

NATO-Russia Relations: A Study of the Current Presence in the Baltics

Emilie Hedegaard Jensen (20165398) and Stephanie Pilgaard Nielsen (20163789)

Master's Thesis – Development and International Relations – Aalborg University

Supervisor: Anita Nissen

Date for submission: 28 May 2021

Character count: 150423

Abstract

This thesis investigates the probability of a Russian military escalation in the Baltics considering NATO's motive to enhance its Forward Presence in the area. In order to do so, the thesis analyses various factors, which are deduced from the theories of neorealism and neoliberalism. Thus, the approach of the thesis is based on positivist epistemology meaning that reality is observable and objective. In addition, the thesis contains a qualitative research approach where a case study of the Baltic states as a potential area of confrontation between NATO and Russia is included. The theoretical basis for the thesis is the theories of neorealism and neoliberalism and the including branches of defensive and offensive neorealism and interdependence and institutional neoliberalism. The theories explain the actions of states and institutions while providing different factors to include in the analysis. These factors involve institutional cooperation, Russian-speaking minorities, geopolitical interests, economic relations, hybrid warfare and different statements. In the analysis, it is revealed that a hybrid escalation in the Baltics seems more probable to take place in the nearest future rather than a military escalation. First, it is revealed that Russian-speaking minorities in the Baltic states give Russia a motivation to invade the area. Second, neoliberalism uncovers that interdependence and institutions create a basis for peaceful cooperation, thus downgrading the probabilities of a Russian escalation in the Baltics. On the other hand, neoliberalism also acknowledges that states may act out of self-interest, thereby maintaining the possibility of an escalation. Third, offensive neorealism exposes Russia's interest in the Suwalki Gap, Putin's recent statements as well as Russia's application of hybrid warfare in the Baltics which illustrate a priority for power and a desire to gain greater impact in the Baltics rather than a priority for security. Fourth, defensive neorealism encounters that Russian troops in Kaliningrad and Russia's application of hybrid warfare reveal a desire to protect and secure its own region due to a fear and insecurity of the Baltics' real intentions. The discussion assesses global factors of Russia's ongoing initiatives and how these may have an impact on a possible Russian escalation in the Baltics. It is debated that an escalation may first be probable when Russia has resolved its disputes with Ukraine. In addition, it appears that Russia at the moment has other interests. Thus, even though one cannot predict when an escalation may happen, these factors do not exclude the probability of an escalation.

Table of content

1. Introduction.....	5
2. Research question	6
3. Structure of the paper.....	7
4. Literature review.....	8
5. Theoretical Framework	13
5.1. <i>Neorealism</i>	13
5.1.1. Defensive neorealism.....	16
5.1.2. Offensive neorealism.....	17
5.1.3. The polarity of the system.....	18
5.1.4. Criticism of neorealism.....	18
5.2. <i>Neoliberalism</i>	20
5.2.1. Interdependence neoliberalism.....	21
5.2.2. Institutional neoliberalism.....	22
5.2.3. Criticism of neoliberalism.....	23
6. Methodological Framework.....	25
6.1. <i>Objectives of the thesis</i>	25
6.2. <i>Definition of actors</i>	25
6.3. <i>Research strategy</i>	26
6.3.1. Case study	26
6.3.2. Document analysis.....	27
6.4. <i>Choice of data</i>	28
6.5. <i>Limitations</i>	29
7. Analysis.....	30
7.1. <i>Historical overview</i>	30
7.1.1. Soviet occupation of the Baltic states.....	30

7.1.2. Regaining independence	31
7.1.3. Moving towards the West	31
7.1.4. Russia's behaviour in recent years	32
7.2. <i>North Atlantic Treaty Organization</i>	33
7.3. <i>NATO's enhanced Forward Presence</i>	34
7.4. <i>Collective Security Treaty Organization</i>	38
7.5. <i>Russian-speaking minorities in the Baltics</i>	41
7.6. <i>Russian troops near the Baltic borders</i>	43
7.6.1. The Suwalki Gap	44
7.7. <i>Economic relations between Russia and the Baltics</i>	45
7.8. <i>Russian Hybrid Warfare</i>	47
7.9. <i>Recent declarations on Russia's and NATO's precautionary measures</i>	50
7.9.1. Speech by President Vladimir Putin.....	50
7.9.2. Speech by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg.....	52
8. Discussion	55
9. Conclusion	59
10. Bibliography.....	61
10.1. <i>Agreements</i>	61
10.2. <i>Articles</i>	61
10.3. <i>Books</i>	71
10.4. <i>Www documents</i>	72

1. Introduction

The relationship between NATO and Russia is a very debated topic due to the parties' strained relationship with each other. These strained relations have especially intensified in recent years due to Russia's actions such as its invasion in Georgia in 2008 and in Ukraine in 2014 (Pruitt, 2018; Conflict in Ukraine, 2021). Russia's aggressive actions have resulted in a fear from the West and a speculation as to whether the Baltic states could be next in line of such aggression as the Baltics, just like Georgia and Ukraine, are former Soviet Republics and share borders with Russia. Thus, in order to protect the Baltics from a possible direct conflict with Russia, NATO enhanced its presence in the Baltics in 2017 by introducing its new strategy, namely the enhanced Forward Presence (eFP). This new strategy comprises four battlegroups in the Baltics and Poland where NATO troops are deployed in order to enhance NATO's presence in these areas and protect and collaborate with the region (NATO, 2017). So far, Russia has not made an attempt to enter into a direct military conflict with the Baltic states. However, according to the scholar, Viljar Veebel, NATO and the West have reason to fear a Russian escalation in the Baltics as he claims: *"Today, it is not about whether or not it will happen - it is about how soon and where it would happen"* (Veebel, 2019, p. 50). Thus, we find it interesting and relevant to investigate the underlying factors of NATO's presence in the Baltics and to examine whether a Russian intensification in the Baltics is probable. We intend to do so by looking at various factors which we will derive from the chosen theories namely neorealism and neoliberalism. The factors we will examine include institutional cooperation, Russian-speaking minorities, geopolitical interests, economic relations, hybrid warfare and recent statements. All of these elements lead us to the following research question.

2. Research question

Considering NATO's reason to enhance its Forward Presence in the Baltics, what factors influence whether or not a Russian escalation is likely in the region from a neorealist and neoliberal perspective?

3. Structure of the paper

This thesis will consist of a literature review followed by a chapter on the theoretical framework, a methodological chapter, an analysis, a discussion and finally a conclusion.

The literature review is intended to provide the reader with an overview of different scholars' findings of NATO-Russia relations in relation to the Baltic states.

The chapter on the theoretical framework aims to explain the two theories of neorealism and neoliberalism. Furthermore, this chapter will explain the different branches within the two theories, namely, offensive and defensive neorealism and institutional and interdependence neoliberalism. Each theory section will contain a part with criticism of the theory.

The methodological chapter has the intention of explaining the methodological choices we have taken throughout the thesis.

The analysis will contain several parts. First, a historical overview will be presented in order to explain the context of the Baltic case. Thereafter, we will investigate the possibilities of a Russian military intensification in the Baltic states by looking at several factors. These factors will include initiatives taken by Russia and NATO such as NATO's enhanced Forward Presence, Russia's collaborative initiatives with the Eurasian community in the form of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, U.S. agreements with the Baltics and Russia's geopolitical interests in Kaliningrad and the Suwalki Gap. In addition, the analysis will contain elements such as hybrid warfare, Russian minorities in the Baltics, economic relations between Russia and the Baltics as well as declarations regarding security matters made by Russian President Vladimir Putin and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg. This is all with the purpose of examining the potential motives for a Russian military intensification in the Baltics based on the chosen theories.

The discussion will look at the possibilities of a Russian intensification in the Baltic states from a more global perspective by investigating other Russian ongoing initiatives.

Lastly, we will finish our thesis by concluding our findings.

4. Literature review

The relationship between NATO and Russia is a very researched topic. This relationship has especially been investigated after the end of the Cold War. As this thesis will examine the Baltic case after Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania gained their independence, the literature review will focus solely on research after the end of the Cold War.

As the Baltic states are former Soviet republics that are now members of NATO (NATO, n.d.), a lot of focus has been on NATO-Russia relations concerning the Baltic states during recent years. In this literature review, we aim to give the reader a bigger insight into the topic regarding NATO-Russia relations and the Baltic states and clarify some of the research that has already been investigated in relation to the topic. Furthermore, we wish to apply neorealism and neoliberalism as our theoretical framework in the thesis. Thus, we believe that it is important that the reader gets an insight into how different scholars have utilised these theories on the topic before. All this is with the purpose of explaining other scholars' findings as well as demonstrating how our research differs from these.

Scholars have investigated NATO-Russia relations as well as the Baltic states from various angles. Scholars such as Hellmann & Wolf (1993) and Thue (2007) have focused on NATO as an institution. Other scholars have investigated the relationship between NATO and Russia, where some are more focused on NATO. Some of these include Ratti (2009) and Miller (2008). Other scholars, such as Sleivyte (2008) focus on Russia. Common for these scholars who are concerned with the relationship between NATO and Russia is that they all apply the theories of neorealism and neoliberalism to their research. In addition, NATO-Russia relations have been investigated with a specific focus on the Baltics. Scholars such as Veebel (2008) and Veebel and Ploom (2019) have investigated the Baltics' deterrence strategy. Furthermore, the Baltic states' security situation has been a widely researched topic in recent years due to Russia's behaviour and the annexation of Crimea in Ukraine. Scholars that have investigated this include Veebel (2019) and Kamiński (2020).

In *Neorealism, Neoliberal Institutionalism, and the Future of NATO* by Gunther Hellmann and Reinhard Wolf from 1993, the two scholars investigate the future of NATO after the dissolution of the Soviet Union by applying the theories of neorealism and institutional neoliberalism. According to Hellmann and Wolf, neorealism suggests that NATO will dissolve now that the Soviet Union no longer poses a threat because the theory claims that alliances exist due to a common enemy shared by the members. On the other hand, institutional neoliberalism suggests that NATO will survive in

its current form or adjust to new changes. Thus, institutional neoliberalism claims that NATO will continue operating in one way or another (Hellmann & Wolf, 1993, pp. 3-43).

Since that time, more scholars have investigated NATO as an institution as well as the factors that can explain NATO's formation and its ongoing existence and development. In his research paper *Explaining NATO. Neorealism, Neoliberalism, and the Atlantic Alliance After the Cold War* from 2007, Magnus Thue examines whether the theory of neorealism or institutional neoliberalism best explains NATO and its evolution since the end of the Cold War. To examine this evolution, Thue focuses on NATO's actions in Afghanistan. According to Thue, both theories are useful to understand NATO and its evolution. However, he states that the theory of neorealism can be applied to explain the formation of NATO, while institutional neoliberalism can be applied to explain NATO's survival after the Cold War. Therefore, Thue concludes that both theories are relevant in the investigation of NATO. Nonetheless, each theory can be applied to explain different matters in relation to NATO (Thue, 2007, pp. 1-88).

In addition, as already mentioned, many scholars have investigated NATO's relationship with Russia since the end of the Cold War with some scholars focusing on NATO while others focus more on Russia. Luca Ratti is NATO oriented in his article *Back to the future? International relations theory and NATO-Russia relations since the end of the Cold War* from 2009. Ratti investigates NATO as an institution as well as the relationship between NATO and Russia. The author applies three theories; liberalism, social constructivism and realism. First, from a liberal perspective, Ratti mentions that NATO can be seen as an institution that promotes democracy and freedom. In addition, NATO has created norms and rules which are consistent with liberal-democratic principles. From a liberal point of view, NATO can be seen as an open-minded institution due to its willingness to admit new members and thereby spread their liberal values creating new collaborations in order to prevent conflicts. Second, the author mentions that social constructivists would perceive NATO as a community whose identity is not only based on a common military threat but also on shared cultural and democratic ties. Lastly, Ratti mentions that realism can be applied to the investigation of the relations between NATO and Russia. From a realist perspective, international institutions are established in order for states to seek their respective national interests. Realists are sceptical towards international institutions as they view institutions as a way for nation-states to collaborate against a common threat. Therefore, realists do not believe that these institutions will survive once the common threat has been defeated. Thus, realists anticipated that NATO would cease to exist after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Given that this has not happened, Ratti suggests that realists now perceive NATO

as a threat to Russia, which is highly due to NATO's development and its Eastern enlargement. Furthermore, Ratti mentions that Russia's actions can also be seen as threatening towards NATO and its member states. The author ends the article by concluding that realism is the best applicable theory to explain NATO-Russian relations (Ratti, 2009, p. 399-422).

In the article *NATO Expansion: The Need for Variation on the Realist Paradigm* from 2008 by Alfred Howard Miller, the primary focus is also on NATO. The author investigates why NATO is still expanding after the Cold War. In order to answer this research focus, Miller applies both neoclassical realism and neorealism. By applying neoclassical realism, Miller focuses on domestic factors such as political concerns and individual leaders' opinions and attitudes. By applying neorealism, Miller examines specific actions of the state of Russia and the NATO alliance. He concludes that Russia's actions, such as their attempt to prevent NATO enlargement, can be explained by defensive neorealism. Furthermore, NATO's expansion can be perceived as a way for the U.S. to obtain hegemony and, therefore, these actions can be explained by offensive neorealism. Miller ends his research by concluding that neither neorealism nor neoclassical realism can explain NATO's expansion properly. In addition, he highlights that neither of the two theories can explain the importance of international institutions today (Miller, 2008, pp. 1-48).

Contrary to Ratti and Miller, Janina Sleivyte addresses Russia's actions in relation to NATO and EU enlargement with a special focus on the entry of the Baltics states in the research paper *Russia's European Agenda and the Baltic States* from 2008. The author applies three different theories; neorealism, institutional neoliberalism and constructivism. Furthermore, she applies the Knudsen model to explain the relationship between a great power and its smaller neighbour states as well as the political pressure applied by the great power. The author demonstrates that all three theories are applicable to the case. First, she combines institutional neoliberalism and constructivism and concludes that international institutions and domestic factors promote a less strained relationship between the Baltic states and Russia due to Russia's willingness to cooperate with institutions such as NATO and the EU. Second, the author applies neorealism to the case and mentions that Russia's desire to cooperate with the EU and NATO can be seen as a tactical choice as Russia is merely interested in cooperation out of self-interest. The author concludes by stressing that neorealism is best applicable to explain Russia's actions (Sleivyte, 2008, pp. 5-50).

Other scholars have investigated NATO-Russian relations concerning the Baltics by examining NATO's and the Baltics' deterrence strategy. The article *NATO options and dilemmas for deterring Russia in the Baltic States* by Viljar Veebel examines the reliability of NATO's deterrence strategies

to prevent aggression from Russia. Moreover, Veebel investigates what aggression from Russia's side might look like and how NATO might be able to increase the reliability of their deterrence strategy. The author concludes that NATO's deterrence policies have not been satisfactory as the alliance has not been able to explain to each member state how deterrence works. As a result, each member state, therefore, has a different understanding of NATO's deterrence strategy as the alliance has not been capable of providing a clear agenda for this (Veebel, 2008, pp. 229-251). In the article *Are the Baltic States and NATO on the right path in deterring Russia in the Baltic?* from 2019, Veebel in collaboration with Illimar Ploom investigates NATO's and the Baltics' deterrence strategies. The two authors highlight the importance of a combination of a NATO deterrence strategy as well as a Baltic deterrence strategy in order to prevent Russian aggression. The article concludes that it is important for the Baltic states to have their own individual defence models as NATO cannot protect the states so easily in the first stage of a conflict (Veebel & Ploom, 2019, pp. 406-422).

In *Researching Baltic security challenges after the annexation of Crimea* from 2019, Viljar Veebel investigates the Baltics' security challenges after the annexation of Crimea. The article highlights that the Baltics' fear of an attack made by Russia is primarily due to Russia's prior actions in Georgia and Ukraine. Besides from investigating the security challenges the Baltics are facing, the article also debates the credibility of NATO's deterrence strategy. The author bases his study on approximately 40 articles produced by academics and military experts. Furthermore, he mentions six different categories to be aware of in relation to the security challenges in the Baltic region. Among these are conventional threat scenarios, potential nuclear escalation scenarios and Russia's point of view in the confrontation with the West. The author concludes that the wide variety of studies on this field demonstrates that many people are worried for the Baltics' future as they might be the next region where Russia will escalate the confrontation with the West. Furthermore, the author claims that today's worries are not so much about whether or not it will happen, but instead it is about how soon and where it will happen. Therefore, it is necessary for the Baltics and NATO to be prepared (Veebel, 2019, pp. 41-52).

In *Changes in the Security Environment of the Baltic States* from 2020, Mariusz Antoni Kamiński examines the security dilemmas that the Baltics are facing. He presents the dilemma in choosing the direction of the states' security policy after their independence in 1991. According to Kamiński, the Baltic states had three options. The first option was to implement military neutrality, meaning that they should not become members of security alliances but still cooperate with other states on different political matters. The second option was to establish relations with Russia and the rest of the

Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The third option was to become members of the European Union and NATO and establish closer ties with the Western economic community. Moreover, the author discusses the dilemma which has arisen due to Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. He states that the annexation has proved that the Baltics are under real threat. When Russia intervened in Georgia, the Baltics did not feel threatened because they knew that they had NATO by their side. However, the Ukrainian Crisis has sparked a feeling of fear in the Baltics that the states might be the next in line to experience Russian interference (Kamiński, 2020, pp. 25-37).

