival in the first 72 hours of an invasion.
- Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian policymakers and military leaders are proactively pursuing closer partnerships with Western allies, especially the United States, despite geographic proximity to Russia and Belarus.

2025 OLMSTED TEAM ITINERARY: INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL & EXPERIENCE

ESTONIA; MAY 5-9

- o U.S. Embassy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Baltic Defence College, Tour of Estonian 2nd Infantry Brigade, Estonian Military Academy, combined training area in Raadi, Estonia

LATVIA; MAY 9-13

- o Old Town Riga tour, Museum of Soviet Occupation, Soviet town tour, St. John's Church service, public engagement on Ukraine conflict, National Defense Academy of Latvia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, NATO Strategic Communications Center COE

LITHUANIA; MAY 13-18

- o Historical tour of Vilnius, U.S. Embassy visit, Lithuania Military Academy, Israeli Embassy, Financial Crime Investigation Service, Meeting with Vilnius University professors, Taiwanese Consulate visit

FUNDING:

Norwich Olmsted Budget 2025: **\$36,395.10**

The amount carried forward from 2024: **\$7,484**

OUR TEAM CONSISTS OF:

- Nine U.S. students representing all branches of the United States Armed Forces



- One Taiwanese cadet from the R.O.C. Military Academy, who is receiving his bachelor's degree from Norwich University before joining the Republic of China Army.



- One Norwich University faculty member: Dr. Travis Morris, Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice and Director of the Peace and War Center.



OLMSTED 2025 FIELD STUDY STATISTICS

Over **14** days, our team visited **3** countries.

10 students representing **8** independent majors, including one Taiwanese exchange student.

5 branches of the United States military.

FIELD STUDY PEACE AND CONFLICT STATISTICS

12 MEETINGS

4 in Estonia

3 in Latvia

5 in Lithuania

8 TOURS

3 in Estonia

3 in Latvia

2 in Lithuania

12 ENGAGEMENTS

4 in Estonia

6 in Latvia

2 in Lithuania

TIME SPENT IN COUNTRY

4 days in Estonia

4 days in Latvia

5 days in Lithuania



Skyline of Riga, Latvia.

TEAM MEMBERS

TWO UNIVERSITIES REPRESENTED: Norwich University and the Republic of China Military Academy

9 Cadets from Norwich, representing all five branches of the United States Armed Forces

1 Cadet from R.O.C.M.A. who will commission into the R.O.C. Army after graduation from Norwich

1 Norwich University faculty member accompanied the team: Dr. Travis Morris is a professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice and Director of the Peace and War Center

The roles helped our team learn the interpersonal skills necessary for working with a diverse and intellectually capable team. The logistical obstacles of traveling overseas and conducting a field study were multi-faceted and complex. With these responsibilities in mind there were struggles and unexpected problems that allowed



us to expand our skillsets. For example, our team learned how to take charge and lead when the situation required. This also required a patient team that could understand when it was time to follow. Additionally, we learned how to work with airlines after a team member's luggage was left in another country. We learned how to process unexpected changes and find adequate solutions.

Cadets were also tasked with researching the history and political climate of their assigned countries. Each day in-country was thoroughly planned and coordinated by three cadets, who contacted military officials, government agencies, and embassies. Additionally, they researched the history and background of the country to become familiar with the country they were assigned to, specifically in understanding the conflict in the country and the differences represented in perspectives. Balancing the responsibilities of logistical planning and foreign area research provided our team the opportunity to plan and execute a multinational field study of peace and conflict to better prepare us for our future military careers.

Name	Position	Major(s)	Branch of Service and Preferred MOS
Daniel Inglee	Team Leader	Political Science/ Studies in War & Peace	U.S. Army Military Intelligence
Jackson Batzel	Operations Officer	Studies in War & Peace	U.S. Marine Corps Infantry
Lilian Lu	Financial Officer	Computer Security and Information Assurance	U.S. Army Military Intelligence
Matthew Printup	Administration Officer	Studies in War & Peace	U.S. Army Field Artillery
Hatem Muhammad	Logistics Officer	Nursing	U.S. Army Nursing
Eric Barbosa Semedo	Logistics Officer	Criminal Justice/ Spanish	U.S. Air Force Pilot
Katherine Suarez	Communications Officer	Mechanical Engineering	U.S. Navy Submarine Force
Kun-Yi Hong	Communications Officer	Political Science	Republic of China Army Special Forces
David Hamilton	Cultural Officer	International Studies/ Studies in War & Peace	U.S. Navy Explosive Ordnance Disposal
Aaron Whitlock	Team Analyst	Computer Science and Information Assurance	U.S. Space Force Space Operations
Dr. Travis Morris	Peace and War Center Director	Criminologist	Professor

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

32 Members

35 Non-Member Partners

Military Protection–Political Alliances



The NATO Strategic Communications Center of Excellence building.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), established on April 4, 1949, is a political and military alliance formed to counter Soviet influence in post-World War II Europe. Founded by 12 countries including the United States and Canada, NATO operates on the principle of collective defense, as outlined in Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. During the Cold War, NATO served as the Western counterbalance to the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact. Following the Soviet Union's collapse, NATO expanded its membership, now totaling 32 countries, and broadened its mission to include peacekeeping, crisis management, and operations beyond Europe.

NATO's structure includes the North Atlantic Council as its main political decision-making body, led by the Secretary General, and the Military Committee, which guides its military strategy. In addition to its core mission of collective defense, NATO now addresses emerging threats like terrorism and cyberattacks and has conducted missions in Afghanistan, Libya, and the Balkans. Through initiatives like the Partnership for Peace, it also engages with 35 non-member partners worldwide, reinforcing its global security role.

