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2025 IN-FIELD NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 4

# NATO Field School and Simulation Program



# NATO Field School

## 2025 IN-FIELD NEWSLETTER

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### *Newsletter Highlights*

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**2025 Staff and Mentors Highlight**

## DIRECTOR'S FOREWORD

BY DR. ALEXANDER MOENS



In 2025, the NATO Field School expanded its fieldwork to include new visits to Estonia and Finland in response to the increasing threat of hybrid, or grey-zone, warfare in NATO and EU member states. In Estonia, students toured the Cyber Range I4 facility and received briefings on its role in strengthening cyber defences. We also visited the Baltic Air Policing Mission at Ämari Air Base, where Portuguese F-16s are currently deployed to help secure Baltic airspace.

In Finland, the main objective was to learn from the Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats. This organization, supported by both NATO and the EU and operated by individual states, serves as a bridge between the two. While there, students participated in a focused simulation on Arctic security.

In Latvia, the cohort once again visited the multinational brigade at Camp Ādaži, noting the extensive build-up of infrastructure, military strength, and capabilities. Conversations with officers highlighted the deep sensitivity Latvians feel due to their proximity to the Russian border. While in Riga, students also engaged in sessions on strategic communication led by officers and experts from the NATO StratCom Centre of Excellence in Riga. One of the most powerful moments came during a visit to the KGB Prison Museum, preserved as it was during the Cold War. Students saw firsthand the terror of political imprisonment and the realities of life under authoritarian rule.

From Riga, the group travelled to Brussels to begin the NATO Summit Simulation. After preparatory sessions with Hannah Christensen on simulation dynamics and Dr. Elis Vlassi on hybrid and cyber warfare, students were joined by 20 new participants for a challenging week of negotiation. The goal was to reach consensus on a short but substantive summit declaration. Supported by NATO staff and delegations, the simulation was made possible through the leadership of Megan Minnion, who ensured access to expert briefings, and mentorship on NATO, strategic communication, and a senior journalist who taught our students how NATO is interpreted for public audiences.

I continue to be deeply impressed by the calibre of our multinational cohort. Representing eight NATO countries and a range of academic and professional backgrounds, the students bring energy, insight, and a genuine commitment to learning. The experiences we've had so far, in the Baltics and Brussels, have been incredibly rewarding. I'm looking forward to the second half of the 2025 NATO Field School as we spend another week engaging with NATO and EU actors around Brussels before concluding the program in Rome.



## 2025 COHORT

This year's NATO Field School cohort is the most competitive and diverse in the program's history, selected through a rigorous application process. Representing eight NATO member states and universities from across Europe, the United States, and Canada, the group brings a truly multinational perspective. These students speak multiple languages and reflect a broad range of academic and cultural backgrounds. They are intelligent, professional, and eager to engage deeply with the complex challenges facing the Alliance today.



“Just a few months ago, I could never have imagined that today I’d be participating in the NATO Field School—traveling across Europe alongside a remarkable cohort of driven individuals who share my passion for international security and defence. Yet here I am: receiving briefings from leading experts, engaging in simulations grounded in today’s geopolitical realities, exploring key institutions like NATO Headquarters and SHAPE, visiting military bases across Allied nations, seeing jets and tanks up close, and even attending a live press conference with the Secretary General.

Each day of this program has challenged me to think more critically, ask sharper questions, and engage more meaningfully with the world around me. My experience with the NATO Field School has been nothing short of extraordinary, and I couldn’t recommend it more to youth seeking to deepen their understanding of diplomacy and the future of international cooperation.”

—Daria Furtak, 2025 NFS Student (University of Ottawa)



## VIRTUAL WEEK

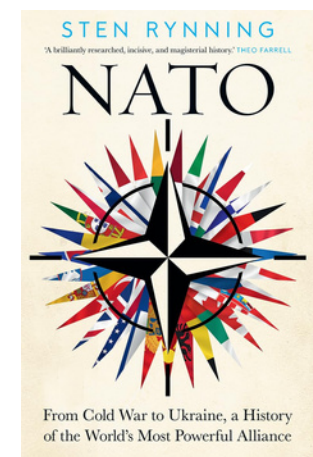
MAY 5-9, 2025

During our online week, students had the chance to connect with one another and begin their academic journey in the program. We enjoyed lectures from Program Director, Dr. Alexander Moens and began simulation training with Hannah Christensen, former Program Coordinator and current Senior Advisor to the Field School. Undergraduate students met in their podcast working groups, while graduate students began preparing for the RomeSEC Conference.