As presented in the literature review, many scholars have chosen to investigate the NATO-Russia relationship by applying different branches of realism and liberalism. Some of these scholars have also implicated the Baltics as an example of a possible area of conflict. In addition, most of the scholars claim that neorealism best can explain Russia's actions while neoliberalism is best applied to NATO. We intend to apply both of the theories to the actions of Russia and NATO in order to be as objective as possible. However, we are aware that neorealism may seem more applicable to the case rather than neoliberalism. In addition, it is important to mention that the scholars we differ the most from are Hellmann, Wolf and Thue who focus on the survival of NATO and the explanation hereof. This will not be our research focus. Instead, our desire is to investigate the different factors that can help explain whether or not a Russian military escalation in the Baltic states is probable by applying neoliberalism and neorealism. Therefore, our work resembles more that of Viljar Veebel who focuses on the security challenges that the Baltics are facing among which Russia is one of the greatest threats due to its actions in Georgia and Ukraine.

5. Theoretical Framework

In our thesis, we will apply two different theoretical approaches of realism and liberalism. More specifically, we will employ neorealism and neoliberalism throughout the analysis and the variations of the two theories, namely, defensive and offensive neorealism and institutional and interdependence neoliberalism. The purpose of this chapter is, therefore, to account for these theories.

5.1. Neorealism

In this part of the theory chapter, we wish to explain the theory of neorealism based on the findings of Kenneth Waltz and John Mearsheimer. To understand neorealism, it is important to know its historical roots and basic assumptions as well as the development of the theory. We, therefore, aim to first give an account of the realist thinking in general, whereafter we will focus solely on the theory of neorealism.

Realism is one of the major classical theories within International Relations (Jackson, Sørensen & Møller, 2019, p. 34). The theory is very preoccupied with the anarchical structure of the international system and highlights this fact as a reason for states to focus on their national security as there is no world government to neither protect nor constrain them (Jackson et al., 2019, p. 6). Before we begin to explain the theory, it is important to understand that the state system is not a natural given but a historical invention made by certain people at a certain time. In other words, human beings have not always lived in sovereign states as they do in today's modern world. Historically, human beings have been divided into chiefdoms, empires and kingdoms. However, throughout history this way of organising people's political lives has transformed (Jackson et al., 2019, pp. 11-12). Nonetheless, when we look into the division of empires and kingdoms, power and security have been essential goals and motivations (Jackson et al., 2019, p. 17). Thus, realist thinking can be dated back to the study of the Peloponnesian War between Sparta and Athens clarified by Thucydides. In his study, Thucydides explained that war is inevitable when one actor achieves more power than the other as this diverse growth of power creates tensions between actors. Thucydides is one of the greatest thinkers of classical realism along with Machiavelli and Hobbes (Jackson et al., 2019, pp. 72-74). According to Hans Morgenthau, realists share some basic assumptions. First, realists share a pessimistic view of human nature as they believe that human beings are selfish and preoccupied with their own well-being and interests as a result of the anarchical structure of the state system. In addition, Hans Morgenthau claims that these pessimistic characteristics of human nature result in a

natural struggle for power. Another assumption that realists make is that international politics are defined by power politics. In other words, the international system consists of conflict and war between states which is due to states acting out of their own self-interest in order to secure their own survival. Therefore, realists see the international system as an anarchy because of the lack of a superior global authority. Furthermore, realists claim that the state is the leading actor in world politics. In addition, realist thinkers mention that states are not equal, which is why there exists a hierarchy of power among states where one distinguishes between great powers and weaker powers. According to realist thinkers, weaker powers are less important and international relations should be seen as a battle between great powers for domination and security. In sum, realism's primary concern is survival of the state and national security. In addition, realists perceive international relations as conflictual (Jackson et al., 2019, pp. 70-71).

As the world began to change in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, a new branch of the other major IR theory, liberalism, arose, namely neoliberalism. This branch will be further explained later in the theoretical chapter. In the 1970s, scholars believed that neoliberalism was becoming the dominant approach in International Relations. Therefore, Kenneth Waltz developed the traditional realist thinking when he introduced neorealism in 1979. Thus, realism retained the status as the dominant approach in IR (Jackson et al., 2019, pp. 48-50). As the basic realist assumptions have already been accounted for, we will simply dive into neorealism, which focuses on the structure of the international system rather than human nature. In other words, neorealists believe that it is the structure of the international system that leads states to strive for power, thereby downgrading human nature as the primary reason for this desire. Neorealists mention that the fact that there is no superior global authority in the anarchic international system, creates a great probability of states attacking each other. For this reason, it is only natural for states to seek power in order to protect themselves in case of an attack. Thus, while realists perceive power as the goal, neorealists perceive power as an instrument to reach the ultimate goal which is survival. Furthermore, neorealists mention that it has minor significance whether a state is democratic or autocratic in relation to how a state reacts towards other states. Thus, neorealists claim that all states act in similar ways in spite of the internal structure of the state. However, they acknowledge that some states are more powerful than others which will have an impact on how states might act towards each other (Mearsheimer, 2013, p. 78). As mentioned in the introductory part of the chapter, Kenneth Waltz and John Mearsheimer are some of the greatest proponents of neorealism. John Mearsheimer proposes five assumptions concerning states' desire for

achieving power. The first assumption is that the international system is anarchic and that great powers are the main actors. The second assumption mentions that all states hold some offensive military capacity which means that they are able to harm other states. However, this capacity varies and changes over time. The third assumption highlights the uncertainty of other states' intentions. In other words, all states aim at knowing the intentions of other states. Therefore, one distinguishes between revisionist states, which want to change the balance of power using force, and status quo states which are satisfied with the balance of power and do not see a reason to change this balance. Nonetheless, it is never possible to know the exact intentions of other states (Mearsheimer, 2013, pp. 78-79). The balance of power aims to guarantee that no state succeeds in obtaining hegemony. Thus, it is necessary to maintain a balance of power avoiding overall domination by one hegemonic power (Jackson et al., 2019, p. 6). The fourth assumption claims that survival is the main goal of states. However, states can also have other goals but they cannot obtain these goals if they have not secured their survival. The final assumption mentions that states are rational actors meaning that they are capable of finding solutions that ensure survival in the best possible way (Mearsheimer, 2013, pp. 78-79). Thus, states may select other options to seek their interests. One of these options could be hybrid warfare (Filipec, 2019, p. 56). Mearsheimer underlines that none of these assumptions alone can explain why states compete with each other for power. Instead, it is important to combine all the assumptions in order to understand why states become preoccupied with the balance of power and pursue power at the expense of others (Mearsheimer, 2013, pp. 78-79). In addition, neorealism states that great powers fear each other. They fear that other states possess the capacity to attack them and because they operate in an anarchic system there is no greater authority to rescue them from an attack by another state. Therefore, states ought to secure their own survival. Nevertheless, states can still form alliances to combat a common threat but they will always prioritise their own interests before the interests of other states. According to neorealism, the best possible way for a state to survive is to be so powerful that other states do not dare to attack it. Thus, states aim to shift the balance of power to their advantage. It is especially important for these states to prevent other states from attaining power at their expense. Therefore, there is always a competition between states because it is never possible to be sure of each other's real intentions. The concept of the security dilemma stems herefrom. The security dilemma indicates that states cannot increase their own security without decreasing the security of others (Mearsheimer, 2013, pp. 79-80). According to Jackson et al., the fact that we live in a world composed of independent states makes security a highly relevant topic to discuss as each of these independent states to some degree are able to protect themselves because

most of them are armed and some are even major military powers. Thus, states work in two ways as a state can both defend and threaten the security of others. In other words, the paradox of the security dilemma indicates that states can both present problems as well as provide solutions (Jackson et al., 2019, p. 6). This creates a vicious circle because a state that attempts to secure its survival will always threaten the survival of other states which will then aim to ensure their survival. This again will threaten and affect other states meaning that the circle will continue (Mearsheimer, 2013, pp. 79-80).

As mentioned, neorealists agree on the basic assumption that states should aim at obtaining power in order to survive. However, they differ in their opinion on how much power is necessary. Therefore, one distinguishes between defensive neorealism proposed by Kenneth Waltz and offensive neorealism proposed by John Mearsheimer (Mearsheimer, 2013, p. 80). These will be further elaborated in the next parts.

5.1.1. Defensive neorealism

The founder of neorealism, Kenneth Waltz is a proponent of defensive neorealism. According to him, a state should only attempt to seek an appropriate amount of power because if the state becomes too powerful, the phenomenon of balancing will occur. This phenomenon indicates that if a state is very powerful, other states will attempt to increase their militaries and power and thereby balance against the powerful state. Thus, the powerful state will become less secure (Mearsheimer, 2013, p. 81). Furthermore, Waltz claims that power is a tool to obtain security. Thus, Waltz perceives states as security maximisers rather than power maximisers (Baylis, Smith & Owens, 2017, p. 108).

In addition, defensive neorealists believe that there exists an offence-defence balance. This involves dealing with how easy or difficult it is for a state to conquer another state's territory or to win a battle against the defender. Nonetheless, defensive neorealists claim that this balance is often in favour of the defender and, therefore, an entrance into these battles for power has more negative outcomes than positive outcomes. In this way, states will attempt to maintain their position in the balance of power, as an offensive approach hardly ever pays off.

To sum up, proponents of defensive neorealism claim that all states in the international system should understand these consequences and not seek more power because this could possibly threaten their own survival. Moreover, if all states recognise this, the competition about security would not be so intense (Mearsheimer, 2013, p. 81).

5.1.2. Offensive neorealism

John Mearsheimer does not agree with defensive neorealists concerning what amount of power is appropriate to seek. He, therefore, proposes another variant of neorealism, namely offensive neorealism. According to proponents of offensive neorealism, states should always aim to achieve more power in order to reach the ultimate goal of hegemony, because offensive neorealists believe that hegemony is the best way for a state to ensure its survival (Mearsheimer, 2013, pp. 81-83). In contrast to defensive neorealism, offensive neorealism provides another explanation to describe the behaviour of states. According to offensive neorealists, states should be perceived as power maximisers as the best way to ensure their survival is to be the most powerful state in the system (Baylis et al., 2017, p. 108). Offensive neorealists do not believe that balancing is efficient because they do not believe that small states dare to balance against great powers. Therefore, these small states will sometimes try to put the responsibility on to the more powerful states. This is referred to as buck-passing. Furthermore, offensive neorealists disagree with defensive neorealists on who has the advantage in war. While defensive neorealists claim that it is the defender who holds the advantage, offensive neorealists claim that the attacker holds the advantage, because history has shown that it is most frequently the attacker who wins the war. On the other hand, both defensive and offensive neorealists agree that the use of nuclear weapons is not beneficial unless only one part in a conflict possesses these. However, offensive neorealists acknowledge the fact that conquest is not always favourable. They highlight that it is not necessary for a state to occupy the whole defeated state. Instead, they claim that it is sufficient for the state to only occupy a smaller area of the defeated state (Mearsheimer, 2013, pp. 81-83). Even though offensive neorealists claim that states always aim to gain more power and achieve hegemony, Mearsheimer acknowledges that no state can achieve the necessary power to become a global hegemon. Instead, he claims that a state shall strive to become a regional hegemon (Jackson et al., 2019, pp. 93-94).

To sum up, offensive neorealists claim that states should always seek to achieve as much power as possible in order to stand strong against states and reach regional hegemony (Mearsheimer, 2013, pp. 81-83).

Neorealists claim that there are different reasons why states go to war. On the one hand, states may go to war because they wish to secure their survival. On the other hand, some neorealists claim that one of the factors why states go to war is due to the amount of great powers in the international

system. The discussion about the amount of great powers in the international system will be further elaborated in the following part.

5.1.3. The polarity of the system

Neorealists discuss whether a bipolar or a multipolar world is more war-prone. Some neorealists claim that a bipolar world is less war-prone than a multipolar world. A bipolar world indicates a world with two great powers. They propose three arguments as to why a bipolar world is better than a multipolar one. To begin with, they believe that there is a bigger opportunity for great powers to combat each other in a multipolar system. Secondly, they claim that the great powers in the bipolar system are more equal because if there are more great powers, the distribution of wealth, population and military powers will be unequal. Finally, one should only focus on the intentions of one other great power in bipolarity which means that there is less miscalculation and thus less opportunity for war. In addition, balancing is more efficient in bipolarity due to the fact that the great powers have no other choice than to confront each other (Mearsheimer, 2013, pp. 84-85).

On the other hand, other neorealists believe that a multipolar world is less war-prone than a bipolar world. According to them, the chances for peace are better if there are more great powers in the system. They propose two reasons for this argument. First, it is easier to deter an aggressive state in a multipolar system because more states can collaborate in the confrontation of the state. Second, states pay less attention to each other in a multipolar system which means that there is less hostility between great powers (Mearsheimer, 2013, pp. 85-86).

However, due to the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, neorealists have begun arguing whether the world has become unipolar with the USA being the global hegemon. They believe that a unipolar world will result in the absence of great power war and no need for competition for security because there is only one great power. On the other hand, the possibility for other types of wars, such as civil wars, is still probable because it is not possible for the hegemon to maintain order in all parts of the world (Mearsheimer, 2013, p. 86).

5.1.4. Criticism of neorealism

Even though neorealism is a very applied theory in International Relations, the theory still possesses several limitations that are important to highlight. Neorealism has been criticised for being too static and too narrow. Some of the critics highlight that Waltz's theory of defensive neorealism fails to explain change in the international system. These critics use the Cold War as an example where the

bipolar system was dissolved even though Waltz and his theory had claimed that the system was stable. This dissolution happened in spite of the absence of a great power war. Waltz acknowledges this limitation of the theory. However, he emphasises that the theory does not attempt to explain change but rather recurrences in the state system. The second criticism highlights that the theory of neorealism is too narrow as the theory is unable to predict outcomes. Therefore, the theory needs further elaboration which can be done in three ways. First, the three scholars, Buzan, Little and Jones believe that the structure of the international system should be expanded. Second, the theory should be further developed by concentrating on the motives that steer state action. Mearsheimer has attempted to correct this flaw by developing the theory of neorealism and introducing another approach, namely offensive neorealism. Lastly, the theory should be developed into also including domestic factors. Neoclassical realism has emerged from this line of thought (Jackson et al., 2019, pp. 90-91).

In addition, Mearsheimer's theory of offensive neorealism has also received some criticism. The criticism revolves around four main arguments. The first argument claims that offensive neorealism neglects to explain peaceful change and collaboration between states. The second argument mentions that states should not fear their survival as these critics argue that there are no examples of states annexing or conquering other states during the past years. Third, the theory fails to explain the emergence of international institutions such as the European Union. Lastly, the theory has been criticised for not being open-minded when explaining relations between states as well as the balance of power (Jackson et al., 2019, pp. 94-95).

As already mentioned, neorealism was introduced due to neoliberalism's success. In the 1980s, the two theories began to share some of the same ideas. Both theories claimed that states are the primary actors and because of the anarchic system they still prioritise their own interests. Where they differ, however, is that neoliberals believe that institutions, interdependence and democracy can lead to better cooperation than what neorealists recognise. In other words, neoliberals criticise neorealism for not acknowledging the importance of institutions. According to these neoliberals, states are self-driven but this can be combated through cooperation (Jackson et al., 2019, p. 52).

In spite of this criticism, we believe that the theory of neorealism is still highly relevant to apply to the topic. As mentioned, Waltz stated that the theory does not intend to explain changes. Instead, the theory aims to explain actions in the state system. Therefore, we hold the opinion that the theory can be used to explain Russia and NATO's actions as well as their presence in the Baltic states. More

specifically, we will apply the theory of neorealism to explain NATO and Russia's actions and interests in the Baltic states such as their enhanced presence in and near the Baltics as well as Russia's use of hybrid warfare. Lastly, it is necessary to mention that we will not be applying the part about polarity in the system in our analysis. Instead, we will include this part in our discussion where we will be examining the different factors from a more global perspective.

5.2. Neoliberalism

As the previous chapter explained the theory of neorealism, this chapter will aim at explaining another major theoretical approach in International Relations namely neoliberalism. First, we wish to explain liberal thinking in general and some of the basic assumptions, whereafter we aim to clarify the theory of neoliberalism focusing on two specific variations, namely interdependence neoliberalism and institutional neoliberalism.

In contrast to realism, liberalism has a more positive view of human nature meaning that it believes that individuals hold many common interests which can lead to cooperation on both a domestic and international level. Thereby, liberals acknowledge that war and conflicts take place but they believe that human reason and cooperation can overcome the thirst for power and human fear. In addition, liberals believe in progress which they define as a better life for the majority of individuals. Another important feature in the liberal thought is the fact that all human beings have the right to happiness and satisfaction. In connection with this, John Locke claimed that states ought to ensure the individuals the right to live their lives happily without the interference of others. In other words, liberals consider the state a *Rechtsstaat*, which means that a rule of law is established in order to respect the rights of its citizens to liberty, property and life. Jeremy Bentham further developed this point of view by incorporating an international aspect through the term of international law. This means that states that are constitutional and have their own rule of law must also obey international law leading to these types of states respecting and tolerating each other on the international stage. According to Immanuel Kant, a world consisting of respectful states will lead to perpetual peace (Jackson et al., 2019, pp. 108-110).

There is no doubt that realism has been the most dominant approach in International Relations for a long period of time. However, during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, the world began to change and states began cooperating through trade, investment, travel, etc. This change led to a reformulation of

the liberal theory which broke with the utopian thoughts and aimed to provide an alternative to the realist theory. This reformulation is also known as neoliberalism (Jackson et al., 2019, p. 48).