Their addition to NATO came after decades of Soviet occupation and represented a firm commitment to Western security structures. Since joining, NATO has established enhanced Forward Presence battlegroups in all three Baltic states, with multinational forces. These deployments became particularly important following Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, which dramatically changed the security perception in the region.

The NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence (NATO StratCom COE) in Riga, Latvia was established in 2014 and officially accredited by NATO in 2014. As one of NATO's Centers of Excellence, it serves as a hub for expertise, research, and training in strategic communications, focusing particularly on evolving information and hybrid threats. The center was established in direct response to Russia's increasingly sophisticated information warfare tactics observed during the annexation of Crimea and ongoing operations in Ukraine.

The StratCom COE conducts cutting-edge research on topics such as disinformation campaigns, social media manipulation, and cognitive warfare. It regularly publishes reports analyzing information

trends and developing countermeasures against operations designed to negatively influence adversaries. The center also provides specialized training for NATO personnel and member states on effective strategic communications and recognizing and responding to disinformation. Latvia's hosting of this center reflects the Baltic States' particular awareness of and vulnerability to information warfare, given their historical experience with Russian and Soviet propaganda and their significant Russian-speaking populations.

The Baltic States face unique security challenges due to their geographic position, including the Suwalki Gap – a narrow corridor of land connecting Poland to Lithuania that, if seized, could cut off the Baltic States from the rest of NATO territory. This vulnerability has led to specific defense planning scenarios and reinforced NATO's commitment to Article 5 collective defense guarantees in the region.

Our field study in the Baltics relied heavily on understanding NATO and its objectives. We gained a more nuanced and holistic view of Eastern Europe through the lens of the former Soviet states by analyzing historical events and current relations with Russia and Belarus in the region. Approval of NATO presence is a central theme throughout the Baltics both in the minds of civilians and military personnel. The primary goal of NATO is to create and develop a robust system of credible deterrence to prevent conflict in the region.

Despite its longevity and adaptability, NATO faces ongoing challenges. These include burden disputes regarding defense spending among member states, with the United States historically contributing the largest share; questions about its relevance in a post-Cold War world; tensions with Russia, particularly following events in Ukraine; and adapting to emerging security threats such as cyber warfare, hybrid warfare, information warfare, and global terrorism. Nevertheless, NATO continues to serve as a cornerstone of transatlantic security and remains a significant force in international relations.



The Olmsted team outside the NATO StratCOM COE building in Riga, Latvia with COL (POL A) Dariusz Niedzielski the Chief of Staff

Information Warfare

Our research findings on hybrid warfare can be divided into two key areas: The social fragmentation caused by Russia and Belarus in neighboring countries and China's strategic infiltration during times of chaos.

In the Baltic region, we observed a clear pattern: the closer a population is to the Russian border, the more exposed they are to disinformation, cognitive manipulation, and propaganda. This is particularly evident in Estonia and Latvia, where a significant portion of the population speaks Russian. These Russian-speaking communities are more vulnerable to pro-Kremlin influence and infiltration, which in turn undermines trust in NATO and national governments. Many citizens express skepticism toward the U.S. and allied military presence in their countries, viewing it as a waste of public resources. Our analysis also delved into how Russia uses Western actions and reactions to shape outcomes in accordance with its preferred narratives.

As a result of these threats, the Baltic states have developed a precise and proactive strategy. Their governments have invested heavily in cybersecurity, media literacy education, and public awareness campaigns. They have used the Russo-Ukrainian conflict as a case study to reinforce the importance of NATO support and defense initiatives to their citizens. These efforts have significantly weakened Russia's ability to sow divisions, positioning the Baltic States as a frontline and role model in resisting hybrid warfare.

In contrast, China's approach to hybrid warfare appears to be more insidious — and Western democracies, including Taiwan, seem less prepared to counter it. China has gradually increased its global influence, leveraged European distrust and confusion while monitoring Western reactions to the ongoing events in Ukraine to better prepare for future operations. On a societal level, China's influence is increasingly pervasive, especially in Taiwan, which is currently facing the most concentrated forms of infiltration. China is biding its time, waiting for the right moment to disrupt the global order and possibly replace the United States as a global leader.

This comparison shows that China and Russia's advancements in Hybrid Warfare capabilities represent a serious long-term threat. More concerning is that the Western world's countermeasures have not matched the intensity or clarity of those implemented by the Baltic States in response to Russia. It is clear from this analysis that our focus in preparing future officers must not only lie within the domains of physical and mental toughness but also requires us to reaffirm our commitment to relentlessly pursue innovation and critical thinking.

LOCATIONS

REPUBLIC OF ESTONIA

Population: 1,193,791 (2024 est.)

Independence: 20 August 1991

Joined NATO: 29 March 2004

Joined EU: 1 May 2004

Estonian Defense Forces: Approximately 7,500 active-duty personnel; approximately 44,000 Defense League



Estonia Peace and Conflict

PAST

Current issues Estonia faces stem from its history with the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. Estonia gained independence in 1918 during the Russian Revolution when the Germans entered Estonia, allowing it to gain freedom from the Russians. It was because of that intervention that Estonia viewed Germany as liberators. During WW2, the Molotov-Ribbentrop



Cadets stood next to Julius Kuperjanovi, representing the Estonians' will to fight for their freedom.