We were honoured to be joined by General M.A.J. Carignan, CMM, MSC, MSM, CD, Chief of the Defence Staff, along with acting Chief Warrant Officer (CWO) Robert Sullivan. We also heard from LtGen (ret'd) Michel Maisonneuve on the current state of the Canadian Armed Forces and received an introduction to NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Transformation (SACT).

Additional highlights included a briefing and Q&A with Sten Rynning, author of 'NATO: From Cold War to Ukraine, a History of the World's Most Powerful Alliance', as well as a CAF 101 presentation led by alumni OCdt Matt Howell and OCdt Ellie Hwang ('24).





# ESTONIA

MAY 12-16, 2025

The in-field adventure of the 2025 cohort began this year in Estonia, for the first time ever!

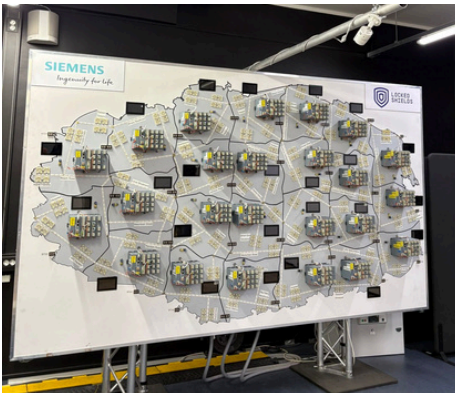


While in Estonia, the NATO Field School had the privilege to observe NATO's Baltic Air Policing mission at Ämari Air Base Station. We interacted with the Portuguese F16 team stationed at Ämari, observing some of the tasks of this eAP. Additionally, NATO exercise "Hedgehog" was in full progress at Ämari and we had the opportunity to interact and observe this exercise among Estonian military staff.



In addition, we were able to attend the Ministry of Defence in Tallinn.

Following this visit, the NFS students visited Cyber Range 14 in Tallinn, Estonia, one of world's premier centres for cyber defence innovation. Students learned about the evolving cybersecurity threats facing Estonia and the NATO alliance, and gained insight into how CR14 supports national and allied resilience through advanced tools and training.



We are deeply grateful to Martin Hanson and the CR14 team for their warm welcome and for sharing their expertise with our future transatlantic security leaders.





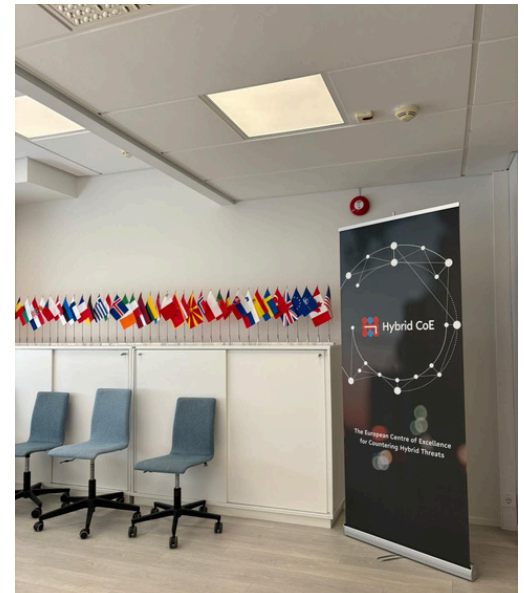
# DAY TRIP TO HELSINKI, FINLAND

MAY 15, 2025

The NATO Field School took the ferry from Tallinn to Helsinki for a day trip to Finland. At the start of the day, we had the incredible privilege to visit the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats (Hybrid CoE).

Our students engaged with world-class experts on the evolving landscape of hybrid threats to the NATO alliance, from disinformation and cyberattacks to the strategic use of economic pressure and emerging technologies. These insights were not only timely, but also transformative for the next generation of transatlantic security leaders.

We are grateful for the organization of Tapio Pyysalo and Sissi Miettinen that made our visit possible.



A highlight of the day: participating in a cutting-edge digital simulation game designed to teach how hybrid threats unfold and how democratic societies can respond.

We are deeply grateful for the warm reception and rich dialogue offered by our Finnish hosts. The hospitality, expertise, and openness we experienced at Hybrid CoE will stay with us long after we leave Helsinki.

Additionally, in Helsinki, NATO Field School students visited Huoltovarmuuskeskus (National Emergency Supply Agency) to explore international security and crisis preparedness.



The visit began with a warm welcome from CEO Janne Kähkönen, followed by briefings from Tehti Palletvuori on Finland's approach to security of supply and information resilience, and Senni Jyrkiäinen on Mediapool's role in safeguarding communication during disruptions.