Neoliberalism deals with cooperation between states and other actors in the international system and how to achieve it. According to neoliberalism, this cooperation arises when states adjust their behaviour in accordance with other states' interests. However, neoliberalism acknowledges the neorealist thought that cooperation can be difficult to achieve in the anarchic international system defined by fear and insecurity. Nevertheless, neoliberals still believe that international cooperation is relatively easier to obtain now due to the historical developments in the twentieth century (Sterling-Folker, 2013, p. 114). These historical developments have also led to the classification of neoliberalism into four different variations (Jackson et al., 2019, pp. 48-50). The first variation is sociological neoliberalism, which emerged in the 1950s and focuses on transnational relations between individuals, groups and organisations (Jackson et al., 2019, pp. 110-111). The second is interdependence neoliberalism, which revolves around the mutual dependence and exchange between individuals and governments through greater economic cooperation (Jackson et al., 2019, p. 107). The third variation is institutional neoliberalism, which focuses on the role of the international institutions and how these institutions further cooperation between states (Jackson et al., 2019, p. 122). The final variation is republican neoliberalism which claims that a world consisting of republican democracies leads to a world in peace (Jackson et al., 2019, p. 128). In the thesis, we will apply institutional neoliberalism and interdependence neoliberalism. First, we have chosen interdependence neoliberalism as this branch focuses on economic and interdependent relations. We believe that this branch can help explain other factors than solely military aspects of a possible Russian intensification in the Baltics. Second, we will apply institutional neoliberalism to examine Russia and NATO's institutional initiatives and their actions in the Baltic states. Therefore, the following parts will contain a more thorough explanation of these variations of neoliberalism.

5.2.1. Interdependence neoliberalism

Since the 1950s, the world has become more modernised and the states have become more industrialised, which have increased the degree of interdependence among states. Interdependence signifies the fact that individuals and governments are affected by what occurs elsewhere in the world. Richard Rosecrance claims that states have abandoned the goal of seeking power through military force. Instead, the industrialised states of today focus more on economic development as well as foreign trade meaning that states today are more dependent on each other, which reduces violent

conflicts between states on the international stage. However, interdependence neoliberals do not reject the risk that the industrialised states will return to seeking power through military force but they do not see it as a likely opportunity. According to Rosecrance, war now takes place in the less developed states due to a low level of economic development (Jackson et al., 2019, pp. 114-115).

In the 1970s, Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye further developed the theory of interdependence neoliberalism and created the complex interdependence theory. Complex interdependence focuses less on the military force and more on negotiation skills. Thereby, high politics such as security and survival are not as essential as low politics such as economics, social affairs and welfare. According to complex interdependence theory, the relationship between states is more friendly and collaborative because of the increasing power when talking about economic affairs originating from the intertwinedness of national economies. Nonetheless, Keohane and Nye claim that there are several consequences connected to this. To begin with, they claim that states will seek different goals and transnational actors will seek their own separate goals without control from the state. Secondly, power resources are often connected to a specific issue area. Finally, they claim that the importance of international organisations will increase (Jackson et al., 2019, pp. 117-118).

In sum, interdependence neoliberalism downgrades the importance of military force and instead focuses more on economic and institutional elements. Furthermore, it claims that welfare is the primary goal of states rather than national security. In other words, interdependence neoliberalism presents a world consisting of more cooperative international relations (Jackson et al., 2019, p. 119).

5.2.2. Institutional neoliberalism

This variation of neoliberalism focuses on the importance of international institutions. Institutional neoliberals claim that international institutions make it easier and more probable for states to cooperate as institutions lay the foundation for better order. According to this type of neoliberals, an international institution can either be an international organisation such as the European Union or NATO; or it can be regimes which are a set of rules that states comply with. Furthermore, institutions can be universal meaning that they are global and all states can be members. An example of this is the United Nations. On the other hand, institutions can be regional or sub-regional such as the European Union or the CIS (Jackson et al., 2019, p. 119). As mentioned, international institutions contribute to better cooperation between states. In order to demonstrate this claim, the extent of institutionalisation among states is measured. This can be done by looking at two factors, namely scope and depth. Scope involves looking at specific issue areas in which institutions are established.

This means that one looks at whether there only exist institutions within a certain issue area such as the economic area or if there also exists institutions in other issue areas. The other factor is depth, which can be measured in three ways. The first measure is commonality which aims at measuring the degree of the members' sharing of expectations about appropriate behaviour. The second measure is specificity where one measures the extent to which these expectations are clearly defined in the rules of the institution. The final measure is autonomy which is the degree of freedom to change rules within the institution without depending on other actors (Jackson et al., 2019, p. 120). Robert Keohane claims that a great level of institutionalisation can help reduce uncertainty and the lack of trust resulting from a multipolar anarchy. In other words, institutional neoliberals acknowledge that there is a lack of trust between member states. However, they believe that institutions can compensate for this lack by providing a stream of information to each other about the actions of others. Furthermore, institutions provide the possibility of states to cooperate and negotiate with each other (Jackson et al., 2019, p. 121). In sum, institutional neoliberals believe in the importance of international institutions in promoting cooperation between states as well as diminishing the lack of trust between them (Jackson et al., 2019, p. 122).

5.2.3. Criticism of neoliberalism

As with neorealism, neoliberalism also has its limitations. Neorealists are the main opponents to liberalism in general. The main critique is that liberals view human nature positively while neorealists have a more pessimistic view on human nature. Neorealists do not believe that there has been any good reason to develop and divide liberalism into four variations because they claim that these liberal circumstances already exist without preventing violent conflicts between states. As an example, neorealists claim that economic interdependence has existed for many years without being able to avoid war and violent conflicts between states. Furthermore, neorealists are critical towards institutional neoliberalism as neorealists claim that states are only interested in cooperating through international institutions out of their own self-interest. In other words, neorealists believe that international institutions are a place where states can exert their power and self-interests and these institutions are, therefore, not important in themselves. In sum, neorealists are very sceptical of the anarchic international system and believe that as long as there is no superior global power, the concept of the security dilemma continues to be a problem. Therefore, liberal states must be aware of the possibility that their liberal cooperation partners might turn against them (Jackson et al., 2019, pp. 128-130).

As with the theory of neorealism, we acknowledge the criticism of neoliberalism. Nevertheless, we still find the theory applicable to the case. We aim to apply the theory of neoliberalism and the two branches hereof to explain other factors such as economic and institutional initiatives in the examination of a possible Russian intensification in the Baltic states.

In addition, we believe that it is important to include the two different theories of neorealism and neoliberalism as it is our opinion that these two approaches can provide diverse explanations and perspectives of a possible Russian escalation. Thus, we aim to gain a more objective view on the matter by applying two different approaches. Furthermore, we believe that the two theories can support each other's shortcomings.

We will attempt to apply both theories to all of the factors and actions of Russia and NATO in order to be as objective as possible. However, we are aware that at times, one theory will be more applicable to some aspects than the other

6. Methodological Framework

The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of our methodological framework as well as the considerations we have taken throughout the development of the thesis.

6.1. Objectives of the thesis

The objective of this thesis is to provide a greater understanding of the relationship between NATO and Russia in relation to the Baltic states. We are aware that other scholars have already investigated the relations between NATO and Russia concerning the Baltics. However, we aim to introduce a newer perspective by examining the underlying factors of NATO's enhanced Forward Presence in the Baltics as well as the motivation and the latest initiatives taken by Russia in order to examine whether a Russian military intensification in the Baltics is probable and how this intensification might happen.

6.2. Definition of actors

It is significant to account for our choice of actors as we will investigate the relationship between a state and an institution, namely Russia and NATO.

We are fully aware that NATO consists of several states compared to Russia. The theory of neorealism focuses on the state as the primary actor whereas we will include an institution as the actor. Nonetheless, as already mentioned, Mearsheimer acknowledges that states can still form alliances in order to combat a common threat (Mearsheimer, 2013). Thus, even though NATO is an institution, it consists of states that hold a common desire, which still makes neorealism applicable. In addition, other scholars (Hellmann & Wolf, 1993; Thue, 2007; Ratti, 2009; Miller, 2008), mentioned in the literature review, support us in the application of neorealism on NATO and its actions as they have also applied neorealism to NATO.

In addition, it is important to explain our choice of including agreements made between the United States and the three Baltic states, when we focus on NATO. The reason for this is that the U.S. is the dominant actor in the alliance (Webber, 2009, p. 49). Thus, even though the agreements are between the United States and the three Baltic states, they are made in accordance with the U.S.' cooperation with NATO and on the basis of NATO's enhanced Forward Presence.

Moreover, we choose to look at Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania as a unit under the term 'the Baltics' even though we are fully aware that they are individual states. This is due to the fact that the three states have a common history with Russia and face the same situation because one talks about an

escalation in the Baltics and not in Estonia, Latvia or Lithuania. However, even though we mostly look at the three states as a unit, we will also occasionally be mentioning the states separately as they have been exposed to different individual experiences. Nonetheless, we believe that these individual experiences affect all three states.

6.3. Research strategy

The approach of this thesis is based on positivist epistemology. According to this type of epistemology, reality is defined by facts that are measurable and observable (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020, pp. 40-41). Thus, by applying positivist epistemology as our research strategy, we wish to explain regularities and causal relations by looking at objective facts. In addition, we will describe and explain our findings based on the theories of neorealism and neoliberalism, and we will, therefore, as researchers distance ourselves from the research object by attempting to be emotionally neutral to the studied object. In other words, we aim to separate emotions and reason as we are driven by facts and rationality rather than feelings and personal experiences (Carson, Gilmore, Perry & Gronhaug, 2001, p. 5). We have deduced this epistemological choice from the theories of neorealism and neoliberalism as these theories focus on societal structures such as anarchy and institutions. In addition, the theories help us describe and explain our research object based on the theories' world view. Thus, we especially differ from interpretive epistemology as this type of epistemology is more concerned with different individuals' feelings and understandings of different phenomena. Thus, by applying interpretive epistemology, reality is perceived by different individuals' perspectives (Scotland, 2012, pp. 11-12). Furthermore, the thesis will be based on a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research aims to explore and understand a specific problem from the perspectives of the parties involved. In addition, qualitative research explains and describes behaviours, opinions, beliefs, emotions and relationships (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest & Namey, 2005, pp. 1-3). We will investigate the possibility of a Russian escalation in the Baltics by explaining and describing the parties' behaviour and actions on the basis of the theories.

6.3.1. Case study

Case study is one of the most used methods in qualitative research (Rashid, Rashid, Warraich, Sabir & Waseem, 2019, p. 1) as well as it has played a significant part in the study of IR (Bennett & Elman, 2007, p. 170). Case study involves an investigation of a specific phenomenon within a specific context through various types of data (Rashid et al., 2019, p. 2). In addition, case studies are used to describe,

evaluate, understand and compare different aspects of the research problem. Thus, case studies are detailed and in-depth studies of specific subjects. Aside from a specific phenomenon, this subject can also be an individual, a place, a group, an organisation, etc. It is important to mention that a researcher can choose to explore a single case or conduct several case studies in order to compare different aspects of the research question (McCombes, 2020). This thesis will be based on a case study of the Baltic states as a potential area of confrontation between NATO and Russia. We will go into depth with the Baltics as one complex case and illuminate different aspects of this case such as the historical context, security politics, geopolitics and Russian minorities in the Baltics. One could partly investigate the same problem area by substituting the Baltic case with another case. One could for example investigate whether a Russian escalation in Poland would be likely to take place. Here one would possibly reach some of the same results as with our case. However, as Poland and the Baltics are also different in some ways due to the states' individual factors, one would possibly find other factors relevant or more interesting to investigate in the case of Poland.

Furthermore, a case study is able to challenge existing theories and assumptions, contribute with new insights into the specific subject, propose actual solutions to a problem and create new directions for future research (McCombes, 2020). We will, in particular, use the case study to contribute with new insights and newer aspects of the chosen case. Moreover, we will challenge existing assumptions of a possible escalation in the Baltics from a military aspect by implicating other aspects, such as hybrid warfare, and investigate if an escalation based on this is more probable.

6.3.2. Document analysis

The analytical method chosen for this thesis is document analysis, which is highly applicable to case studies. Document analysis is a method that evaluates documents. As with other methods in qualitative research, the data used for a document analysis must be possible to examine and interpret with the purpose of gaining understanding and developing empirical knowledge. The analysed documents contain text which can be manuals, background papers, books, journals, letters, newspapers, press releases, summaries, etc. The analytic procedure involves finding, selecting, making sense of and giving an account of the data in the analysed documents. Furthermore, the process involves skimming, reading and interpreting the documents. In other words, document analysis takes elements from content analysis and thematic analysis. Content analysis involves organising information into different categories which are related to the research question. Thematic analysis involves a more in-depth treatment of the data by carefully re-reading and reviewing the data

and performing coding in order to discover themes relevant to the specific research topic (Bowen, 2009, pp. 27-32). We have identified several documents that are relevant to our case on which we will perform document analysis. These document types include agreements on defence cooperation between the U.S. and the three Baltic states, a press release of the Warsaw Summit Communiqué on NATO's enhanced Forward Presence as well as speeches by Russian President Vladimir Putin and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg. We have allowed the theories to guide us in the selection of the different elements in the documents that are relevant for our research focus. This means that we select the elements that the theories are able to explain. We have chosen the agreements and the Warsaw Summit Communiqué because they demonstrate that NATO has seen a reason to strengthen its presence in the Baltics because of Russia. In addition, we have chosen to include the speeches because they provide a contemporary perspective on the situation. In relation to our selection of documents, we would have liked to include the Security Cooperation Roadmaps on security priorities in the period 2019-2024 between the U.S. and Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania from 2019 (U.S. Department of State, 2021). However, as the U.S. Bureau of Political-Military Affairs informed us that the agreements were not publicly available, we decided to exclude them as our chosen documents.

6.4. Choice of data

We will primarily apply qualitative data in order to provide an answer to the research question. Qualitative data involves non-numerical data meaning that the data is descriptive and observable (McLeod, 2019). In order to examine the recent initiatives in the Baltics, we will look at different agreements proposed by NATO, the U.S and the Baltics. Furthermore, we will include recent speeches by Russian President Vladimir Putin and Secretary General of NATO Jens Stoltenberg. Finally, we will include statements made by Baltic and American ministers and ambassadors. The agreements and speeches will function as primary sources. Primary sources are defined as first-hand evidence. Secondary sources describe and interpret information from primary sources (Streefkerk, 2021). The statements made by Baltic and American ministers and ambassadors will function as secondary sources, as the statements are found in newspapers where they have been described and interpreted.

Furthermore, the thesis will also include quantitative data. Quantitative data involves data that is measured or quantified (Elliott, 2020). Thus, statistics regarding Russian minorities and trade between Russia and the Baltic states will function as our quantitative data. In order to identify relevant data, we will look at the different components that the theories contain. Neoliberalism contains

components such as economy, trade and cooperation (Jackson et al., 2019) from where we have found data such as statistics, which can give us an indication of Russia and the Baltics' economic relations. Neorealism contains elements such as security and threats (Mearsheimer, 2013). On the basis of these elements, we have selected data such as statements and speeches, which can help explain part of the security issues concerning the Baltics. The agreements that we have chosen are derived from both of the theories as these agreements illustrate the parties' cooperation with each other as well as the underlying factors for this cooperation.

6.5. Limitations

It is important to mention that the thesis has its limitations. In the thesis, we will focus on a newer perspective of the situation in the Baltics. More specifically, we will look at the time frame after the Ukrainian Crisis in 2014 and NATO's enhanced presence in the Baltics in 2017. We aim to look at the present perspective of the situation in the Baltics and provide an explanation of the most recent events. In order to do so, it is necessary to include the historical perspective and other relevant factors in the relationship between Russia and the Baltic states.

In addition, the analysis is limited to include the actors of NATO, Russia and the Baltic states while the discussion will include more actors and a more global perspective in order to examine if an escalation in the Baltics is likely to take place.

Furthermore, we are aware that Poland is also part of NATO's enhanced Forward Presence (NATO, 2017). However, we will only focus on Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania due to these states' history as part of the Soviet Union and their common term as the Baltics, where Poland is not included.

In addition, it is important to mention the language limitations, as there can be a potential bias in solely including data written in English. As we are limited to using English sources, it also means that we are more likely to apply more Western newspapers. We cannot read Russian, Latvian, Estonian and Lithuanian newspapers in their original language and, therefore, we may not get the full objective picture of their views on the matter.

Lastly, it is necessary to mention what we mean when we speak of or refer to a Russian escalation or intensification in the Baltic states. When we do so, we will be referring to a Russian military intensification or escalation

7. Analysis

The aim of the analysis is to answer the research question by examining various factors. We intend to do so by first providing an explanation of the historical context. Second, we will explain NATO as an institution and its objectives. Third, we will analyse Russia and NATO's initiatives such as NATO's enhanced Forward Presence and Russia's interests and initiatives regarding the Baltic states.

7.1. Historical overview

The aim of this chapter is to explain the history and the evolution of the Baltic states since the Soviet occupation in 1940. As the Baltics are former Soviet republics, we will implicate Russia as an important actor in the history and the evolution of the Baltics. In addition, due to the Baltics' evolution and move towards the West, we will also include NATO as a significant actor in the historical overview.

7.1.1. Soviet occupation of the Baltic states

In 1940, the three Baltic states, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, were annexed by the Soviet Union and thereby the states were shaped to hold the same values as the Soviet regime (Misiunas, 2020). In other words, the Baltic states were forced to join the Soviet Union which had tragic consequences for the Baltic population. During the Soviet occupation, many Balts were executed, imprisoned or deported to prison camps (Černoušek, 2020). The United States and the rest of the Western World never acknowledged the annexation of the Baltic states, thus they did not legitimise the states as part of the Soviet regime (Misiunas, 2020).