Pact (1939), also known as

the Hitler-Stalin Pact, was signed. This allowed Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia to strengthen their powers in a time of non-conflict between the two nations. In 1941, Germany reentered Estonia with a different objective and occupied the people, killing, deporting, and suppressing Estonians. In 1944, Soviet Russia reentered Estonia after Germany's attack, and the cycle of occupation, mass killing, deportations, and suppression continued. During the time of this occupation, the population of ethnic Estonians dropped from 90% to 60%. Stalin aimed to make Estonia mainly Russian regarding ethnicity by moving Russians to the empty cities. Estonia regained independence in August 1991 during the fall of the Soviet Union. The last of the Soviet soldiers left in 1994. Thus, many Estonians speak Russian, and the formation of Ethnic Russian Estonians, who speak only Russian due to growing up in Russian-speaking communities and schools.

PRESENT

Estonia has hosted troops from multiple NATO member states as part of its commitment to deterrence and defense. Estonia hosts approximately 1,000 U.S. Army soldiers as part of NATO's enhanced forward presence, underscoring its strategic importance in the region. One of NATO's largest drills happening on this side of the world is taking place in Estonia. Exercise Hedgehog is a multinational joint exercise that takes place every three years. This year's exercise began on Monday, May 5th, and will run through May 23rd, involving operations across the country. This year, more than 16,000 troops from Estonia and allied nations participated, including active-duty personnel, conscripts, and reservists. The primary focus of the exercise was on planning and executing joint military operations while strengthening interoperability between Estonian forces and their NATO allies.



Cadets met with Mrs. Liis Lipre-Jarma to discuss Estonia's initiatives in foreign policy and relations.

FUTURE

Estonia's main security concern is the threat of Russian invasion and how they will use their limited assets in retaliation. They have limited air force and navy capabilities with their focus on their land forces department. Estonia's objective is to hold off any aggression using its ground forces if any invasion is imminent and wait until NATO aid arrives. According to analysts at the Baltic Defence College (BALTDEFCOL), American troops would take approximately 96 hours to deploy to Estonia in the event of an attack. This critical window shapes much of Estonia's defense planning and preparedness.



Cadets spent three days at the Estonian Military Academy discussing the officer training pipeline for the future officers of the Estonian Military.

Estonia is making efforts to increase its defense spending, with ambitions to raise to 5% of GDP: well above NATO's recommended 2% threshold. This expanded budget is focused on modernizing its ground forces, acquiring long-range precision weaponry, and improving situational awareness systems to enhance early threat detection and rapid response capabilities. Estonia is also working to improve its infrastructure and deepen its operability with NATO allies to ensure that reinforcements can be rapidly integrated into its national defense.

Olmsted Scholar

Our team had the privilege of meeting with Olmsted Scholar Major Natalie Rambish, U.S. Air Force. She is currently finishing her master's thesis at Tartu University in Tartu, Estonia, while also interning at the Baltic Defense College. During our conversation, she gave insights into the core mission of the Olmsted Foundation and her experiences learning Estonian. Without any prior experience in the language, she is now taking Estonian philosophy courses without any English. As undergraduate students, our field study provided a preliminary glimpse of what the Olmsted Foundation and the U.S. Armed Forces have to offer. Major Rambish's anecdotes resonated with the team, and she is truly an inspiration to us as cadets and midshipmen.



MAJ Natalie Rambish, USAF



The team met with LTC Kevin Ryan NU'06 (the first Army War College Fellow to attend the Baltic Defense College) and MAJ Natalie Rambish, a current Olmsted Scholar in country.

REPUBLIC OF LATVIA

Population: 1,801,246 (2024 est.)

Independence: 21 August 1991

Joined NATO: 29 March 2004

Joined EU: 1 May 2004

Latvian National Armed Forces:

Approximately 8,000 active military forces; approximately 10,000 National Guard (2024)



Latvia Peace and Conflict

PAST

Latvia has a long history of foreign occupation dating back to the 13th century, influencing its modern security outlook. Starting in the Middle Ages, Latvia was taken over by Germanic crusaders who founded Riga, the current capital of Latvia. For centuries, Latvia traded hands among rulers, having limited political power, from Poland to Sweden and eventually the Russian Empire following the Great Northern War in the early 18th century. Latvia first gained independence after World War I in 1918, following the collapse of the Russian Empire.

In 1940, Latvia was incorporated into the Soviet Union, soon mass deportations, arrests, and executions of the Latvians followed. German occupation came next, spanning from 1941 to 1944, where Latvia became a site of the Holocaust and the Nazi regime, turning the population into forced laborers and personnel of the military. As the war changed, the Soviet Union reoccupied Latvia in 1944 and integrated it into the USSR as a Soviet Socialist Republic. This is known as the second Soviet occupation from 1944 to 1991.

During this time, Latvians were deported and imprisoned, and policies encouraged the dilution of Latvian national identity, making them a minority. In 1987, the three Baltic States united themselves through the Singing Revolution and the Baltic Way, a chain of people that spanned from Tallinn through Riga, in line with their freedom monument, and to Vilnius, launching the demand for independence.

On August 21st of 1991, Latvia gained its independence after the fall of the Soviet Union. The legacy of foreign occupation, cultural suppression, and ethnic divisions remains. Their history greatly shaped the country's post-independence priorities: to ensure sovereignty through integration of Western institutions, rebuilding of national identity, and securing peace through strong alliances.



(L to R) Cadets Daniel Inglee, Kunyi Hong, Eric Barbosa, Katherine Suarez, and Lilian Lu at the Freedom Monument in Riga, Latvia

PRESENT:

Since regaining independence in 1991, after decades of Soviet occupation, Latvia has placed paramount importance on securing its sovereignty through the integration of Western political, economic, and defense structures. Considering the region's complex geopolitical history and proximity to Russia, NATO membership is not just a symbolic affiliation but an essential element of its national security and foreign policy. It ensures Latvia benefits from the collective defense against both conventional and hybrid warfare, providing security assurances to the country and strengthening defense ties to the United States, especially for the procurement of advanced military equipment.