## LATVIA

MAY 19- MAY 23, 2025

Next, the NATO Field School took a bus to Riga! In Latvia, students enjoyed lectures with Dr. Alexander Moens and Dr. Elis Vllasi at the University of Latvia. We also attended the KGB Museum in Riga, and completed a mock simulation training, Baltic Amber. On Tuesday, the NATO Field School had the opportunity to interact with officers from Task Force Latvia HQ. After a command brief by Deputy Commander LCol Maley, we split into various breakout groups in order to learn more about specialized trades.



NATO Field School students and staff also had the honour of meeting Baiba Braže, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Latvia, and Mihai Popșoi, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Moldova.



We're incredibly grateful for the opportunity to engage with these leaders on key topics including NATO's ongoing support for Ukraine, the future of the Alliance, shared values, and the continued commitment of member and partner nations.



On Thursday, we had the privilege to attend **Camp Adazi**, where we engaged with members of the military staff and soldiers. As the Enhanced Foreign Presence in Latvia, members of the Canadian Armed Forces briefed the students on Operation Reassurance. Additionally, other military staff were able to give insights into NATO Multinational Division North in Latvia.



Our visit highlighted the importance of collective defence and commitment of the Allies. During this unprecedented time of global insecurity, it was a privilege for the NFS students to engage with the most multinational Brigade in the Alliance.

# BRUSSELS, BELGIUM

MAY 23- JUNE 7

## NATO SUMMIT SIMULATION (NSX)

MAY 26-30, 2025

Our week at NATO Headquarters began a panel on NATO's Nuclear Policy, Arms Control, Disarmament, and WMD Non-Proliferation (ACDN) featuring Jim Stokes, Director of Nuclear Policy in the Defence Planning and Policy Division, and Eirini Lemos-Maniati, Head of ACDN in the Political Affairs and Security Policy Division. Then, Hasit Thankey, Head of the Defence Enablement and Logistics Section, delivered a briefing on NATO's Defence and Deterrence Posture.

In the afternoon, the NATO Press Office hosted a mentoring and workshop session led by Delyth Hemingway (Speechwriter), Daniele Riggio (Press Officer), and Alina Coco (Media Operations and Monitoring). We also engaged in a candid conversation with Paula Redondo, Political Affairs Officer for Russia, on NATO-Russia relations and NATO's assistance to Ukraine.

One of the standout moments was witnessing Secretary General Mark Rutte and Icelandic Prime Minister Kristján Þór Guðnason deliver a joint press conference in the NATO HQ press room. Following this, students attended a lunch with NATO Staff and received remarks Petr Lunak, formerly Deputy Section Head of Engagements at the Public Diplomacy Division. This followed by a guided tour of NATO HQ with Nick Nyugen, including a visit to Room 1 where the real NAC meets.

Our final day of the NATO Summit Simulation (NSX) concluded with a closing session featuring NATO Spokesperson Allison Hart. A heartfelt thank you to our mentors Oana Lungescu, Teri Schultz, and Dr. Mark Webber for their guidance. We are also deeply grateful for Megan Minnion, for making this experience possible.

Our cohort for the NATO Summit Simulation is comprised of 63 students representing 18 NATO Nations and Partners. This cohort includes undergraduate and graduate students, as well as young professionals. We had 21 students from outside of the NATO Field School group join us for our week at NATO HQ for the simulation.







The NFS student cohort had the privilege of visiting Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), NATO's strategic military headquarters. We had the privilege of meeting Deputy SACEUR Admiral Keith Blount, who shared insights on Allied priorities and military cooperation. We then concluded with a briefing by Dr. Ian Hope, Chief Historian and Historical Advisor to SACEUR

## DAY TRIP TO BRUNSSUM, NETHERLANDS & GEILENKIRCHEN, GERMANY

The first stop on our day trip was Allied Joint Force Command Brunssum (JFC-B). We received insightful briefings from Lieutenant Colonel Bart Bass, Community Relations Officer, and Ms. Eliza Elerte, Political Advisor.

To conclude our day-trip, NFS students were welcomed to Geilenkirchen Air Base, home of NATO's Airborne Early Warning and Control Force. We were honoured to be briefed by Air Commodore Andrew Turk, Deputy Commander of the NAEW&CF.



Our final destination in Brussels was our visit to the European External Action Service (EEAS). We're grateful to Nicole Meijer for organizing our visit and to our briefers for sharing their insights: Lieutenant Colonel Janez Pungaršek on the EU Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine, Mr. Jean-Pierre Van Aubel EU security and defence, and Dr. Rafael Domisiewicz on the EU-NATO Strategic Partnerships

**ROME, ITALY**

JUNE 8-20

**NEGOTIATION, MEDIATION, DECISION-MAKING  
EXERCISE (NMDX) SIMULATION**

JUNE 9-12, 2025

Students in the NATO Field School participated in the Negotiation, Mediation and Decision-Making Exercise (NMDX) at NATO Defense College. As part of the NDC's Senior Course curriculum, the NMDX challenged participants to navigate complex geopolitical scenarios and NATO's international crisis management framework.