In the late 1980s, the Soviet Union experienced an economic and political crisis, which resulted in the weakening of the Union. Thus, the Baltics saw a window of opportunity to regain their independence from the Soviet regime. The Baltics' desire for independence led to several demonstrations in the Baltic capitals. In 1989, the most remarkable demonstration took place, namely the Baltic Way (Baltic Defence College, n.d.). This demonstration consisted of two million Balts who created a 600-kilometre human chain through the three Baltic states with the intention of bringing awareness to the international stage about their poor situation during the Soviet rule (Europa-Parlamentet, 2009). In 1990, the Baltic states declared themselves de facto independent. However, their independence was first properly acknowledged in September 1991 and on 6 September, the Soviet Union recognised the Baltics as de jure independent (Baltic Defence College, n.d.). The same month the Baltics became members of the United Nations (Misiunas, 2020).

7.1.2. Regaining independence

After the independence of the Baltic states, other Soviet republics followed suit. These republics were Ukraine, Georgia, Belarus, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. On 25 December 1991, the Soviet President of the time, Mikhail Gorbachev, resigned and the Soviet-era terminated. After the resignation of former President Gorbachev, Boris Yeltsin became the new President of Russia (History.com Editors, 2020). Even though Russia and President Yeltsin formally acknowledged the Baltic states as independent and sovereign states after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russian troops were still stationed in the Baltics. However, in 1998, Russia's military presence in the Baltics ceased as the Skrunda radar in Latvia closed down. Nonetheless, the cessation of Russia's military presence did not result in a complete absence of Russian influence as Russia still made attempts to influence foreign policies and defence policies in the Baltics (Brauß & Rácz, 2021, p. 8).

In the so-called 'long-term Baltic Policy of 1997', Russia made it a high priority to deter the Baltic states from joining NATO. Thus, Russia suggested other alternatives to NATO such as Russian security guarantees and a European security system. Despite these alternatives made by Russia, the Baltic states have continued to decline such cooperation, which has resulted in several threats and angry attitudes from Russian politicians (Bøtcher, 2000).

7.1.3. Moving towards the West

In 2002, NATO held a summit in Prague where ten former communist states had applied for NATO membership, which included Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Russia's dominant way of conducting politics was in particular a reason why the Baltics sought closer to the West and had the desire to achieve NATO membership (Kramer, 2002, pp. 731-733). Critics of a Baltic NATO membership argued that such membership would create a strained relationship between Russia and the West (Kramer, 2002, p. 747).

In 2004, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania succeeded in becoming members of NATO along with Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. This membership generated great joy among the Baltic prime ministers (Gidadhubli, 2004, p. 1885). Meanwhile, Russia did not appreciate this membership because this would lead to a greater presence of NATO close to Russia's borders. Thus, some politicians ordered the Russian government to reassess the states' defence policies. In addition, the Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesman, Aleksandr Yakovenko, claimed that the Baltic membership of

NATO was a threat to Russia (Gidathubli, 2004, p. 1885). During the same year, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania also became members of the European Union (Paulauskas, 2006, p. 3).

7.1.4. Russia's behaviour in recent years

In the following years, Russia began to have a more onrushing behaviour in the international arena. In 2008, a conflict between Russia and the former Soviet republic Georgia broke out (Pruitt, 2018). Due to Georgia's internal conflicts with the two provinces Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Russia saw this as an opportunity to intervene in these conflicts in August of that year. The provinces belonged to Georgia but had the desire of becoming independent. Thereby, Russia saw its window of opportunity to support the provinces' desire for independence and thus crossed the Georgian border claiming that Russia solely wanted to protect Russian citizens in Georgia (Anniversary of Russian aggression and occupation of Georgia, 2020). Even though Russia claimed to be defensive and protective of Russian citizens, it also used offensive methods. Among other things, the Russian army bombed Georgian cities and military facilities as well as destroyed the Georgian navy. The conflict lasted for five days and hundreds of people lost their lives. Today, Russia still occupies 20% of Georgia's territory (Anniversary of Russian aggression and occupation of Georgia, 2020). Thus, some critics claim that the Russo-Georgia War kickstarted Russia's aggressive behaviour which continued in the following years (Anniversary of Russian aggression and occupation of Georgia, 2020). The Russo-Georgian War created great international debate, especially other states close to Russia had strong opinions about the war. After Russia's invasion of the two Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Russia recognised these two regions as independent from Georgia. However, other states still considered the regions to be part of Georgia. Therefore, Poland, Lithuania, Ukraine and Latvia called on Russia to reverse its recognition of the independence of the two Georgian regions (TBT Staff, 2018). The Polish President at the time, Lech Kaczynski, especially had a strong opinion towards the Russian invasion of Georgia and towards Russia's intentions when he in 2008 stated *"Today Georgia, tomorrow Ukraine, the day after tomorrow the Baltic states, and then, perhaps, the time will come for my country, Poland"* (TBT Staff, 2018).

A few years later, a similar incident occurred, when Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula in Ukraine in 2014 due to internal conflicts within Ukraine. The conflict began in 2013, where a protest against Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich broke out due to his rejection of greater cooperation with the European Union. A great majority of the Ukrainian population wanted larger cooperation with the European Union. However, some of the citizens of Crimea expressed an anti-European attitude

with stronger ties to Russia. Given the fact that many Crimeans shared Russian values, Russia again claimed that it had the responsibility to protect the Crimeans. Therefore, Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula in March 2014 claiming that it was a way of being supportive of the Crimean's wish. However, just like the case in Georgia, the annexation of Crimea did not happen peacefully as thousands of people have been killed as a result of the annexation. The conflict has still not been resolved today (Conflict in Ukraine, 2021). All of these actions and conflicts that Russia has participated in can make one fear that the Baltics might be next in line of a conflict as the former Polish President also expressed in his statement from 2008. History illustrates that Russia has entered into direct conflict with former Soviet republics where parts of these states are represented by a Russian-speaking minority. The Ukrainian Crisis broke out as some Ukrainians had the desire to collaborate more with the European Union while other Ukrainians felt closer ties with Russia. The question is thus, whether Russia might do something similar to what happened in Ukraine and Georgia in the Baltic states as the Baltics also have a Russian-speaking minority (Rosu, 2021). In the following, we will investigate this presumption as well as the factors that can help explain whether or not a Russian escalation in the Baltics is probable. In order to do so, we will first provide an explanation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

7.2. North Atlantic Treaty Organization

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization also known as NATO is an international organisation consisting of states in North America and Europe. The organisation was founded in 1949 by the North American states of Canada and the United States as well as the European states of Denmark, France, Belgium, Iceland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Italy, Portugal, Norway and the United Kingdom with the aim to protect the freedom and security of these member states through cooperation on political and military matters (Silander, 2017, p. 2). NATO was formed due to the threat of the Soviet Union and the expansion of communism, the desire to promote European integration and to combat the development of hostile nationalism and militarism in the European states. Since the foundation of NATO, the organisation has developed and adapted to the changing world order (Silander, 2017, p. 2). NATO acts as a unit which is also reflected in its Article 5 regarding collective defence formulated in the Washington Treaty. This article mentions that an attack on one member state is an attack on all member states (NATO, n.d.). Thus, Article 5 brings the NATO member states together, promising to protect each other. Furthermore, a decision made by NATO can be perceived as a joint decision made in agreement with all of the member states (NATO, n.d.).

NATO should be seen as a political and military organisation. The political aspect includes protecting and promoting democratic values as well as cooperation on security and defence matters. The military aspect entails dealing with security challenges with military tools if diplomatic methods are insufficient (Silander, 2017, p. 3) Thus, NATO has the capability to use its military power to undertake crisis-management operations. These operations are either carried out under a United Nations mandate or under Article 5 of the Washington Treaty (NATO, n.d.).

As of today, NATO consists of 30 member states (NATO, n.d.). The enlargements over the years have been an image of new security challenges (Silander, 2017, p. 4). In relation to the NATO enlargement, NATO has developed a Membership Action Plan which aims to help potential members get ready and live up to NATO standards in order to be admitted into NATO. NATO also cooperates with other international organisations as well as non-member states on political and security related issues. These partner states contribute to NATO-led operations but since they are not fully members of the alliance, they do not have the same authority to contribute to the decision-making as a member state does (NATO, n.d.). Besides from defending its own territories, NATO also acts in other territories of non-member states in order to prevent and control crises, spread NATO's values and stabilise and reconstruct areas which have been affected by conflict (NATO, 2020a). In sum, neorealism can explain that NATO was founded due to the threat of the Soviet Union and the expansion of communism (Mearsheimer, 2013). Institutional neoliberalism can explain the objectives of the organisation, which are for the states to cooperate in order to promote international peace and prevent conflict (Jackson et al., 2019).

7.3. NATO's enhanced Forward Presence

This section intends to introduce NATO's and the U.S.' initiatives in the Baltics as a result of Russia's prior actions such as the military actions in Georgia and Ukraine. Furthermore, we wish to investigate the effect that these initiatives may have on Russia.

In 2016, the North Atlantic Alliance met at the Warsaw Summit to discuss the security issues that the organisation was facing and how to overcome these issues. At the summit, NATO stated that the organisation was facing several security challenges stemming from the East and the South. Russia was particularly debated as a severe threat due to its aggressive actions (NATO, 2017). These actions have included the annexation of Crimea in Ukraine as well as military activities in the Baltic and the Black Sea regions and the Eastern Mediterranean (NATO, 2017). For these reasons, it can be argued

that NATO considers Russia a threat in the international sphere due to Russia's interference and aggressive behaviour close to NATO borders. Thus, according to the theory of offensive neorealism, Russia's actions prove discontent with the current balance of power in the international system (Mearsheimer, 2013). NATO has reacted to these threats by terminating the collaboration between Russia and NATO regarding civil and military matters and by strengthening NATO's defence and deterrence strategy (NATO, 2017). NATO's defence and deterrence strategy highlights the importance of remaining a nuclear alliance. In addition, NATO claims that nuclear weapons are a means to achieve peace and prevent aggression. More specifically, the strategy mentions how the alliance has chosen to increase its presence in the Baltic states and Poland with the purpose of demonstrating determination, solidarity and the capability to quickly respond to external threats (NATO, 2017). Thus, in response to Russia's actions, NATO has decided to adjust itself to the current situation by increasing its military presence in these areas. Therefore, from a neorealist perspective, one can argue that NATO can be perceived as a revisionist actor as the alliance is dissatisfied with the current balance of power in the international system and wants to change this balance. On the other hand, one can reject this viewpoint as NATO is not applying force to change the power balance but is simply applying a deterrence strategy (Mearsheimer, 2013). Thus, NATO is not acting in accordance with a revisionist state. However, NATO is also not behaving as a status quo actor as the alliance is trying to strengthen its defence and deterrence strategy, thereby illustrating discontent with the balance of power. In sum, NATO has made adjustments in order to secure its member states and to prevent a Russian military escalation in the Baltics. Nonetheless, these adjustments can neither be identified with a status quo actor nor a revisionist actor. Instead, NATO's actions should be identified in between the two (Mearsheimer, 2013).

At the beginning of 2017, the new initiative by NATO, the so-called enhanced Forward Presence (eFP), entered into force and included the presence of forces from different NATO member states in the Baltics and Poland. These forces are collaborating with national forces in four battalion-sized battlegroups. Canada leads the battlegroup in Latvia, the UK leads the battlegroup in Estonia, Germany leads the one in Lithuania and the U.S. leads the battlegroup in Poland (NATO, 2017). In addition, more allies contribute to the four battlegroups. Denmark and Iceland contribute to the battlegroup in Estonia while the Czech Republic, Montenegro, Italy, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Poland and Albania contribute to the battlegroup in Latvia. In Lithuania, the Czech Republic, France, Iceland, Belgium, Luxembourg, Norway and the Netherlands contribute to the battlegroup while the

United Kingdom, Romania and Croatia contribute to the battlegroup in Poland (NATO, 2021). Thus, the eFP demonstrates how all the member states are committed to the common goal and Article 5 in the NATO treaty, which, as already mentioned, indicates that an attack on one member state is an attack on all member states (NATO, 2021). NATO is highlighting its defence and deterrence strategy as well as its common goal to protect each other against an attack. Thus, it appears that the alliance itself identifies as a defensive actor. However, one can argue that the thoughts behind these actions are offensive since NATO's military forces are deployed in the Baltics and Poland in order to keep Russia away and pose a serious threat to Russia (Mearsheimer, 2013). On the other hand, one can also apply neoliberalism to the alliance as NATO from an institutional neoliberal perspective can be viewed as a united alliance where decisions are made jointly and where each state has a responsibility to protect each other. Therefore, the enhanced Forward Presence can also be seen as a possibility for the member states to cooperate and negotiate with each other (Jackson et al., 2019). In addition, the fact that the alliance has a responsibility to each other as well as to the international community indicates that the alliance cannot make hasty decisions as they need to involve each other. Thus, decisions made by the alliance must be well considered in relation to the greater good of the alliance as well as to pursue peace in the international community. Therefore, other states that are not members of the alliance such as Russia should not have much to fear as NATO's eFP should only be considered as a deterrence strategy rather than an offensive strategy (Jackson et al., 2019).

In 2017, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania signed agreements with their NATO ally, the United States, on defence and security cooperation. First of all, we believe that it is important to mention that each agreement contains the same content and we will, therefore, not look at them individually. Secondly, as already mentioned in our limitations, it is significant to mention again that even though the agreements are between the Baltics and the United States, these agreements are based on and formulated in accordance with the states' cooperation with NATO. The agreements create a basis for the presence of U.S. forces in the Baltic states and establish rules regarding the U.S. forces' rights and how they should behave in these territories. Thus, the agreements should be perceived as an extension of NATO's eFP. The objective of the agreements is to promote security and peace, thus the presence of U.S. forces in the Baltic states aims to strengthen the security and stability in these territories (Agreement on Defense Cooperation, 2017a, pp. 1-35; Agreement on Defense Cooperation, 2017b, pp. 1-35; Agreement on Defense Cooperation, 2017c, pp. 1-36). Therefore, from a neoliberal perspective, one could argue that these agreements highlight that cooperation between

member states can lead to peace and security. Thereby, the agreements mention peace, which is a goal in alignment with liberalism (Jackson et al., 2019). On the other hand, they also mention security, which is a goal in alignment with realism. According to neorealism, whenever a state or an actor strengthens its security in order to secure its own stability and survival, it is always at the expense of someone else's security. Therefore, defensive neorealists would probably claim that the actions of the United States and the Baltics on the basis of NATO are defensive as they are simply trying to protect the member states without using drastic means. However, offensive neorealists would claim that their actions are offensive as the alliance is expressing dissatisfaction with the balance of power (Mearsheimer, 2013). Article VI indicates that the Baltic states shall ensure the protection and safety of the U.S. forces in each of their states. Furthermore, the parties shall cooperate in order to ensure that this is provided (Agreement on Defense Cooperation, 2017a, p. 10; Agreement on Defense Cooperation, 2017b, p. 10; Agreement on Defense Cooperation, 2017c, p. 11). The agreements provide the opportunity for the U.S. to establish military service exchanges, educational centres, service areas, etc. in the Baltics for use by the U.S. forces. The Baltic states have agreed to not interfere in these establishments (Agreement on Defense Cooperation, 2017a, p. 25; Agreement on Defense Cooperation, 2017b, p. 25; Agreement on Defense Cooperation, 2017c, p. 26). In addition, the agreements and the presence of U.S. forces in the Baltic states will also contribute to enhancing investment security, consumption growth as well as contribute positively to the economy of the Baltic states and GDP growth (BNN, 2017). Latvia was the first state to sign the agreement with the United States on 12 January 2017. The Latvian Defence Minister, Raimonds Bergmanis, stated that the agreement was a significant step towards strengthening Latvia's defensive capabilities and guaranteeing the presence of allies in the state (BNN, 2017). On the day of the signing of the defence cooperation agreement between the United States and Estonia, the former U.S. Ambassador to Estonia, James D. Melville, expressed that the agreement was an important step in NATO's enhanced defence and security cooperation. In addition, he stated that the presence of U.S. forces in Estonia provided the strengthening of regional security in the Nordic-Baltic region (U.S. Embassy in Estonia, 2017). In Lithuania, Defence Minister, Raimundas Karoblis, also expressed satisfaction about the signing of the agreement between Lithuania and the United States. He claimed that the presence of U.S. forces in the state is one of the most important elements of Lithuania's security. Moreover, the U.S. Ambassador to Lithuania, Anne Hall, stated that the agreement demonstrates the allies' willingness to cooperate and thereby strengthen NATO, which will lead to an increase in the stability in Europe as well as combat the security threats that the world is facing (Dapkus, 2017). The fact that

the Baltics have agreed to extend their partnership and collaboration with the U.S. based on their NATO membership combined with these statements illustrate that the Baltics are satisfied with cooperating with the West and NATO and want to enhance this collaboration even further. If one investigates this reinforced collaboration and intensification of U.S.-NATO soldiers from a neorealist perspective, it becomes clear that NATO cannot enhance its own security without decreasing the security of Russia. Thus, according to the security dilemma proposed by neorealists, Russia will most likely feel threatened by NATO's enhanced presence near Baltic-Russian borders, which may intensify Russia's desire to strengthen its own presence near the Baltics (Mearsheimer, 2013). Having examined NATO's enhanced presence in the Baltics, we now aim to dive into an investigation of Russia and its different initiatives and actions.

7.4. Collective Security Treaty Organization

This section of the analysis intends to demonstrate a Russian alternative to Western institutions such as NATO in order to illustrate that Russia also understands the importance of collaboration through institutions. We find it interesting to investigate whether or not Russia's engagement in international institutions reduces the possibility of a Russian escalation in the Baltics.