Compared to its Baltic neighbors, Estonia and Lithuania, Latvia has taken a more gradual approach to military development. This reflects the reliance on NATO forces stationed within the country as a key deterrent against the looming possibility of Russian aggression, while attempting to scale up its national defense infrastructure.

Beyond conventional warfare capabilities, NATO also offers strategic knowledge-sharing opportunities for members, along with rapid support against attacks. A prime example is the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence (StratCom COE), headquartered in Riga, Latvia. Established through initial funding from the three Baltic States, the center has become a leading research institution that provides training and policy development in countering disinformation, propaganda, and information warfare. Tools that are often employed by adversaries, like Russia, to destabilize a democratic society.

While NATO aids in securing Latvia's military, the European Union complements this with economic and political resilience. EU membership grants access to structural and cohesion funds that can be used to support improvements in infrastructure, education, and healthcare. The Single Market helps to establish easier trade between member states and creates broader investment opportunities for businesses.

One of the most practical benefits for Latvian citizens is the freedom of movement, allowing them to live, work, and travel across the EU without restrictions. Politically, Latvia holds a voice in the EU's decision-making process, which helps to uphold democratic principles, strengthen the rule of law, and promote institutional reforms within the country.

In response to the growing regional instability and fear of possible actions from Russia, Latvia has increased its defense spending significantly. The current plan has 5% of GDP planned for defense spending in 2026, which is a drastic change from the former 2.27% utilized in 2023. Initiatives include the reintroduction of mandatory national service (conscription service), expansion of border security, and further investment in cybersecurity efforts.



Dr. Travis Morris presenting a Tarbucket to Vice Rector OF4 Ēriks Keisters of the National Defense Academy of Latvia

Having both NATO and EU membership provides Latvia with a comprehensive security framework, allowing the country to protect its borders, develop economically, and solidify its democratic institutions.

FUTURE:

Latvia has only regained independence in the past 35 years. It is a relatively new country in terms of identity. After Soviet culture stripping during occupation, the country has struggled to reform that identity, holding onto old stories from its first independence period in 1918 to 1940. Living memory is a prioritized focus on rebuilding the nation, keeping the old stories alive and passed on through the generations. The preservation of Old Town is a

testament to this, as one is able to see the transformation and different coats of arms around the city as Riga underwent different foreign power occupations.

Looking ahead, Latvia's approach to peace and security is expected to evolve along three key trajectories: military modernization, resilience against hybrid threats, and regional leadership within NATO and the EU. These goals are shaped not only by the lessons of history but also by the current security landscape in Eastern Europe, which remains volatile due to the ongoing war in Ukraine and rising authoritarianism in neighboring Russia.

Latvia's most immediate priority is the continued strengthening of its national defense capabilities. Latvia has made a turn to allocating a significant number of resources towards modernizing its armed forces, expanding training programs, and enhancing readiness. This process has happened gradually and at a slower rate than in the other Baltic States. Latvia reinstated its conscription service in 2023 to help rebuild military numbers, which is the most progressive measure that has been taken. This will help the country to be able to support NATO operations and defend its national territory if Russia invades Latvia's borders.

Latvia seeks to ensure that it will never again fall victim to foreign domination. It looks towards serving as a model of a small state that transformed its vulnerability into strength through unity, foresight, and international solidarity.



Olmsted Foundation team pictured with Mr. Juris Pēkalis: Director General of Directorate of Security Policy and International Organizations

REPUBLIC OF LITHUANIA

Population: 2,628,186 (2024 est.)

Independence: 11 March 1990

Joined NATO: 29 March 2004

Joined EU: 1 May 2004

Lithuanian Armed Forces: Approximately 18,000 active-duty personnel (including about 5,000 active National Defense Voluntary Forces (2024)



Lithuania Peace and Conflict

PAST

Lithuania has a long and complex history regarding conflict both locally and regionally. Facing pressure from crusaders at the end of the 13th century, the tribes constituting modern Lithuania united under the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and would go on to shape Eastern European affairs until the late 18th century. Despite once being the largest state in Europe, the region eventually fell under the control of Tsarist Russia in 1795.

Apart from a brief stint of independence in the wake of the Bolshevik revolution and lasting until 1940, Lithuania would be

occupied by Russia in both its Imperial and Soviet forms until it regained independence in 1990. Since its independence from the Soviet Union, Lithuania has worked to reorient itself to Western Europe, joining the European Union and NATO in May of 2004.



Remains of the Upper Castle, built atop Gediminas Hill. The castle was besieged by Teutonic Knights eight separate times but was never fully taken.

PRESENT:

Lithuania represents a keystone state regarding peace and security in the region, as it lies at the crossroads between the Northern Baltics, Belarus, and the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad. Since joining in 2004, Lithuania has become an active NATO contributor. As a result of the strategic importance of Lithuania's geographic location, Germany leads a NATO battlegroup of approximately 1,000 troops in Lithuania, established after Russia took Crimea in 2014. Lithuania hosts NATO air patrols at Šiauliai Air Base to protect Baltic airspace. The country spends 2.7% of its GDP on defense, exceeding NATO's 2% target, and participated in NATO missions in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Mediterranean.

Over 80% of Lithuanians support NATO, seeing it as essential protection against Russian threats. This strong support comes from Lithuania's history of Soviet occupation and its location near Russia's Kaliningrad territory. Lithuania consistently pushes for stronger NATO presence on the eastern border, especially since Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Political leaders across all parties support NATO, and citizens welcome NATO troops as protectors, understanding the vital role that NATO and the United States play in providing credible deterrence.