The working week began with introductory remarks from the Dean of NDC, Dr. Suzanne Nielsen and Faculty Advisor Colonel John O. Birkeland. Throughout the exercise, students were guided by senior mentors Mr. Patrick Andrews, former International Staff, NATO Headquarters, Colonel (ret'd) Soren Knudsen (Danish Army), and Mr. Ilay Ferrier, former Director, NATO's Crisis Response Systems. Thank you to our mentors who supported the students' efforts to reach consensus.



You can learn more about our working week at NDC with their article titled Empowering the Next Generation of Leaders Through the Negotiation, Mediation and Decision-Making Exercise (NMDX): <https://www.ndc.nato.int/sfu-2025-nmdx/>





During our final week in Rome, our students continued their politico-military focused agenda with a visit to NATO's Joint Forces Command Naples. Building on insights from JFC-B, the group engaged in briefings on NATO's operational planning, disinformation threats, and the strategic dynamics of the Western Balkans. We are very appreciative to LCdr Robert Harkins and Mr. Laszlo Pivonka for organizing our visit.



The NFS continued their week in Italy with a day trip to Cessano to visit the NATO Security Force Assistance Centre of Excellence. Students had the opportunity to be briefed by members of the Italian Armed Forces, including Colonel Matteo Luciani, Director of SFA COE. In addition to the briefings, the NFS had the privilege of watching a military exercise at the infantry school and view a variety of the military equipment.



The NATO Field School also had the opportunity to visit the European Space Agency's ESRIN facility. During our visit, we explored the critical intersection of space, security, environment and climate. Through insightful briefings and engaging discussions, we gained a deeper understanding of how space-based technologies inform global policy decisions and environmental strategies. Thank you to Tatiana Burukhina for organizing our visit.



Our last day in-field with the NFS was our student-led Rome Student Engagement Conference (RomeSEC). We are grateful to the American University Rome (AUR) for hosting this event. Across four panels, experts explored NATO's strategic adaptations towards Russia, Germany's evolving role in the Alliance, EU-NATO Relations, NATO's southern flank, and how to balance human security with military preparedness.



*Dr. Alexander Moens*

**Director & Founder**

Dr. Moens is a Professor of Political Science at Simon Fraser University and served as Chair of the Department from 2017-2022. Dr Moens has held the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Marcel Cadieux, the NDU Hemispheric Defence Fellowship, and the NATO Defense College Eisenhower Fellowship. In 2022-23, he was invited to be a Senior Fellow for Curriculum Policy and Planning for the Senior Course at NDC. Dr Moens' current research interests include Canadian, American, and European security and defence policy, Great Power Politics, and NATO.



*Julia Reinhard*

**Program Coordinator**

Julia is a 2024 alumna and has recently completed her B.A. in Political Science and Criminology, from Simon Fraser University. In continuing her academic career, she is pursuing an M.A. in Global Security Studies from King's College in London.



*Sasha Kardos-Machado*

**Communications and Outreach Coordinator**

Sasha is a 2024 alum of the program, she recently graduated from Bishop's University with an Honours BA in International Studies and Political Studies. She works in Ottawa, for PAA Advisory | Conseils in their defence practice.



*Sarah Dicken*

**Field School Assistant & NDC Intern**

Sarah completed her Bachelor's degree at the University of British Columbia studying Political Science and International Relations. Sarah has worked as a Parliamentary Page in the House of Commons during her first year of university, and as an administrative clerk for Indigenous Services Canada. Sarah is an alumna of the 2024 NATO Field School.





*Hannah Christensen*

**Podcast Coordinator & Senior Advisor**

Hannah joined the NATO Field School team in 2020, and served as Program Coordinator until 2024. She was the recipient of the 2024 Women in Defence and Security (WiDS) Scholarship and recognized as one of their 'Twenty in their 20s' awardees. Hannah is a member of the Advisory Council on Diversity for the Commander, Maritime Forces Pacific, and is currently completing a Master's degree in security and Defence Policy at Carleton University.

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*Dr. Elis Vllasi*

**Mentor & Adjunct Field School Director for Hybrid Warfare**

Dr. Vllasi is an Associate Professor and Program Director in Applied Cybersecurity and Nuclear Deterrence at the College of Emerging and Collaborative Studies, University of Tennessee in Knoxville. Vllasi is a civil and environmental engineer with a Ph.D. in political science from Purdue University. His current research interests involve examining Chinese and Russian grey zone warfare strategies and tactics. As a Fulbright Fellow, he conducted a pilot study examining Russia's influence in Kosovo.