In 1991, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) was formed by Russia and 11 other former Soviet Republics including Ukraine, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldova. The only former Soviet Republics that did not want to join the CIS were Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. Thus, the Baltics were already at this time declining to establish stronger ties with Russia and the former Soviet republics, which Russia may not have been content with (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2018). The objectives of the CIS are to enhance the social and economic development of the member states by strengthening the collaboration between them in areas such as the economic, environmental, political, cultural and humanitarian fields (Collective Security Treaty Organization, n.d.a). Thus, the CIS mainly focused on cooperation and interdependence between states in the social and economic fields. From an interdependence neoliberal perspective, the modern world of today is focused on abandoning the idea of seeking power through military means. Instead, the industrialised states of today are more occupied with economic development and foreign trade by focusing on interdependence and cooperation, thus making the states more dependent on each other, which, according to Rosecrance, helps reduce conflicts on the international stage (Jackson et al., 2019). Thus, one could argue that Russia's

collaboration with other CIS member states illustrate that Russia is willing to have a more democratic and collaborative approach to economic and political matters rather than a unilateral approach. This interdependence between the member states also illustrates a mutual commitment to each other, which means that it is not ideal for a state to act out of self-interest. Instead, the member states should make joint decisions. This could make one assume that Russia does not hold the same liberty to act out of self-interest as before establishing a collaborative institution. Thus, according to this assumption, a Russian invasion of the Baltics might cause other CIS member states to oppose to Russia by reducing their collaboration with the state (Jackson et al., 2019).

As mentioned, the member states of the CIS did not collaborate on areas such as defence and security as this was not the first priority (Collective Security Treaty Organization, n.d.a). However, on 15 May 1992, Russia, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan signed the Collective Security Treaty in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. One year later, the states were joined by Belarus, Georgia and Azerbaijan. The Treaty was a regional agreement between the states and it highlighted the importance of a collective security collaboration between the member states in the military-political field. In addition, the Treaty emphasised that all disagreements between themselves, as well as other states, should be resolved in a peaceful way (Collective Security Treaty Organization, n.d.b). Article 4 of the Treaty is one of the most significant articles as the article states that an aggression on one member state is considered an aggression against all member states of the Treaty. In other words, all member states ought to help and assist the attacked state (Collective Security Treaty Organization, 2012b). In 2002, it was decided to upgrade the Collective Security Treaty to hold the status of an international regional organisation, thereby changing the name to the Collective Security Treaty Organization. This signified that the organisation would no longer just be recognised by its own region but also by the international society. As a result of the organisation's international recognition, the CSTO gained observer status in the UN General Assembly in 2004 (Collective Security Treaty Organization, n.d.b). According to the Charter of the CSTO from 2002, the goals of the organisation include the strengthening of peace, territorial integrity and sovereignty of the member states as well as international and regional stability and security. In addition, the Charter mentions that all member states shall hold the same equal rights and duties. In order to obtain these aforementioned goals and improve the safety of the member states, Article 8 of the Charter mentions that the member states ought to collaborate on combating illegal migration, illegal trafficking of drugs, international terrorism and extremism, etc. (Collective Security Treaty Organization, 2012a). Therefore, it becomes clear how the scope of institutionalisation has developed from one issue area such as the

economic field to include other issue areas such as defence. Furthermore, the depth is comprehensive. Firstly, the measurement of commonality illustrates that the member states share a high degree of expectations about appropriate behaviour as they agree to help each other. Secondly, the specificity of these expectations is clearly defined in the Collective Security Treaty, especially in Article 4. Finally, the organisation holds an essential degree of autonomy to change its own rules without the interference of others as long as the changes do not contravene with international law and the UN Charter (Jackson et. al., 2019). It becomes clear that Russia and the former Soviet republics have attempted to adapt to the modern liberal world, which constitutes of interdependence and collaboration between states through institutions. Russia recognises that basic liberal assumptions such as peaceful collaboration between member states in economic and political areas are of importance. However, just like the West and NATO, Russia also recognises the importance of a defence and security alliance in order to secure its own region and the individual states. Thus, one could argue that Russia would prefer that the Baltics join their Eurasian initiative instead of the Western NATO as already mentioned in the historical overview. As previously stated in relation to Russia's CIS membership, it could be argued that Russia may not find it attractive to act out of self-interest and intensify its presence near the Baltics as this might have more negative outcomes than positive outcomes. However, this argument does not seem valid when we investigate the CSTO membership as it appears that members of the CSTO might fear going against Russia because this could possibly have negative consequences for them as they would then risk losing Russia as a supportive and defensive actor on the international stage. This was also expressed when the members of the CSTO demonstrated their support for Russia's actions in regards to the Russo-Georgian War (RIA Novosti, 2008) when they did not consider Russia to be an essential cause to the Ukrainian Crisis (Douhan, 2015, p. 210). Nonetheless, in spite of the member states' support for Russia, they did not join Russia in recognising the independence of the two Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Thus, one could argue that the member states of the CSTO on the surface are supportive of Russia's actions. However, it appears that the states are not taking a direct stance as they have been showing a more neutral approach to the conflict by not formally recognising the independence of the two Georgian regions (RIA Novosti, 2008). This makes one reconsider Russia's ability to make unilateral decisions without experiencing severe consequences as other CSTO members previously have demonstrated a rather neutral approach to the actions taken by Russia. Therefore, one would assume that Russia should not worry about the reactions of the CSTO if Russia

was to intensify its actions towards the Baltics as the CSTO should not be perceived as an obstacle to a Russian intensification in the Baltics.

Some scientists claim that the CSTO is Eurasia's answer to NATO (Tanaguzova, 2020). According to Symbat Tanaguzova, it is very likely that Russia aims to hold the same objectives as NATO as Russia is attempting to strengthen its military power through the CSTO. Thereby, one can argue that the CSTO is Russia's answer to a strong military alliance such as NATO (Tanaguzova, 2020). Overall, the organisation provides military training as well as supports arms sales and manufacturing to the member states of the CSTO. This means that the CSTO is the most important defence organisation in the former Soviet Union. Furthermore, the member states of the CSTO uses the organisation to combat narcotics trafficking, the illegal circulation of weapons, crime and terrorism as well as cyber warfare (Avedissian, 2019). If one investigates the alliance from an institutional neoliberal perspective, one could argue that the fact that the CSTO is recognised by the international society and, therefore, promises to live up to international law means that if the alliance violates international law this may have severe consequences, thus making it more attractive for the CSTO to cooperate in peace with the rest of the international community in order to obtain international and regional stability and security as mentioned in the Charter of the CSTO (Jackson et al., 2019). Having investigated Russia's cooperation with other Eurasian states, we will in the next parts of the analysis attempt to dive more into the concrete actions taken by Russia in recent years. In order to examine these concrete actions, we find it necessary to first give an account of what may motivate Russia in having an interest in the Baltics. Therefore, we will give an account of the Russian minorities in the Baltics in the following part.

7.5. Russian-speaking minorities in the Baltics

There is reason to believe that if Russia was to intensify its presence in the Baltics, it would be because of the great number of Russian-speaking minorities in the Baltics. According to the newspaper, "New Europe", available statistics indicate that 25% of Estonians speak Russian as their primary language. In Latvia, 36% of the population speaks Russian as their primary language while the number in Lithuania is 4.5% (Rosu, 2021).

As witnessed in Ukraine and Georgia, Russia seeks ways to interact with Russian minorities in other states. Russian President Vladimir Putin has previously claimed that it is his responsibility to protect

Russian-speaking minorities in all parts of the world. In a 2015 interview with Charlie Rose, Putin stated, *“Do you think it’s normal that 25 million Russian people were abroad all of a sudden? Russia was the biggest divided nation in the world. It’s not a problem? Well, maybe not for you. But it’s a problem for me”* (Cesare, 2020). Moreover, it is important to mention that a large proportion of the Russian minorities in the Baltic states are stateless. Being stateless indicates that one does not belong to the state in which one lives or the state from which your ancestors came (Best, 2013, p. 35).

While the Baltic states have begun to reduce the number of stateless people to some extent by further developing their integration policies, the number of stateless people is still relatively high in the three states. In 2013, 13% of Estonia’s population was stateless, 18% of Latvia’s population was stateless while 0.3% of Lithuania’s population was stateless. However, it is not clear whether or not these stateless people were solely Russian minorities or also other minority groups (Best, 2013, p. 35). Nonetheless, the high numbers of stateless people indicate that there is a problem, which may enhance Russia’s desire to intervene in the Baltics. Given Putin’s statement that it is a problem for him that the Russian people are scattered all over the world as well as his desire to protect them, it can be argued that Putin has a significant and valid reason to protect the Russian minorities in the Baltics due to their statelessness. On the other hand, this rather aggressive statement by Putin suggests a very unilateral approach towards politics. Furthermore, it suggests that Russia has a motive to enter areas where Russian minorities are living as previously seen in Georgia and Ukraine, which can create fear and insecurity in the Baltics and NATO due to the high number of Russian minorities living in the Baltics. In addition, Russian-speakers living in the Baltics are mostly living in the border regions. Thereby, it would be fairly easy for Russia to invade these territories where Russian-speaking Balts are living (Scholtz, 2020). It is important to mention that these Russian-speaking minorities living in the Baltics identify themselves differently as they vary by generation and by the socio-economic environment. Some of these Russian-speakers identify more with the Russian culture whereas others identify more with the Estonian, Latvian or Lithuanian culture. Those born after the dissolution of the Soviet Union are more integrated into Baltic societies and are, therefore, more likely to identify themselves with the Baltic society in which they are living compared to their ancestors who immigrated during the Soviet era (Grigas, 2014). Thus, if Russia was to invade the Baltics as seen in Georgia and Ukraine, it would probably be due to the Baltics’ shared history with Russia as part of the Soviet Union as well as the great number of Russian-speaking minorities and stateless people in

the Baltics. Having established what might motivate Russia in a possible intensification in the Baltics, we will now investigate the concrete actions taken by Russia in recent years.

7.6. Russian troops near the Baltic borders

After Russia's annexation of Crimea, Russia began to intensify its military presence in Kaliningrad and on the Eastern borders of Latvia and Estonia (Cesare, 2020). Kaliningrad is located between Poland, Lithuania and the Baltic Sea and has been a Russian exclave since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Before that, Kaliningrad was part of the Soviet Union since the USSR took over the territory after it had been occupied by the Germans during World War II. After the dissolution of the Soviet regime and the independence of Lithuania, Kaliningrad was geographically separated from Russia (Moloney, n.d.). In Kaliningrad, Russia has enhanced its air defences, anti-ship weaponry and electronic warfare equipment. In addition to this, Russia has deployed 20,000 soldiers in Kaliningrad. Furthermore, Russia has also intensified its presence in St. Petersburg and the borders to the Baltic states, which together with Kaliningrad are part of Russia's Western Military District. In total there are approximately 120,000 troops and a tank division stationed in this district (Cesare, 2020). This intensification of Russia's military presence near the borders of the Baltic states supports the idea of Russia as a possible threat scenario. According to Mearsheimer, a state's military capacity demonstrates that the state has the potential of harming other states (Mearsheimer, 2013). These reinforcements can potentially be applied in an attack against the Baltic states (Cesare, 2020). This has previously been seen in relation to the events taking place in Georgia and Ukraine where Russia invaded and harmed parts of the states. These events fortify the idea of a possible Russian intensification in the Baltics. In addition, Russia also cooperates with Belarus on intensifying its military activities near the borders of Lithuania. These borders include Kaliningrad and Belarus. Furthermore, Russia and Belarus have planned a strategic military exercise in September 2021. This exercise, also referred to as Zapad, will take place in Belarus, Kaliningrad and the rest of the Western Military District (Balčiūnas & Gerdžiūnas, 2020). According to Russian Defence Minister, Sergei Shoigu, the Zapad-2021 exercise will consist of 4,800 exercises and practical events. He claims that the Zapad exercise will be the most significant possibility to test the capabilities of the troops (Nilsen, 2020). In 2017, a previous Zapad exercise took place, which was closely observed by the European states. Thus, it is likely that the Zapad-2021 exercise will also be closely followed by the West (Nilsen, 2020).

From a neorealist perspective, the fact that the West observed the Zapad-2017 exercise so closely, illustrates the West's insecurities and uncertainties regarding Russia's actions and intentions. Mearsheimer also mentions this uncertainty of other states' intentions in his third assumption of neorealism. According to him, all states aim at knowing the intentions of other states. Thus, in addition to the fear that some European states already hold due to Russia's actions in Georgia and Ukraine, it can be argued that the uncertainty about the real intentions of the Zapad exercise in 2017 leads the European states to be particularly aware of the new exercise taking place later this year. In addition, Russia's actions and intensified military presence around EU/NATO borders may cause fear and insecurity for the West, hence why it is also important to consider Russia's perspective and considerations. According to Mearsheimer, states are rational actors with the main goal of securing their survival. Therefore, Russia has most likely also felt threatened for its own survival due to NATO's enlargement as well as its eFP, thus attempting to outbalance the balance of power by intensifying its own military and behaving like a revisionist state (Mearsheimer, 2013). Furthermore, it is important to consider the geopolitical position of the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad as the exclave does not share borders with Russia and is surrounded by the EU/NATO member states of Poland and Lithuania, which can also be perceived as a security threat for Russia because Kaliningrad's exposed position makes it an easy target to attack and difficult to defend. On the other hand, the position of Kaliningrad can prove to be a strong tactical advantage as it can create a threat to the Baltics and Poland (Scholtz, 2020).

Another important geopolitical aspect to consider is the border between Lithuania and Poland, also known as the Suwalki Gap, which has become a focal point in the relations between Russia and NATO (Larter, 2019). In the following section, this aspect will be further elaborated.

7.6.1. The Suwalki Gap

The Suwalki Gap is a 60 miles relatively flat wide border (Nye, 2021) that separates Kaliningrad and Belarus while connecting Lithuania and Poland (Larter, 2019). Therefore, the Suwalki Gap would most likely be one of the greatest areas for conflict between Russia and the West (Larter, 2019). If Russia invades the Suwalki Gap the state could isolate the Baltics from the rest of the West and NATO as the Baltics would lose their geographic connection to Poland (Goble, 2020). It is important to understand that if this frightful scenario was to happen, Russia's actions cannot be explained by a desire to protect a great Russian minority as seen in the cases of Georgia and Ukraine. This is because

the population residing in the Suwalki Gap mainly consists of Polish nationals and most of the minorities in the area are Lithuanians or Ukrainians. Thus, Russia will not be able to apply the same argument as they did in Georgia and Ukraine where they supported their actions by a wish to protect a Russian minority in the two states. Instead, Russia's actions can best be explained by a fear of being surrounded by Europe and NATO member states, thus attempting to separate the Baltics from the West and reducing the threat posed by NATO and the West (Veebel & Sliwa, 2019, pp. 113-114). Thus, if one investigates this aspect from an offensive neorealist perspective, the theory is not dismissive of a possible Russian invasion of the Suwalki Gap as this would simply be a result of a fear about NATO's further presence near the Baltics. However, according to defensive neorealists, it is not worth the risk for Russia to invade the Suwalki Gap as an offensive approach hardly ever pays off. Thus, according to these theorists, it will make more sense for Russia to seek to maintain its current balance of power by simply defending itself and its borders. Thereby, they would not see an invasion of the Suwalki Gap as a possibility. Instead, they would believe it to be more likely of a Russian intensification in Kaliningrad in order to be able to protect itself against an attack (Mearsheimer, 2013).

However, one could argue that there are easier options for Russia to isolate or pressure the Baltic states, which do not contain conventional military methods and expenses. These options involve the application of hybrid warfare, which we will illuminate later in section 7.8 (Veebel & Sliwa, 2019, p. 114).

As we have now given an account of Russia's military and geopolitical initiatives and interests regarding the Baltics, it is important to investigate Russia's non-military interests. Therefore, we will investigate Russia's economic relationship with the Baltics in the following section, as we believe that this relationship may also have an impact on a possible Russian escalation in the Baltics.

7.7. Economic relations between Russia and the Baltics

In spite of the Baltic states establishing closer ties with the West, Russia and the Baltics have always been rather dependent on each other in relation to the economical perspective. Trade has been an important area on which Russia and the Baltics have been able to collaborate and establish more dependent relations. Much of the trade has concerned energy supplies such as oil, gas and electricity. However, the total trade between the states has fallen between 2013 and 2019 (Ferris, 2020). The reason for this is that the Baltic states have been attempting to become more dependent on each other

and the EU, thus attempting to become more independent from Russian energy supplies (Hoellerbauer, 2017). The total trade between Russia and Estonia has fallen from \$4.81 billion in 2013 to \$2.93 billion in 2019. The total trade between Russia and Latvia has fallen from \$11.22 billion in 2013 to \$5.43 billion in 2019. In Lithuania, the total trade between the two states has fallen from \$7.25 billion in 2013 to \$4.06 billion in 2019 (Ferris, 2020). In addition, in 2012 the Baltics were 90% dependent on Russia for oil and almost 100% dependent on Russia for gas (Hanson, 2013, pp. 5-6). In the first half of 2019, more than 75% of Estonia's and Lithuania's oil import came from Russia while Russian oil import in Latvia solely consisted of 25% in the first half of 2019 (Ferris, 2020). In addition, more than 75% of Estonia's and Latvia's gas imports came from Russia in the same period while the gas import in Lithuania consisted of 50-75% from Russia (Ferris, 2020). Even though these numbers seem rather high, they have still decreased, as already mentioned, as the Baltics have been more dependent on Russia due to the fact that Russia has been their only source to gas, oil and energy supplies for a long period of time. Nonetheless, the Baltic states are still reliant on Russian electricity supplies as they receive energy from the electrical grid, BRELL, which provides energy to Belarus, Russia, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The Baltics are striving to decrease their reliance on Russian energy supplies and instead become more reliant on energy supplies from the EU. Thus, one could argue that a part of the bond between the Baltic states and Russia is crumbling (Ferris, 2020). However, Russia would not be particularly affected economically as the Baltics only represent a small market for Russia (Hoellerbauer, 2017). Moreover, the Baltics are afraid of Russia cutting off the grid between them because of Russia's former actions. If Russia cuts off the grid, the Baltics will be without electricity. Russia demonstrated its ability to do this when it cut off the grid between Kaliningrad and Lithuania as part of a test in May 2019.