FUTURE:

The primary threats towards security in the region are posed by Russia and Belarus. These threats are mainly involved in the non-kinetic domains including disinformation, cyber-attacks, and economic and communications sabotage. Energy security is crucial, with Lithuania working to end dependence on Russian supplies by building LNG terminals and connecting to European networks. As well as the many conventional threats posed by Russia and Belarus, the region is on the frontlines of modern Hybrid and Cognitive warfare. Belarus has weaponized migration since 2021, pushing migrants toward Lithuanian borders. In response to these many threats, Lithuania has taken steps to increase its military capabilities in both kinetic, and non-kinetic domains. Currently, Lithuania plans to increase its military budget to 5.5% of its GDP to increase the size of its standing force as well as modernizing the equipment and training its troops will use and receive. Additionally, the country has developed "total defense" strategies that prepare both military and civilians for potential crises through civil engagement and volunteer training.



Team members pose for a photo with 2nd Year Cadets of the General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania.



A photo of the Lithuanian Presidential Palace, located in central Vilnius.

PERSONAL STATEMENTS

Daniel Inglee

Team Leader – Olmsted 2025



The Olmsted Trip to the Baltics was an experience that shaped my development not only as a leader and college student, but as a future Army officer. Traveling through Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania deepened my understanding of regional stability and NATO's strategic posture in Eastern Europe. My eyes were opened to the vital role these nations play in defending eastern Europe: countering Russian influence and propaganda while maintaining peace in a complex security environment. I gained a firsthand appreciation for the constant attentiveness required to safeguard sovereignty in the face of stronger threats. Speaking with local leaders and citizens helped me connect abstract strategic concepts to real-world concerns and human experiences.

One of the most impactful lessons from the trip was the critical role of information warfare in the region. The Baltic States are constantly targeted by disinformation campaigns designed to erode public trust, manipulate historical memory, and diminish national identity. I witnessed how governments, independent media, and civil society collaborate to strengthen information resilience, an effort that proves just as vital as conventional military defense. This experience highlighted the growing importance of strategic communication and media literacy as essential tools in today's security landscape.

As Team Leader, I was responsible for coordinating with other members to ensure our trip ran smoothly. This required a strong grasp of logistical planning, strategic communication, and team dynamics, all skills that are essential to military leadership. It also built my confidence in managing real-world challenges. Engaging with Baltic military leaders, diplomats, and civilians offered invaluable insights into hybrid warfare, deterrence, and alliance-building. Representing Norwich University, the Olmsted Foundation, and the U.S. Army with professionalism, I left the region with a renewed sense of purpose and a broadened global perspective. This experience enhanced my readiness to lead in diverse environments and reinforced the importance of empathy, adaptability, and international cooperation.

Matthew Printup

Administration Officer – Lithuania Team



Learning in the physical area where a great number of important historical events occurred is critical to analyzing and understanding a region/information space. Before this intellectual journey I was naïve to many of the narratives and opinions of the Baltic States, and I was largely uninformed on these former Soviet states.

Following this experience, I have gained a unique perspective that is different and more holistic than my counterparts in the United States via analyzing this region by way of speaking with the people of Eastern Europe.

One notable perspective I gained is the citizen-soldiers' resilience and grit to survive and defend their nations from an invasion of their homeland. Insight from soldiers and cadets in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania allowed me to see that these were not a cowardly people, but a people extremely proud of their nations. They are willing to fight and perish as their ancestors have done for hundreds of years in defense of their land and ideals. This sense of patriotism and pride in one's nation is commendable and afforded me the context necessary to draw conclusions about the state of their military and their population as a whole.

However, their understanding of the importance of NATO and critical nature of the United States forward presence was unexpected. The Baltic people recognize the military giant that could be knocking on their doorstep sometime in the near future, as well as how critical it is to maintain positive and effective relations with friendly nations who are aligned in ideals. They prioritize joint training and international cooperation in military contexts that allow them to prepare as much as possible.

I am greatly appreciative of this opportunity to study peace and conflict in the Baltic States. I have gained analytical skills in skepticism that allow me to dig much deeper into ideas; I am no longer taking things at face value, and I can look at complex situations from a macro viewpoint. These are skills that are necessary for military officers, and I will carry them throughout my military, academic, and professional careers. This field study has changed the way I view the world and its citizens forever.

KUN-YI, HONG

Communications Officer – Lithuania Team



As the only international student on this trip, I know that I could not fully understand all the content, so I dedicated myself to experiencing, documenting, and promoting our field study. My job is to help more foreign government agencies and military academies understand Norwich University and the mission of the Olmsted Foundation.

During this learning journey, I encountered two main challenges: the language barrier and my unfamiliarity with regional issues of war and peace. By overcoming these obstacles, I developed the resilience and critical thinking necessary for a future military officer.

First, since English is my second language and Baltic people speak with a non-American accent, I often struggled to grasp key points during discussions.

However, I pushed myself to actively seek clarification from speakers and engaged in post-meeting discussions, which allowed me to fully absorb the essence of each session.

Second, my past studies on war and peace were primarily focused on Asia. To overcome this limitation, I conducted background research before the trip and paid close attention to local perspectives throughout the field study. This helped me gain a much more realistic understanding of the region, and communicating with local people was more crucial than relying on internet information.

The key takeaways from my learning:

1. The people of the Baltic States demonstrate remarkable resilience in defending the survival and democracy of small nations. In particular, military academy cadets embrace a “ready to die” mindset in the face of war, and Lithuania’s decision to establish diplomatic ties with Taiwan despite pressure from China is a powerful symbol of their courage.
2. The Baltic countries are actively building strong partnerships with the West to deter threats from Russia. We saw their determination. For example, at the NATO base in Estonia, the government completed critical infrastructure within a week to support U.S. forces. I saw similarities of survival between Baltics countries and Taiwan.
3. China is successfully conducting hybrid warfare by benefiting from both Russia and Ukraine during the war, while also using economic and diplomatic pressure to hinder cooperation between the Baltic region and Taiwan. This trend is likely to pose a significant threat to the Western world within the next decade. It is time to deter China by our “determination” and “action.”
4. Relying solely on single-sided perspectives can limit our ability to fully understand complex situations. The team was able to benefit from my perspective as a Taiwanese to broaden our discussions. For example, Taiwan and the Baltic States share notable similarities in terms of diplomatic approaches and military strategies. By examining these parallels, we can cultivate a more international and well-rounded mindset.

This two-week experience has inspired my desire to better understand war and peace within international relations. I realized that “perspective” influences how we define right and wrong in conflict. As a future military officer, the most important skill I must cultivate is independent thinking in order to make the “best” decisions in real time.

Hatem M. Muhammad

Logistics Officer – Estonia Team



Trial and error: the essence of this field study. The preparation for our journey was met with difficulties and obstacles; yet this team overcame them. Additionally, we acquired the necessary data points to become more worldly and academic future officers.

A key observation in each Baltic capital included the historical appearance of the Old Town. The accommodations I helped select put on display how much the Baltic history and culture mean to the people; historical sections of the city remain fossilized to preserve their identities. History has been going on for hundreds of years, and many governments and occupiers have expressed themselves in the capital's infrastructure, culture, and language. Holding on to

this culture is a way for the people of the Baltic to express their independence and to show the world that they are a unique people, with their traditions, way of life, and cuisine.

A common theme of our meetings was the Ukrainian fight for the freedom of Europe. My analysis says this is why the Baltic countries provide Ukraine with humanitarian and military aid. They want to combat the threat at the source in Ukraine to prevent it from spilling into their homeland. Another common theme was the importance of the United States' presence in this region. Constance H. Wang (the Taiwanese Representative to Lithuania) stated that the presence of the U.S. is the number one, two, and three support nation for the Baltic States. This proves the United States' significant role in the peace and security of this region. Not only knowing this, but understanding this is crucial for future military leaders in their decision-making process and understanding each nation's complex narratives towards their specific objectives.

This experience will help me as an officer in the military; I will be commissioned as a nurse in the United States Army. One of the critical nursing skills is cultural competence, and this cultural and academic journey has dramatically helped me understand this region. I now better understand the allies and the adversaries of the United States, and by pushing myself out of my comfort zone, I am a more effective communicator with a more professional approach to international relations.

Eric Barbosa Semedo

Logistics Officer – Estonia Team



Before taking part in this field study, my understanding of world history of the Baltic region was limited. I was born outside the United States meaning I did not grow up with a nuanced understanding of world history or the unique challenges different nations have faced. This study offered me the opportunity to go beyond textbooks and headlines to see and feel the layers of history, culture, and resilience that define the Baltic region and its people.

Spending four days in Estonia gave me a much deeper appreciation of the country's heritage and the strong sense of national pride that exists among its citizens. One of the most impactful parts of the experience was staying at their military academy. It offered a rare and valuable perspective

on how their military system works in comparison to the United States. Unlike the United States, Estonia has mandatory conscription at the age of 18, their cadets are active members of the armed forces while being trained as future platoon leaders/officers. This dual role as students and soldiers places a great responsibility on their shoulders.

What resonated with me most was how seriously they embraced this duty. National service is not an obligation, it is a deeply held commitment to protect their homeland. With Russia only 40km away from their military academy and Kaliningrad even closer, there is a staunch awareness of history repeating itself regarding the occupation of their nations. The proximity of enemies along with the memory of past occupations and conflicts, fuels very real and heartfelt patriotism. Observing that up close made me reflect on how intertwined a nation's history can be with its people's identity and values.

The most critical thing I have taken away from this trip is the importance of not guessing or speaking without a solid foundation of knowledge. I learned that one should only speak about things one has researched and fully understands to brief someone confidently. Knowing facts is not enough but being able to clearly explain them is necessary, especially when discussing complex topics such as international relations, history, or national identity.

Additionally, being a logistics officer for this study and part of the Estonian team gave me valuable leadership and organizational experience. I learned how to plan events, travel, and meetings down to the minute, ensuring there were no gaps in scheduling or communication. This role pushed me to become a better communicator, especially through email, and gave me the chance to help our team make the most out of important meetings and cultural experiences. It was incredibly rewarding to contribute to the success of the trip in this way.

I am truly appreciative of the opportunity to have immersed myself in a culture so different from my own. This experience has changed the way I look at history and international relations. History is not defined as a series of dates and events, but as lived experiences that shape a nation's choices and spirit. It has also broadened my understanding of peace and security. My shift in perspective to view the world with more empathy and context is something I will carry with me long after this study is completed.

Jackson Batzel

Operations Officer – Lithuania Team



Two weeks ago, while sitting on a plane crossing the Atlantic Ocean, there were many things I thought I knew about the Baltic States. The phrase, “You don’t know what you don’t know” has resonated with me deeply. The Baltic States are a place like nowhere else in the world: deeply entwined with the past and on the cutting edge of the world’s future. The Baltics and its people have maintained a character which I believe the United States lost some time ago. Grit, determination, and resilience are not put on a moral pedestal, as they are words that could characterize every citizen. Since the Teutonic Knights arrived in the 12th century to bring Christianity to the North by fire and sword, the peoples of the Baltics have been engaged in invasions from all sides, and revolutions within.

From Napoleon to Putin, the Baltics have been on the forefront of overt aggression and the struggle for cultural identity. Through all of this, however, the people of the Baltics have maintained strong cultural identities, fierce patriotism, and resilience in the face of existential threats.