As it can be seen, the Baltics have reduced their trade relations with Russia. However, Russia has also distanced itself from cooperating with NATO member states on trade (Ferris, 2020). In sum, Russia and the Baltics have collaborated much in regards to trade and as of today, the parties are still collaborating to some degree. According to the proponent of interdependence neoliberalism Richard Rosecrance, industrialised states are more dependent on each other because of the economic development and foreign trade, which reduces violent conflicts between states in the international arena. Therefore, one could argue that one of the reasons why there has not been a major conflict yet between Russia and the Baltic states is because of this interdependent relationship. This raises concern on whether a possible conflict could arise if the Baltics and Russia stopped all forms of cooperation between them (Jackson et al., 2019).

Interdependence neoliberals do not reject the idea of states returning to traditional methods in seeking power. Nonetheless, they do not consider the applicability of military force to be a possibility but they also do not give other examples of traditional methods on how to seek power. However, one could argue that Russia's demonstration of its power by cutting off the grid between Kaliningrad and Lithuania, resulting in the Baltics desire to withdraw from the collaboration, is another way for Russia to apply more traditional methods rather than focusing on peaceful and respectful collaboration between the parties. Thus, interdependence can be positive and important when the states trust each other. However, it can also prove to be counterproductive when the states fear each other (Jackson et al., 2019). According to the institutional neoliberal, Robert Keohane, a great level of institutionalisation can help reduce uncertainty and the lack of trust between states. Keohane mentions scope and depth as important tools to measure the level of institutionalisation. When looking at the scope, Russia and the Baltics are only collaborating on issue areas of economics and trade. Therefore, one could argue that the scope is minimal as the parties have not established institutions where they can collaborate on other issue areas such as politics and security matters. Russia is leaning towards the East on issue areas regarding politics and military security whereas the Baltics are leaning towards the West. The fact that the parties collaborate on a minimal spectrum illustrates that they have a minimal level of institutionalisation. One could, therefore, debate that if they had collaborated on more issue areas they might have a stronger connection, thus making it less likely for conflicts and mistrust as mentioned by Keohane. However, as this is not the case, the parties instead mistrust each other (Jackson et al., 2019) just as one would assume that historical events demonstrate this tense relationship of mistrust. Thus, the economic relationship between Russia and the Baltics may diminish the possibility of a Russian escalation in the Baltics due to the states' collaboration and interdependence. However, as their cooperation and institutionalisation are minimal, a Russian escalation does not seem unlikely. In the following, we will investigate Russia's recent actions in the Baltics which include the use of hybrid warfare.

7.8. Russian Hybrid Warfare

While Russia, just like the West, has strengthened its physical presence around the Baltics using conventional methods such as military forces, Russia's tactics have diversified over the years to include a variety of tactics. These include the implementation of hybrid warfare, which is a newer concept explaining unconventional methods and activities of warfare such as economic manipulation, diplomatic pressure, disinformation, use of proxies and insurgencies and military actions. These

methods are intended to disturb and weaken an opponent's activities without entering into a direct and open conflict. Today, hybrid warfare is especially associated with Russia's actions in relation to the Ukrainian Crisis (Dowse & Bachmann, 2019). However, Russia has not only employed hybrid warfare in Ukraine but also in the Baltics. In 2007, Estonia was a target of hybrid warfare. More specifically, Estonia was exposed to a cyberattack by Russia making Estonia one of the first states to be subject to this modern type of hybrid warfare. Russia's motive for the cyberattack was due to Estonia's desire to move a bronze statue of a soldier from the centre of Tallinn to a military cemetery outside of the centre. For Estonians with close ties to Russia, the statue symbolises the Soviet Union's victory over Nazism. On the other hand, ethnic Estonians associate the statue with the state's oppression by Russia during the Soviet time. The relocation of the Bronze Soldier created protests among Russian-speakers. The protests in Estonia were intensified by the spread of Russian fake news, which alleged that the statue, as well as close-by Soviet war graves, were planned to be destroyed (McGuinness, 2017). Following this, Estonian government bodies, online services of Estonian banks as well as news media were victims of a cyberattack by Russia. This resulted in several consequences such as government employees being unable to communicate with each other online, cash machines and online banking services being out of service and news media being unable to deliver the news (McGuinness, 2017).

Since the 2007 cyberattack on Estonia, the Baltic states have faced Russian use of hybrid warfare various times. In 2018, Latvia was a target of a Russian cyberattack during the Latvian parliamentary elections. Russia's main target of the attack was the central election commission. However, the cyberattack was not successful as Russia did not manage to influence the election results. Moreover, Russia also intended to spy on government institutions including the foreign and defence sectors during this cyberattack (Viksnins, 2020). One could both apply defensive neorealism and offensive neorealism to the Russian cyberattack, which will provide the reader with different understandings of Russia's intentions. First, defensive neorealists would argue that Russia has held a great amount of uncertainty on its own security. Thus, defensive neorealists would insist that Russia's actions and intent to spy on government institutions can be explained by a fear and uncertainty of what Latvia might be planning against Russia. Thus, by applying hybrid warfare, this would allow Russia to be one step ahead of Latvia in order to feel more secure (Mearsheimer, 2013). On the other hand, one can also apply offensive neorealism to the cyberattack, which would then make Russia's intentions revolve more around the desire for power rather than security. Offensive neorealists would argue that

Russia's attempt to influence the Latvian election results was a way for Russia to gain power over Latvia's future policy. Thereby, Russia would be able to have more control over Latvia's actions using hybrid warfare instead of entering into a direct military conflict with Latvia (Mearsheimer, 2013).

Moreover, in 2020, Latvia and Lithuania banned the Russian broadcast channel, RT, because there had been information proposing that the Russian propagandist sanctioned by the EU, Dmitri Kiselyov, was controlling the RT channel (Cesare, 2020). As already mentioned, there exists a great Russian-speaking minority in the Baltic states and many of these tend to have a great interest in Russian media. Thus, one could argue that they are more likely to be affected by Russian propaganda (Grigas, 2014). However, the aim of this thesis is not to explain whether or not these Baltic Russian-speakers lean towards Russia and support Putin. Instead, as already mentioned, the intention of including the Russian-speaking minorities has been to highlight the existence of these Russian-speaking minorities as Russia may perceive this as a valid reason to invade areas where these Baltic Russian-speakers are located.

In addition, Russia has not only applied hybrid warfare to influence or seek information from the Balts. Russia has also applied hybrid warfare to eFP soldiers deployed by the Baltic borders. It has been proved that Russia has hacked the soldiers' smartphones by using techniques such as drones and covert antennas (Schultz, 2017). As already demonstrated, Russia is again applying hybrid warfare with the aim of getting an insight into the opponent's work and intentions. Thus, according to neorealism, Russia's application of more unconventional methods such as hybrid warfare makes it possible to gain greater knowledge about the intentions of other states instead of entering into a direct military conflict. In this way, Russia can gain an insight into what other states are planning at a distance rather than being offensive in their behaviour (Mearsheimer, 2013).

In sum, it becomes clear that Russia has resorted to other methods such as hybrid warfare, which demonstrates how Russia is trying to gain insight knowledge in the Baltic states as well as reach its minorities abroad. Russia's application of hybrid warfare could also indicate that the state is becoming more cautious of entering a direct and military conflict, thus resorting to newer methods. Considering this aspect combined with the fact that NATO has enhanced its presence in the Baltics, it may seem more likely that Russia would apply hybrid warfare rather than entering into a direct military confrontation with the Baltics and NATO.

7.9. Recent declarations on Russia's and NATO's precautionary measures

In this section, we will analyse two speeches given respectively by the Russian President and the NATO Secretary General. Both speeches will be applied to include a more recent perspective and to support the speculation of a possible Russian intensification in the Baltics.

7.9.1. Speech by President Vladimir Putin

In a speech given by Russian President Vladimir Putin to the Federal Assembly on 21 April of this year, Putin addressed, among other things, the meaning and purpose of Russia's policy in the international sphere. He highlighted that the policy aims to ensure peace and security for the Russian people and for the state (President of Russia, 2021). A basic liberal assumption is that states ought to ensure the individuals the right to live their lives happily without the interference of others. Therefore, it can be argued that Russia acts on the basis of liberal values, as Russia's policy aims to ensure peace and security for the Russian citizens (Jackson et al., 2019). On the other hand, it can be argued that Russia acts based on realist values. Neorealism indicates that states act out of their own self-interest in order to secure their own survival. Thus, Russia's desire to ensure peace and security for the state illustrates that Russia acts out of self-interest and only focuses on its own peace and security and not so much on international peace (Mearsheimer, 2013). In addition, Putin stated that Russia wants to protect its own interests within the framework of international law and he added that if someone declines to understand Russia's interests and actions or does not want to have a dialogue, Russia will find a way to defend itself. Furthermore, Putin mentioned that Russia has attempted to create an international dialogue on information and cybersecurity with the West but the West keeps declining Russia's proposals of international dialogue on these topics (President of Russia, 2021). An interesting observation to make from this is that Russia wishes to create dialogue on information and cybersecurity and how to combat these threats, even though the state itself has performed various cyberattacks and spread disinformation in recent years, as seen in Ukraine and in the Baltics. Meanwhile, the West keeps picking on Russia for no reason according to Putin. He further stated that Russia is open to international cooperation and wants to maintain good relations with other states. These include states that Russia has also had tense relations with in recent years. According to Putin, Russia has intended to maintain and strengthen the role of the United Nations on the international stage, while providing assistance in regional conflicts around the world. However, Putin mentioned that Russia will act fast and tough in case someone mistakes Russia's good intentions and attempts to destroy these relations (President of Russia, 2021). According to neoliberalism, cooperation occurs

when states adjust their behaviour in accordance with other states' interests. Nonetheless, neoliberalism acknowledges the neorealist thought that cooperation can be difficult to achieve in the anarchic international system defined by fear and insecurity (Jackson et al., 2019). It is interesting how Russia is open to international cooperation and wants to maintain its good relations with other states, while Russia still creates some degree of fear and insecurity by adding that if anyone goes against Russia or mistakes its intentions, Russia will act fast and tough against this state (Jackson et al., 2019). In continuation of this, Putin stated that *"Those behind provocations that threaten the core interests of our security will regret what they have done in a way they have not regretted anything for a long time"* (President of Russia, 2021). This rather offensive statement demonstrates that Russia will do whatever it takes to ensure its own power and survival in case of an attack and that it is not afraid to harm others if it is necessary. In other words, from a neorealist approach, the statements made by Vladimir Putin demonstrates how Russia is willing to use aggressive methods in order to protect itself if other states go against Russia. Recent events demonstrate how other Western states have chosen to go against Russia. The United States made new sanctions on Russia in April 2021, as it came out that Russia had been building up their military along the border to Ukraine (Reuters, 2021). This military build-up could possibly lead to an escalation of the conflict between Ukraine and Russia. NATO supported the U.S. and demanded Russia to deescalate the tensions (Roth, 2021). In the same month, Russia expelled diplomats from the Baltic states due to the Baltic's expulsion of Russian diplomats in solidarity with the Czech Republic. In relation to the expulsion, the Russian foreign ministry expressed that Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania continue to have an aggressive and unfriendly behaviour towards Russia (AFP, 2021a). As it can be seen, both NATO and the Baltics have chosen to go against Russia, which for now only has led to soft action from Russia by expelling Baltic diplomats. However, given these circumstances as well as NATO's build-up near the Baltic borders and Putin's statements from the speech, it can be argued that Russia is willing to do what it takes to protect itself, which may also include more drastic and aggressive methods if needed. As the cases of Georgia and Ukraine have demonstrated, Russia has not been afraid to apply drastic methods in the past. Thus, the fact that there remain unresolved conflicts between Russia and the West combined with these new actions may contribute to an intensification of the tense relationship between Russia and the West. Thus, from an offensive neorealist perspective, one could argue that these actions from the West may result in a Russian intensification in the Baltics in order to defend itself and stand as a strong and powerful player in the international community (Mearsheimer, 2013).

7.9.2. Speech by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg

On 13 November 2020, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg gave a speech at the Riga Conference 2020. In the speech, Stoltenberg emphasised the security issues that NATO has been facing as well as how the organisation should address these issues in the long term. He began the speech by highlighting the presence of NATO allies in the Baltic region and how this presence aims to prevent conflict and obtain peace (NATO, 2020b). Therefore, one can argue that NATO acts according to liberal values. Furthermore, the statement illustrates NATO's importance as an international institution because it promotes cooperation between the member states which will prevent conflict and eventually lead to peace in the Baltic region (Jackson et al., 2019). In addition to this, Stoltenberg stressed Russia's behaviour as an important aspect to consider. He mentioned Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and its major military build-up on NATO borders. In addition, Stoltenberg mentioned Russia's use of hybrid warfare such as disinformation campaigns, cyberattacks and its attempts to interfere in the elections of NATO allies. Stoltenberg categorised all of these actions as aggressive and disturbing which corresponds with the neorealist thought. In response to Russia's behaviour NATO allies have taken several precautions by acquiring new air and missile defence systems. Furthermore, NATO is in the process of adapting its intelligence and exercises as well as keeping its nuclear deterrent safe, secure and successful (NATO, 2020b). Therefore, one could argue that NATO perceives Russia as an aggressive player in the international arena, whereas it perceives itself as a fair, peaceful and democratic institution. Moreover, it can be argued that NATO may call its own actions defensive. However, this may not be the way Russia sees it. From Russia's point of view, these adjustments may be seen as a threat as NATO is securing itself, thereby making Russia doubt its own security, which is also highlighted by the security dilemma proposed by neorealism (Mearsheimer, 2013). Even though NATO perceives Russia as a threat, the alliance recognises the importance of maintaining dialogue with Russia as the state is the alliance's biggest neighbour. According to Stoltenberg, it is important with this dialogue in order to prevent confrontations, accidents and misunderstandings (NATO, 2020b). This demonstrates that NATO understands the importance of cooperation in order to prevent confrontations and miscalculations and achieve peace as the liberal thought indicates (Jackson et al., 2019). Nonetheless, he states "*But know one thing. NATO and all NATO Allies will do whatever is necessary to keep all our countries safe.*" He further added that all NATO's actions are defensive including its presence in the Baltic states (NATO, 2020b). The statement seems rather intense and also threatening to some extent, as he mentions that NATO will do whatever it takes to keep its member states safe (NATO, 2020b). This

suggests that NATO is prepared to use all necessary means, which could also include offensive measures in spite of the organisation highlighting its defensive nature (Mearsheimer, 2013).

Stoltenberg ended his speech by introducing the NATO 2030 initiative, which has three main objectives, namely to remain a strong military alliance, to become a stronger political alliance and to obtain a greater global approach. First, he states that in order to remain a strong military alliance NATO aims at continuing to invest in deterrence and defence including new aspects such as cyber and other new capabilities. Second, he underlines that to become a stronger political alliance NATO must interact more with each other in order to solve their differences. Third, he suggests that to obtain a greater global approach NATO ought to collaborate more with its partners and other organisations such as the UN and the EU to protect the allies against global threats such as terrorism, the increase of nuclear weapons, cyberthreats and the rise of China (NATO, 2020b). Thus, from an institutional neoliberal perspective, it becomes clear that NATO is eager to collaborate more by having an open dialogue with its member states. Thereby, the alliance is really focused on the capabilities that NATO holds as an institution due to the institution's ability to create a safe space where all member states can interact with each other and combat severe threats in spite of individual differences between the member states (Jackson et al., 2019). According to neorealism and the security dilemma, the fact that NATO has launched this initiative as well as attempting to further its collaboration and enhance its military presence in the Baltics could also pose a threat to Russia. This may cause a further intensification of Russian military measurements as Russia may aim to protect itself from NATO. Thus, as highlighted in the theory chapter of neorealism, one can argue that the security dilemma between Russia and NATO creates a vicious circle as one cannot increase its own security without affecting and decreasing the security of others (Mearsheimer, 2013).

In sum, both speeches attain some neoliberal and neorealist aspects. In Putin's speech, it becomes clear how he identifies NATO as uncollaborative while he believes that Russia has tried to do what it can to collaborate with the West. In Stoltenberg's speech, it is obvious that he identifies Russia as a threat to the security of NATO. However, Stoltenberg recognises the importance of collaborating with Russia. It can then be argued that each actor identifies itself as collaborative, rightful and defensive while looking at the other as being uncollaborative, wrong and offensive. However, one cannot ignore that both parties have stated that they will do whatever is necessary to protect themselves, which is a very neorealist utterance as it becomes clear that both of the actor's goal is to

assure their own security. Thus, one can argue that a state or an organisation may act out of liberal values such as peaceful cooperation, however, if the actor feels threatened for its own security, the actor will not hesitate to resort to more conventional methods which may include military measures, based on neorealist thought. Having focused on relations between NATO, Russia and the Baltics, we will in the discussion take a more global approach to the investigation of whether or not a Russian escalation is probable.