The 2025 Olmsted Field Study was more than an academically or diplomatically enriching trip, it was an eye-opening experience in the realities our allies exist in. Walking the halls of the Estonian Military Academy in Tartu, I was struck by a simple poster you would never find in the dorms/barracks of an American university or academy. “If you are weak, you’re gonna die.” The existential and domineering nature of the threats arrayed before them, and the reality of living so close to their greatest enemy, have only hardened their resolve in the face of death. Their commitment to persevere in the face of overwhelming odds was not the only thing that stuck with me on this trip. Standing in a crowded square in Riga, Latvia, with people of all ages late one night, I watched the people of Latvia rally behind their hockey team as it took on and ultimately defeated France in the opening round of the IIHF world championship. Broadcasted on massive screens throughout Riga, the game drew crowds of diehard fans and patriots that filled the streets. The undertones of unity were present in every country and city we visited but was exemplified most in Riga among the cheers and waving banners. Beyond the loud and overt, the most impactful moment of this study was found in the simple, quiet moments. I observed grandmothers praying for peace in a small Orthodox Church; observed a weeping statue overlooking a Church desecrated by the Soviets, and saw the dark cells of the Latvian secret police. I was inspired by the optimism and hope for a brighter future found within every citizen.

This Field Study has been foundational in my future as a culturally aware and globally minded military officer. The skills I have gained in analysis, planning, international relations, and cultural understanding will undoubtedly form me into a more prepared and well-rounded Officer in the United States Marine Corps.

Aaron Whitlock

Team Analyst – Latvia Team



"The more you know, the more you realize you don't know."

Expectations are subliminally pre-embedded in every experience that life has to offer. As an American on a plane from Istanbul to Tallinn, I had a shallow understanding of the complexities of simply being a citizen in a country bordering our greatest adversary. Fast-forwarding two weeks, I have a deeper comprehension of life in the Baltics. Resilience is the way of life here. As a people, Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians have been fighting for freedom for centuries. This way of living is, in a way, incomprehensible to most people living in America. During our time, no foreign army has occupied American soil. Simultaneously, it is very possible that this region could become the next theater of war in which we will engage. Understanding the Baltic States and their bilateral relations in Europe and abroad is critical for upcoming leaders in our armed forces. Furthermore, it is critical for upcoming leaders to understand the underlying mindset here: Russia is a serious threat, and we will be ready.

This came as a great surprise to me. The sheer will and patriotism of the Baltic peoples should inspire the West, considering the current geopolitical situation and context in Europe. They are taking a stand and working hard to maintain peace and security in the face of a powerful adversary. From HIMARS to UH-60s, they are expanding their arsenals and creating spaces for further bilateral cooperation, especially with the United States, which they perceive as their strongest ally.

I am very thankful for this experience. I have learned an incredible amount about what it really means to be resilient and the role that the United States plays in this corner of the world. I can say that I am now better equipped to enter a global military community and work closely with our NATO partners to maintain peace and security worldwide. Concurrently, I am excited to continue building important partnerships in this region and around the world.

Lilian Lu

Finance Officer – Latvia Team



Throughout the field study, there has been a common theme of “living memory.” An idea not so apparent in the United States yet is the pinnacle of the Baltic States today. From everyday cuisine to its architectural construct, each of the Baltic countries holds great importance in remembering their origins and shaping the narrative that has developed modern society. From the buildings of Latvia, which were built as an extension of their city walls, to Lithuania’s establishments built with various materials – unique remnants that hold the stories of the past (time of Soviet Rule, Russia’s occupation, etc.). The history of the Baltics is still relevant today and lives on in the memories of the last generation, making a common practice passed through word of mouth, and therefore remembered among the young.

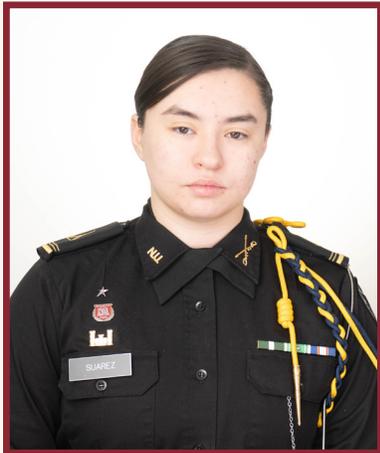
At Norwich University, I am studying Computer Security Information Assurance with a minor in Information Warfare (IW). Interacting with both the locals and those on a diplomatic level has allowed me to further my understanding of IW by studying the narratives in the Baltic States. It is critical to understand that we are all a target of propaganda, the media’s orientation of current geopolitical conflicts. Each event builds a narrative geared towards a specific audience, and the outflow of information is not as clear-cut as we think.

The 2025 Olmsted Field study has continued to emphasize the information network with each contact we meet; from discovering the impact the Russia-Ukraine War has on the Baltics, to learning how Taiwan is in a similar position against a superpower, we open a new perspective. What surprised me the most was our meeting with the Israeli Embassy. It is admirable that diplomatic considerations are being made to balance the priorities of fighting a seven-front war at home, while being cognizant of what’s occurring in others. Additionally, the Baltics Field study has shown that in the midst of major conflicts capturing the eyes of many, in parallel, other nations are taking the time to prepare, learn, and account for a potential future.

Furthering my experience in information warfare and hybrid warfare, this field study has taught me a new perspective on the strategic battlefield, an emphasis on hard power vs soft power. Although the United States has been prepared against information warfare campaigns like disinformation, cyber-attacks, etc., perhaps we should also look to the potential dangers of offensive measures that are “softening” the population to lose in strategic battles. I was once told, “As a future military leader, we would one day make decisions that will save the lives of many, and some of us will make decisions that would lead to the demise of others.” I am inspired to be an Intelligence officer in the United States Army, and I hope to develop myself with a continual desire to learn, analyze, and transform those analytics into an advantageous perspective to lead.