8. Discussion

In our analysis, we focused on the possibilities of a Russian escalation in the Baltic states by primarily focusing on NATO, Russia and the Baltics. The discussion will include our reflective thoughts and aims to provide the reader with a more global perspective on the matter by introducing ongoing initiatives such as Russia's escalation near Ukrainian borders, China-Russia cooperation, global interests in the Arctic and Russia's internal conflicts with the imprisoned opponent to the Russian government, Alexei Navalny which has created international debate. In the following, we will discuss whether these ongoing initiatives may have an impact on how the relationship between NATO and Russia may play out in the Baltic states and if a Russian escalation in the Baltics is plausible.

As mentioned in the analysis, Russia has been intensifying its military actions near the borders of Ukraine. According to Ian Bremmer, this is with the aim of marking its territory and influencing these areas (Bremmer, 2021). In addition, this escalation also demonstrates Putin's determination to protect Russian interests regardless of the risks (Bremmer, 2021). Thus, one could argue that Ukraine is still the priority at the moment meaning that Russia is not done with this conflict. Due to this, one could discuss whether or not an escalation in the Baltics will take place in the near future. On the one hand, it seems unlikely that Russia will also begin a new conflict in the Baltics before a solution or ending of the conflict in Ukraine has been made although Russia has already been intensifying its military presence near the Baltic borders as illustrated in the analysis. On the other hand, Russia's success in building up its military near Ukrainian borders without severe consequences may strengthen Russia's confidence and motivation for invading the Baltic states. Nevertheless, we find the first option most likely to take place because one should also consider the fact that the Baltic states are members of NATO and that NATO soldiers are already present in the Baltics. Thus, it is likely that Russia has found it to be more secure to build up its military near Ukrainian borders as Ukraine is not a member of NATO (NATO, n.d.). Thus, Russia may not dare to start a military conflict with the Baltics due to their NATO membership.

Another important aspect to consider is the fact that Russia is also experiencing internal conflicts within its nation state which has created great international debate. The opponent to the current Russian government, Alexei Navalny, has attempted to take the power away from the Russian President Vladimir Putin by revealing Russia's corruption to the public through videos and other public activities such as running against Putin. Navalny has gained support from a small part of the

Russian population who are determined to demonstrate their frustration with the current government and could possibly pose a threat to this government. However, few people believe that Navalny has the potential to succeed in his mission of taking the power away from Putin. Nonetheless, it still seems like the Russian government perceives Navalny to pose a threat to the government as Russian staff members have poisoned Navalny in an attempt to assassinate him. Today, Navalny is imprisoned and due to his objection to his imprisonment, he decided to go into hunger strike and is now almost dying (Ward, 2021). Navalny's situation has created great debate in the international arena and leaders from the West are now expressing their objections to Russia's treatment of Navalny as they have stated that Russia will face negative consequences if Navalny dies in prison (AFP, 2021b). However, this internal conflict does not seem to call a halt to Putin's and Russia's actions abroad which Ukraine is an example of. Thus, one could argue that the Navalny case would also not stop Russia from an escalation in the Baltic states if that is its desire. However, it appears that the West will not hesitate to stop further collaboration with Russia if Navalny dies in prison. This will create further mistrust and tensions between Russia and the West including NATO which can get interesting in relation to the Baltic case.

In addition, due to Russia's former actions and engagements in several conflicts such as the Georgian War and the Ukrainian Crisis, Russia's relationship with the EU and the United States has become more strained. As a result of the West's disapproval of Russia's actions, the EU and the United States have made several sanctions on Russia, which has caused Russia to enhance its relationship with China on economic and security related matters. In addition, Russia has also strengthened its military cooperation with China by selling them hardware as well as conducting joint military exercises from the Baltic to the South China Sea (Gabuev, 2020). Thus, Russia is becoming more dependent on its cooperation with China, which makes it interesting to consider the possibility of an alliance between Russia and China. However, Russia and China have also both stated for several years that their interests are so different from each other and forming an alliance has, therefore, not been a focus area. On the other hand, Putin has in recent years stated that even though an alliance has not been a focus area so far, one cannot rule out the possibility of a military alliance between the two states in the future. In spite of Putin's shift of opinion regarding an alliance, Alexander Gabuev highlights that if Russia was to form an alliance with China, it would probably not be because of a true desire to establish closer ties with the state. Instead, it would most likely be due to a desire to create fear in the West with the intention of making the West ease its sanctions on Russia (Gabuev, 2020). Thus, one

could argue that Russia has no interest in becoming an alliance with China as the states have very different interests. In addition, Russia has no intention of becoming too dependent on any state. However, if the West does not soften some of its restrictions towards Russia and if it keeps sanctioning the state, then Russia may seek more towards a collaboration with China. Whether it will be in the form of an alliance or simply a stronger cooperation is not possible to predict, but either way it would have negative consequences for the West as Russia would then turn further away from the West if most of the collaboration between them stops. Thus, one could discuss that Russia may find it more attractive to intensify its presence in the Baltics if it has no obligations to the West and if the parties lose their close ties. Building a closer relationship with China can either create a situation where it is possible that Russia will not hold the same interest in the Baltics as before, but on the other hand, a new collaboration with China could also lead to a new confidence towards the West, as a stronger collaboration with China would be the result of a weakened relationship with the West. This could create more uncertainties for the West including NATO and the Baltic states. In relation to this, it appears that NATO acknowledges that the rise of China could pose a threat as highlighted in the NATO2030 initiative (NATO, 2020b).

Another major focus on the international stage in recent years is the Arctic as the region has become more accessible due to global warming. This has led the nearby states to the Arctic to become more active and interested in the area due to its strategic position, its natural resources and its navigation routes (AFP, 2021c). This interest has resulted in a geopolitical competition between Russia, Canada, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Iceland, the United States and Finland who all are part of the Arctic Council (AFP, 2021d). In the Arctic Council, the states cooperate and interact on common interests and issues in the Arctic such as sustainable development (Arctic Council, n.d.).

Especially Russia has expressed great interest in the area and has claimed the Arctic to be their territory. In addition, Russia has taken several steps in its desire to make the region a strategic priority by investing in mineral extraction and military infrastructure. Furthermore, Russia hopes that it will be able to use the Northern Sea Route to export oil and gas in the future when ice in the Arctic has melted (AFP, 2021d). The fact that Russia has claimed the Arctic to be their territory has created tensions between the parties. At a press conference in Moscow, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov expressed that: *“It has been absolutely clear for everyone for a long time that this is our territory, this is our land”* (AFP, 2021d). In addition, he expressed frustration with Norway as the state has expressed the wish for NATO presence in the Arctic (AFP, 2021d). Thus, this also

demonstrates the current tensions between Russia and NATO. The situation regarding the Arctic demonstrates that there is a form of power struggle taking place in the region. At the same time, the states cooperate in the Arctic Council, where one would think that they all agree that they have a part in the Arctic. Nonetheless, the current situation demonstrates that even though they cooperate on initiatives in the region, the states and, in particular Russia, act on the basis of their own interests which creates tensions between the parties instead of a peaceful cooperation. Thus, one could argue that the parties are moving away from a peaceful cooperation, as neoliberalism indicates (Jackson et al., 2019), to a power struggle, where they cannot be sure of each other's real intentions, as neorealism indicates (Mearsheimer, 2013).

It appears that Russia is already caught up in many initiatives internally and globally. This could make one think that the possibility of a Russian escalation in the Baltics is not a priority at the moment with everything else going on in the international sphere. However, this does not mean that it will not be a priority in the future.

One could also argue that Russia and China are great individual candidates for switching the balance of power by challenging the unipolar world with the U.S. as the great power. Jacob L. Shapiro emphasises that the world today is unipolar. However, if one disregards Russia and China's underlying weaknesses, the two states might be able to challenge the unipolar world, which would mean that a multipolar world would not be unachievable (Shapiro, 2018). As pointed out by neorealism, the supporters of a bipolar world believe that a multipolar world is unfavourable as it is their opinion that a multipolar world will create greater opportunity for the great powers to combat each other. On the other hand, supporters of a multipolar world believe that this system is more favourable and peaceful as they mention that it is easier to combat an aggressive state if more powers collaborate with each other. Thus, according to supporters of this system, they believe that hostility is less likely in a multipolar world (Mearsheimer, 2013). Therefore, one could argue that a Russian escalation in the Baltic states is unlikely to take place if the world becomes multipolar with the U.S., China and Russia as global powers, as this would mean that both China and the U.S. could oppose to Russia's actions and thereby support each other in combatting Russia's aggressive actions. On the other hand, one could also argue that the threat of a Russian escalation in the Baltics would still exist, as China may support Russia's actions or simply just remain neutral to the situation. Thus, a global perspective is also important to take into consideration when investigating whether or not a Russian escalation in the Baltics is likely.

9. Conclusion

Based on our findings in the analysis, we can draw different conclusions depending on which factors we focus on as well as the theoretical lenses we apply. NATO's enhanced Forward Presence in the Baltics illustrates that NATO has seen Russia's former actions in Georgia and Ukraine as a threat to the security of the region. Bearing this in mind, we have investigated some of the factors that could explain NATO's fear and the possibility of a Russian escalation in the Baltics from a neorealist and neoliberal perspective. First, we have examined Russian-speaking minorities in the Baltics which demonstrates Russia's motive for a possible invasion in the Baltics as history illustrates that Russia's motive for invading Georgia and Ukraine was due to a Russian minority in these areas. Second, by applying institutional neoliberalism to Russia's collaboration with the CSTO, an escalation does not seem probable due to the member states' responsibilities to comply with International Law. Third, by applying defensive neorealism on the Russian troops in Kaliningrad, we can conclude that these troops merely are present to defend itself against the West and protect Russian territories. Thereby, downgrading the possibility of a Russian escalation in the Baltics. Fourth, by looking at the geopolitical importance of the Suwalki Gap, offensive neorealists would argue that NATO's eFP could frighten Russia to the extent that Russia would invade the Suwalki Gap, thus isolating the Baltics from the West and escalating a confrontation with NATO. Fifth, by investigating Russia and the Baltics' economic cooperation from an interdependence neoliberal perspective, economic ties would most likely strengthen their collaboration, thus diminishing the chances of conflict and war. However, since this collaboration has decreased, they are no longer as dependent on each other, which would then not leave out the chances of conflict and a possible escalation between the parties. Sixth, we have assessed Russia's application of hybrid warfare from a neorealist perspective, where we conclude that this might be a more likely way for Russia to escalate a confrontation with the Baltics rather than entering into a direct military conflict. Lastly, by applying neorealism to the speeches by Putin and Stoltenberg, we have concluded that the speech by Putin may lead one to fear an escalation due to an insecurity of Russia's real intentions. In addition, the speech by Stoltenberg illustrates that NATO still sees Russia as a threat, thus maintaining an interest in protecting the Baltics. Taking all of these considerations into account, we can conclude that whether or not a Russian intensification in the Baltics is probable depends on the theoretical perspective one applies. Neoliberalism is more likely to downgrade the probability of an escalation due to its belief in peaceful cooperation among states, whereas neorealism is more likely to speak in favour of an escalation due to its speculation of states' real intentions. Thus, the thesis also demonstrates how neorealism is better at explaining the

possibility of a Russian intensification in the Baltics. However, neoliberalism has been useful in providing us with different aspects of the situation by investigating economic ties rather and institutional cooperation than merely military aspects provided by neorealism.

As our discussion demonstrates, one should also consider some of the global factors that may play a part in the possibility of a Russian escalation. Having considered this aspect, we conclude that a military intensification does not seem probable at the moment as Russia is also involved in many other initiatives. However, this does not rule out the possibility of a military escalation in years to come. Taking all of this into consideration, it seems like the fear for when and where a Russian escalation will take place will remain an unanswered question and an existing fear.

10. Bibliography

10.1. Agreements

Agreement on Defense Cooperation, U.S.-Estonia, 17 Jan, 2017a, T.I.A.S. No. 17-706.1. Retrieved 13.04.2021 from:

https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/17-706.1-Estonia-Defense-TIMS-56237.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1sIDNSl3fgUWIF_6D6krgFwVLHhv9pDM_WRVZAhxseTeUQiNd84XsKOI

Agreement on Defense Cooperation, U.S.-Latvia, 12 Jan, 2017b, T.I.A.S. No. 17-405. Retrieved 13.04.2021 from:

<https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/17-405-Latvia-Defense-Cooperation.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0N6F7V7g3ePv47zgeXwfqDBfxyZaCjtU5RtCjLLKr2FWcbZUCpoOIt9FU>

Agreement on Defense Cooperation. U.S.-Lithuania, 17 Jan, 2017c, T.I.A.S. No 17-227. Retrieved 13.04.2021 from:

<https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/17-227-Lithuania-Defense-Cooperation.pdf?fbclid=IwAR0mYpHmEOyG9s4n9u7bgpkUqND9AZdGHoU1REzXcKkReY17ZPaxwJjDSqI>

10.2. Articles

AFP. (2021a). Russia Expels 7 EU Diplomats Over ‘Solidarity’ With Czechs. *The Moscow Times*. Retrieved 14.05.2021 from:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2021/04/28/russia-expels-7-eu-diplomats-over-solidarity-with-czechs-a73765>

AFP. (2021b). Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny to end prison hunger strike. *France 24*. Retrieved 19.05.2021 from:

<https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20210423-russian-opposition-leader-alexei-navalny-to-end-prison-hunger-strike>

AFP. (2021c). Russia warns West against Arctic encroachment ahead of talks. *France 24*. Retrieved 20.05.2021 from:

<https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20210517-russia-warns-west-against-arctic-encroachment-ahead-of-talks>

AFP. (2021d). Russia warns Western countries against claims in Arctic ahead of talks. *Al Arabiya*. Retrieved 20.05.2021 from:

<https://english.alarabiya.net/News/world/2021/05/17/Russia-warns-Western-countries-against-claims-in-Arctic-ahead-of-talks>

Alharahsheh, H.H. & Pius, A. (2020). A Review of key paradigms: positivism VS interpretivism. *Global Academic Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 2(3), 39-43. Retrieved 23.05.2021 from:

https://www.gajrc.com/media/articles/GAJHSS_23_39-43_VMGJbOK.pdf

Anniversary of Russian aggression and occupation of Georgia. (2020). *Inform Napalm*. Retrieved 26.03.2021 from:

<https://informnapalm.org/en/anniversary-of-russian-aggression-and-occupation-of-georgia/>

Avedissian, K. (2019). Fact Sheet: What is the Collective Security Treaty Organization? *EVN Report*. Retrieved 15.04.2021 from:

<https://www.evnreport.com/understanding-the-region/fact-sheet-what-is-the-collective-security-treaty-organization?fbclid=IwAR2utZhiv6BfFJxaf9sUrfTOKCWEbKQi9gXY1qFlCkmeEyFAfyJtrhH1s>

Balčiūnas, A. & Gerdžiūnas, B. (2020). Russian troops in Belarus would be an 'early warning' for Baltics. *LRT*. Retrieved 20.04.2021 from:

<https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1194179/russian-troops-in-belarus-would-be-an-early-warning-for-baltics>

- Bennett, A.O. & Elman, C. (2007). Case Study Methods in the International Relations Subfield. *Comparative Political Studies*, 40(2), 170-195. Retrieved 23.05.2021 from:
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/238430648_Case_Study_Methods_in_the_International_Relations_Subfield
- Best, M. (2013). The Ethnic Russian Minority: A Problematic Issue in the Baltic States. *Verges: Germanic & Slavic Studies in Review (GSSR)*, 2(1), 33-41. Retrieved 27.04.2021 from:
<https://journals.uvic.ca/index.php/verges/article/view/11634>
- Bowen, G. (2009). Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(2), 27-40. Retrieved 18.05.2021 from:
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/240807798_Document_Analysis_as_a_Qualitative_Research_Method
- BNN. (2017). Latvia and USA sign agreement on cooperation in defence. *BNN*. Retrieved 14.04.2021 from:
<https://bnn-news.com/latvia-and-usa-sign-agreement-on-cooperation-in-defence-158454>
- Brauß, H. & Rácz, A. (2021). Russia's Strategic Interests and Actions in the Baltic Region. *DGAP Report*, 1, 1-30. Retrieved 25.03.2021 from:
https://dgap.org/sites/default/files/article_pdfs/210107_Report-2021-1-EN.pdf
- Bremmer, I. (2021). Why Putin Flexed His Military Muscle on Ukraine's Border. *TIME*. Retrieved 20.05.2021 from:
<https://time.com/6004236/russia-ukraine-border-putin/>
- Bøtcher, B.W. (2000). Rusland og Baltikum. *Det Krigsvidenskabelige Selskab*. Retrieved 25.03.2021 from:
<https://krigsvidenskab.dk/emne/rusland-og-baltikum>
- Černoušek, Š. (2020). Soviet repression and deportations in the Baltic states. *Gulag Online*. Retrieved 10.05.2021 from:

<https://gulag.online/articles/soviet-repression-and-deportations-in-the-baltic-states?locale=pl>

Cesare, M. (2020). Russian Encroachment in the Baltics: The Role of Russian Media and Military. *Foreign Policy Research Institute*. Retrieved 20.04.2021 from:

<https://www.fpri.org/article/2020/12/russian-encroachment-in-the-baltics-the-role-of-russian-media-and-military-2/>

Conflict in Ukraine. (2021). *Council on Foreign Relations*. Retrieved 26.05.2021 from:

<https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/conflict-ukraine>

Dapkus, L. (2017). Lithuania signs agreement with U.S. on troop deployment. *MilitaryTimes*. Retrieved 14.04.2021 from:

<https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2017/01/17/lithuania-signs-agreement-with-u-s-on-troop-deployment/>

Douhan, A.F. (2015). International Organizations and Settlement of the Conflict in Ukraine. *ZaöRV*, 75, 195-214. Retrieved 12.05.2021 from:

https://www.zaoerv.de/75_2015/75_2015_1_a_195_214.pdf

Dowse, A. & Bachmann, S. (2019). Explainer: what is 'hybrid warfare' and what is meant by the 'grey zone'? *The Conversation*. Retrieved 21.04.2021 from:

<https://theconversation.com/explainer-what-is-hybrid-warfare-and-what-is-meant-by-the-grey-zone-118841>

Elliott, R. (2020). Quantitative vs Qualitative Data. *GeoPoll*. Retrieved 17.05.2021 from:

<https://www.geopoll.com/blog/quantitative-vs-qualitative-data/>

Ferris, E. (2020). Unplugging the Baltic States: Why Russia's Economic Approach May Be Shifting. *Russia Matters*. Retrieved 23.04.2021 from:

<https://russiamatters.org/analysis/unplugging-baltic-states-why-russias-economic-approach-may-be-shifting>

Filipec, O. (2019). Hybrid Warfare: Between Realism, Liberalism and Constructivism. *Central European Journal of Politics*, 5(2), 52-70. Retrieved 25.05.2021 from:

http://www.cejop.cz/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/2019_Vol-05_No-02_Art-03_Filipec.pdf

Gabuev, A. (2020). Is Putin Really Considering a Military Alliance with China? *The Moscow Times*. Retrieved 20.05.2021 from:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2020/12/02/is-putin-really-considering-a-military-alliance-with-china-a72207>

Gidathubli, R.G. (2004). Expansion of NATO: Russia's Dilemma. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 39(19), 1885-1887. Retrieved 25.03.2021 from:

<https://www-jstor-org.zorac.aau.dk/stable/pdf/4414989.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A6eacc843d6def4df3fbce1b7ba59cb9a>

Goble, P. (2020). Kaliningrad - A Key Factor in the Kremlin's Calculations on Belarus. *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 17(122). Retrieved 28.04.2021 from:

<https://jamestown.org/program/kaliningrad-a-key-factor-in-the-kremlins-calculations-on-belarus/>

Grigas, A. (2014). Compatriot Games: Russian-Speaking Minorities in the Baltic States. *World Politics Review*. Retrieved 11.05.2021 from:

<https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/14240/compatriot-games-russian-speaking-minorities-in-the-baltic-states>

Hanson, Z. (2013). Russia's Energy Diplomacy in the Baltic States. *Auctus: The Journal of Undergraduate Research and Creative Scholarship*, 1-15. Retrieved 28.04.2021 from:

<https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1052&context=auctus>

Hellmann, G. & Wolf, R. (1993). Neorealism, Neoliberal Institutionalism, and the Future of NATO. *Security Studies*, 3(1), 3-43. Retrieved 22.03.2021 from:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233343898_Neorealism_Neoliberal_Institutionalism_and_the_Future_of_NATO

History.com Editors. (2020). Collapse of the Soviet Union. *History*. Retrieved 25.03.2021 from:

<https://www.history.com/topics/cold-war/fall-of-soviet-union>

Hoellerbauer, S. (2017). Baltic Energy Sources: Diversifying Away from Russia. *Foreign Policy Research Institute*. Retrieved 13.05.2021 from:

<https://www.fpri.org/article/2017/06/baltic-energy-sources-diversifying-away-russia/>

Kamiński, M.A. (2020). Changes in the Security Environment of the Baltic States. *Wiedza Obronna*, 273(4), 25-37. Retrieved 07.05.2021 from:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/349237059_Changes_in_the_security_environment_of_the_Baltic_States

Kramer, M. (2002). NATO, the Baltic states and Russia: a framework for sustainable enlargement. *International Affairs*, 78(4), 731-756. Retrieved 25.03.2021 from:

<https://library.fes.de/libalt/journals/swetsfulltext/15872680.pdf>

Larter, D.B. (2019). On the borders of Putin's Baltic fortress, Lithuania cheers local buildup of US forces. *DefenseNews*. Retrieved 28.04.2021 from:

<https://www.defensenews.com/land/2019/10/14/on-the-borders-of-putins-baltic-fortress-lithuania-cheers-the-build-up-of-us-forces-in-the-baltics/>

McCombes, S. (2020). How to do a case study. *Scribbr*. Retrieved 18.05.2021 from:

<https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/case-study/>

McGuinness, D. (2017). How a cyber attack transformed Estonia. *BBC News*. Retrieved 21.04.2021 from:

<https://www.bbc.com/news/39655415>

McLeod, S. (2019). What's the difference between qualitative and quantitative research? *Simply Psychology*. Retrieved 24.05.2021 from:

<https://www.simplypsychology.org/qualitative-quantitative.html>

Miller, A.H. (2008). *NATO Expansion: The Need for Variation on the Realist Paradigm*. (Master's Thesis, Webster University, Missouri, USA). Retrieved 19.03.2021 from:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/303699205_NATO_Expansion_The_Need_for_Variation_on_the_Realist_Paradigm

Misiunas, R.J. (2020). Baltic states. *Britannica*. Retrieved 25.03.2021 from:

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Baltic-states>

Moloney, D. (n.d.). Why Does Russia Own Land Above Poland (Kaliningrad Oblast)? *Maphover*. Retrieved 10.05.2021 from:

<https://maphover.com.au/russia-above-poland-kaliningrad-oblast/>

Nilsen, T. (2020). Northern Fleet Commander says Zapad-2021 will be next year's "main effort". *The Barents Observer*. Retrieved 20.04.2021 from:

<https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2020/12/northern-fleet-commander-says-zapad-2021-will-be-next-years-main-effort>

Nye, L. (2021). In a war with Russia, both sides could focus on this 60-mile stretch. *We Are The Mighty*. Retrieved 13.05.2021 from:

<https://www.wearethemighty.com/mighty-culture/suwalki-gap-war-russia-nato/>

Paulauskas, K. (2006). The Baltics: from nation states to member states. *European Union Institute for Security Studies, Occasional Papers 62*, 1-45. Retrieved 10.05.2021 from:

<https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/occ62.pdf>

Pruitt, S. (2018). How a Five-Day War With Georgia Allowed Russia to Reassert Its Military Might. *History*. Retrieved 26.03.2021 from:

<https://www.history.com/news/russia-georgia-war-military-nato>

- Rashid, Y., Rashid, A., Warraich, M.A., Sabir, S.S. & Waseem, A. (2019). Case Study Method: A Step-by-Step Guide for Business Researchers. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 18, 1-13. Retrieved 18.05.2021 from:
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1609406919862424>
- Ratti, L. (2009). Back to the Future? International relations theory and NATO-Russia relations since the end of the Cold War. *International Journal* 64(2), 399-422. Retrieved 17.03.2021 from:
<https://journals-sagepub-com.zorac.aub.aau.dk/doi/pdf/10.1177/002070200906400206>
- Reuters. (2021). NATO backs U.S. sanctions on Russia, decries Moscow's "destabilising behaviour". *Reuters*. Retrieved 14.05.2021 from:
<https://www.reuters.com/world/nato-backs-us-sanctions-russia-decries-moscows-destabilising-behaviour-2021-04-15/>
- RIA Novosti. (2008). CSTO condemns Georgia's actions in S Ossetia, backs Russia. *Tajikistan News ASIA-Plus*. Retrieved 12.05.2021 from:
<https://www.asiaplustj.info/en/news/tajikistan/20080907/csto-condemns-georgias-actions-s-ossetia-backs-russia>
- Rosu, C. (2021). How real is the Russian threat to the Baltic States? *New Europe*. Retrieved 22.04.2021 from:
<https://www.neweurope.eu/article/how-real-is-the-russian-threat-to-the-baltic-states/>
- Roth, A. (2021). Ukraine still outgunned as Russia prepares for larger conflict. *The Guardian*. Retrieved 14.05.2021 from:
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/14/ukraine-still-outgunned-as-russia-prepares-for-larger-conflict>
- Scholtz, L. (2020). The Sulwalki Gap dilemma. *Militaire Spectator*. Retrieved 28.04.2021 from:
<https://www.militairespectator.nl/thema/strategie-operaties/artikel/suwalki-gap-dilemma#>

Schultz, T. (2017). Russia is hacking and harassing NATO soldiers, report says. *DW*. Retrieved 13.05.2021 from:

<https://www.dw.com/en/russia-is-hacking-and-harassing-nato-soldiers-report-says/a-40827197>

Scotland, J. (2012). Exploring the Philosophical Underpinnings of Research: Relating Ontology and Epistemology to the Methodology and Methods of the Scientific, Interpretive, and Critical Research Paradigms. *English Language Teaching*, 5(9), 9-16. Retrieved 17.05.2021 from:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/266221532_Exploring_the_Philosophical_Underpinnings_of_Research_Relating_Ontology_and_Epistemology_to_the_Methodology_and_Methods_of_the_Scientific_Interpretive_and_Critical_Research_Paradigms

Shapiro, J.L. (2018). Is a Multipolar World Emerging? *Geopolitical Futures*. Retrieved 24.05.2021 from:

<https://geopoliticalfutures.com/multipolar-world-emerging/>

Sleivyte, J. (2008). Russia's European Agenda and The Baltic States. *Shrivenham Papers*, (7), 5-50. Retrieved 17.03.2021 from:

https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/90368/SP_7.pdf

Streefkerk, R. (2021). Primary and secondary sources. *Scribbr*. Retrieved 17.05.2021 from:

<https://www.scribbr.com/citing-sources/primary-and-secondary-sources/>

Tanaguzova, S. (2020). CSTO versus NATO, potential cooperation or further confrontation? *Polemics The Magazine of the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna*. Retrieved 16.04.2021 from:

<https://www.polemics-magazine.com/int/csto-versus-nato-potential-cooperation-or-further-confrontation>

TBT Staff. (2018). Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Ukraine appeal to Russia over Georgia. *The Baltic Times*. Retrieved 10.05.2021 from:

https://www.baltictimes.com/poland_lithuania_latvia_ukraine_appeal_to_russia_over_georgia/

The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. (2018). Commonwealth of Independent States. *Britannica*.

Retrieved 16.04.2021 from:

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/Commonwealth-of-Independent-States>

Thue, M. (2007). *Explaining NATO. Neorealism, Neoliberalism, and the Atlantic Alliance After the Cold War*. (Master's Thesis, The University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway). Retrieved 22.03.2021

from:

<https://www.duo.uio.no/bitstream/handle/10852/14744/STV4990x-xMagnusxThue.pdf%3Fsequence%3D1>

Veebel, V. (2008). NATO options and dilemmas for deterring Russia in the Baltic States. *Defence Studies*, 18(2), 229-251. Retrieved 19.03.2021 from:

<https://www.tandfonline-com.zorac.aub.aau.dk/doi/pdf/10.1080/14702436.2018.1463518?needAccess=true>

Veebel, V. (2019). Researching Baltic security challenges after the annexation of Crimea. *Journal on Baltic Security*, 5(1), 41-52. Retrieved 07.05.2021 from:

<https://www.sciendo.com/article/10.2478/jobs-2019-0004>

Veebel, V. & Ploom, I. (2019). Are the Baltic States and NATO on the right path in deterring Russia in the Baltic? *Defense & Security Analysis*, 35(4), 406-422. Retrieved 19.03.2021 from:

<https://www.tandfonline-com.zorac.aub.aau.dk/doi/pdf/10.1080/14751798.2019.1675947?needAccess=true>

Veebel, V. & Sliwa, Z. (2019). The Suwalki Gap, Kaliningrad and Russia's Baltic Ambitions. *Scandinavian Journal of Military Studies*, 2(1), 111-121. Retrieved 13.05.2021 from:

<https://sjms.nu/articles/10.31374/sjms.21/>

Viksnins, K. (2020). Cyberwarfare in Latvia: A Call for New Cyberwarfare Terminology. *Foreign Policy Research Institute*. Retrieved 21.04.2021 from:

<https://www.fpri.org/article/2020/06/cyberwarfare-in-latvia-a-call-for-new-cyberwarfare-terminology/>

Ward, A. (2021). Alexei Navalny, the Russian dissident challenging Putin, explained. *Vox*. Retrieved 19.05.2021 from:

<https://www.vox.com/22254292/alexei-navalny-prison-hunger-strike-end-russia-protests-vladimir-putin>

Webber, M. (2009). NATO: The United States, Transformation and the War in Afghanistan. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 11, 46-63. Retrieved 18.05.2021 from:

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/j.1467-856X.2008.00349.x>

10.3. Books

Baylis, J., Smith, S. & Owens, P. (2017). *The Globalization of World Politics. An Introduction to International Relations*. (7th edition). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Carson, D., Gilmore, A., Perry, C. & Gronhaug, K. (2001). Philosophy of Research. In D. Carson, A. Gilmore, C. Perry & K. Gronhaug (Eds.), *Qualitative Marketing Research* (pp. 1-21 in pdf). London: SAGE Publications, Ltd. Retrieved 23.05.2021 from:

<http://methods.sagepub.com.zorac.aub.aau.dk/base/download/BookChapter/qualitative-marketing-research-carson/n1.xml>

Jackson, R., Sørensen, G. & Møller, J. (2019). *Introduction to International Relations*. (7th edition). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mack, N., Woodsong, C., MacQueen, K.M., Guest, G. & Namey, E. (2005). *Qualitative Research Methods: A Data Collector's Field Guide*. North Carolina: Family Health International. Retrieved 17.05.2021 from:

<https://www.fhi360.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/Qualitative%20Research%20Methods%20-%20A%20Data%20Collector%27s%20Field%20Guide.pdf>

Mearsheimer, J.J. (2013). Structural Realism. In T. Dunne, M. Kurki & S. Smith (Eds.), *International Relations Theories. Discipline and Diversity* (3rd edition) (pp. 77-93). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Silander, D. (2017). North Atlantic Treaty Organization. In F.M. Moghaddam (Ed.), *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Political Behavior* (pp. 1-6 in pdf). Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc. Retrieved 19.05.2021 from:
<http://sk.sagepub.com.zorac.aub.aau.dk/reference/download/the-sage-encyclopedia-of-political-behavior/i7556.pdf>

Sterling-Folker, J. (2013). Neoliberalism. In T. Dunne, M. Kurki & S. Smith (Eds.), *International Relations Theories. Discipline and Diversity* (3rd edition) (pp. 114-131). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

10.4. Www documents

Arctic Council. (n.d.). *About the Arctic Council*. Retrieved 24.05.2021 from:
<https://arctic-council.org/en/about/>

Baltic Defence College (n.d.). *Restoration of Independence in the Baltics*. Retrieved 25.03.2021 from:
<https://www.baltdefcol.org/?id=1243>

Collective Security Treaty Organization (n.d.a). *CIS*. Retrieved 16.04.2021 from:
https://en.odkb-csto.org/international_org/cis/

Collective Security Treaty Organization. (n.d.b). *From the Treaty to the Organization*. Retrieved 15.04.2021 from:
<https://en.odkb-csto.org/25years/?fbclid=IwAR37HXHZKWbR6RYMuZ3uQojN1opdUkoXnlVUxMF13QI8jEXQp6ML41IRgmo>

Collective Security Treaty Organization. (2012a). *Charter of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, dated October 07, 2002*. Retrieved 16.04.2021 from:

[https://en.odkb-csto.org/documents/documents/ustav_organizatsii_dogovora_o_kollektivnoy_bezopasnosti /](https://en.odkb-csto.org/documents/documents/ustav_organizatsii_dogovora_o_kollektivnoy_bezopasnosti/)

Collective Security Treaty Organization. (2012b). *Collective Security Treaty, dated May 15, 1992*.

Retrieved 15.04.2021 from:

https://en.odkb-csto.org/documents/documents/dogovor_o_kollektivnoy_bezopasnosti/?fbclid=IwAR1faw2UhLwlSsU8eaEWPIA9e3G-yZ_1AsFVUsInGDG-vYLIkcbAk77ReDQ

Europa-Parlamentet. (2009). *20 år efter den baltiske kæde*. Retrieved 25.03.2021 from:

<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+IM-PRESS+20090708STO57793+0+DOC+XML+V0//DA>

NATO. (n.d.). *What is NATO?*. Retrieved 19.05.2021 from:

<https://www.nato.int/nato-welcome/index.html>

NATO. (2017). *Warsaw Summit Communiqué*. Retrieved 07.04.2021 from:

https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm

NATO. (2020a). *NATO's purpose*. Retrieved 19.05.2021 from:

https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_68144.htm

NATO. (2020b). *Speech by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the Rīga Conference 2020*.

Retrieved 30.04.2021 from:

https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_179489.htm?selectedLocale=fr

NATO. (2021). *Boosting NATO's presence in the east and southeast*. Retrieved 08.04.2021 from:

https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_136388.htm

President of Russia. (2021). *Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly*. Retrieved 28.04.2021 from:

<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/65418>

U.S. Department of State. (2021). *U.S. Security Cooperation With the Baltic States*. Retrieved 23.05.2021 from:

<https://www.state.gov/u-s-security-cooperation-with-the-baltic-states/>

U.S. Embassy in Estonia. (2017). *Signing of Defense Cooperation Agreement - Remarks by Ambassador James D. Melville*. Retrieved 13.04.2021 from:

<https://ee.usembassy.gov/signing-defense-cooperation-agreement-remarks-ambassador-james-d-melville/>