Katherine Suarez

Communications Officer – Latvia Team



Prior to participating in the cultural field study in the Baltic States, I had a foundational understanding of the region's occupational history. I was aware of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939, which secretly divided Eastern Europe between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. I also knew of the following German invasion in 1941, only for the region to fall back under Soviet control until 1991. While this historical knowledge provided context, experiencing the region firsthand significantly deepened my understanding and emotional connection to these complex legacies.

This field study has been an eye-opening experience that has helped to deepen my academic understanding of the historically complex region of the Baltics. It brought to life the limited narrative I have seen in textbooks in a way I couldn't ever imagine. Visiting the Museum of Occupation in Riga helped draw the emotional connection to the occupation that I had never made in the classroom. I was particularly struck by how the memory of these occupations is not only a matter of history, but a living part of national identity and geopolitical strategy. The feeling of patriotism and pride from our tour guide when standing at the footprint memorial of the Baltic Way and in line with the Freedom Monument was a powerful moment for me on this study.

What stood out to me most was these nations' resilience and strategic foresight in the post-Soviet period. Despite their small size and complicated past, they have actively pursued integration into Western institutions like NATO and the EU. Understanding how the Baltic States view deterrence from their experience adds context to the significance of our contribution to the reassurance of allies and strategic stability. Previously, I viewed these decisions through a policy lens. I now see them as choices vital to safeguarding sovereignty and ensuring a future free from foreign domination. Their commitment to democratic values and collective security reflects a forward-looking vision grounded in lived experience.

This experience enriched my academic grasp of Eastern European history and international relations and emphasized the value of experiential education. It deepened my understanding of how history, politics, and memory are intertwined, and how regional narratives shape global security dynamics. As a future officer in the United States Navy, this field study significantly expanded my geopolitical awareness and appreciation for allied resilience. I left the Baltics with a lasting respect for their perseverance and a renewed commitment to understanding the strategic environments in which we operate.

David Hamilton

Cultural Officer – Estonia Team



Prior to this field study, I admit my ignorance to the tensions between the Baltic States and Russia. Over a thousand years of complex history seemed overwhelming at first, but my knowledge of peace and security within this region has dramatically increased over the course of two short weeks. Among these, two important concepts stood out to me: the relationship between narratives and patriotism and the link between culture and history.

One of the main events the Estonia team arranged was to visit the 2nd Infantry Battalion in the field during Operation Hedgehog. The name of this exercise – explained to us by the Latvian Command Sergeant Major – particularly stood out to me. The national animal of Russia is the brown bear, which is a fitting symbol considering the nation's size and military strength. The hedgehog, a relatively small mammal, is representative of the Baltic States, with every soldier acting as a single quill. While small on their own, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania draw strength from their unity – combining resources, innovation, patriotism, and an unyielding will to resist another occupation and defend their sovereignty.

It is honorable, but I had further questions. During our tours in Riga, Vilnius, and the Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fights, I was confronted with the atrocities of both Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia invasions, but on different levels. In America, our students are taught that Nazis are the “ultimate” bad guy: an evil that cannot be trumped. In the Baltic States, Russia fills that role. A personal anecdote from a Vilnius tour guide illuminated the harsh reality that every Lithuanian was affected by Soviet occupation and forced deportations. Contrastly, the Israeli embassy inferred that the Soviets liberated the Jews from German extermination, with Lithuanians being complicit. The war in Ukraine was described as the war for Europe by almost every agency we visited – including the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs – which explains most of Eastern Europe's profound support for Ukraine. However, a cadet from the Lithuanian military academy claimed that had it been America that invaded Ukraine, Lithuania would have looked the other way.

Sorting through distinct experiences, biases, and emotions was unexpectedly difficult. Whether the top government leaders or the humblest soldier, all these perspectives are influenced by narratives set by the actors involved. It cannot be stressed enough that information warfare, specifically the use of propaganda to create certain narratives, is a direct reflection of one's loyalty to their state and the extent of their willingness to defend it.

I have always been fascinated with foreign cultures. Examining history and gaining context allows for an understanding of why things are the way they are in different parts of the world. For someone that knows nothing about Estonian, Latvian, or Lithuanian history, they might wrongfully assume that Baltic people are inherently rude. For example, when stepping into a taxi or elevator, small talk

is nonexistent. However, when one connects the past with the present – linking the former Soviet occupation to the current population’s reserved demeanor, and the years of deportations to Siberia and KGB surveillance to the deeply ingrained distrust of outsiders – it becomes clear that such caution should be met with understanding and sympathy.

After graduation, I hope to be commissioned into the U.S. Navy as an Explosive Ordnance Disposal Officer. This position is one of high stakes with no margin for error, but one of the most important aspects of the job is joint training with allied nations. Having conducted a field study in the Baltics and interacting with their militaries, I feel more confident in my ability to operate effectively in unfamiliar environments, build relationships that foster mutual trust, and use my adaptability to be successful in coalition operations. Such cultural awareness is incumbent upon every officer to anticipate potential disagreements that can be prevented through respectful conversation and diplomacy. I am grateful for enhancing my cultural competence during this experience. I plan to use the memories from this field study for the rest of my life and encourage all others to submit themselves and their ignorance to the humbling enlightenment of cultural immersion. The world is too complex to lead without first learning to listen.







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The Final meeting for 2025 Norwich Olmsted Team with the Taiwanese Representative, Constance H. Wang in Lithuania.