SFU SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

NATO FIELD SCHOOL SFU



THE NATO FIELD SCHOOL

ISSUE 5 IN-FIELD NEWSLETTER 2026

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NEW Podcast

2026 Staff Acknowledgemets

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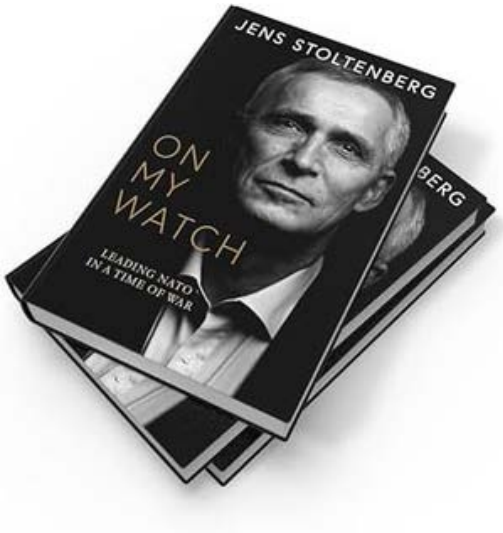
Closing Remarks

Pre-Departure Week

MAY 4-8, 2026

The 2026 NATO Field School began with a week of briefings and workshops to prepare students for their time in Europe. Opening with NATO 101, the cohort built a shared understanding of the Alliance and how it works before meeting the people whose experience would bring those lessons to life.

The highlight of the week was a conversation with former NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and former NATO spokesperson Oana Lungescu. Students discussed On My Watch: Leading NATO in a Time of War and asked questions about the challenges of leading the Alliance during wartime. The session offered a chance to hear directly from those who had helped shape NATO's response and communicate its decisions.





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The cohort also heard from General Jennie Carignan, Canada's Chief of the Defence Staff, and the Honourable David J. McGuinty, Minister of National Defence, helping them better understand Canada's past and current contributions to NATO.





The week concluded with same workshops that are conducted every year in the pre-departure week to best prepare students for all of the different elements that the NATO Field School has to offer.

Hannah Christenson led simulation training to prepare students for the Balkan Amber, NSX and NMDX Simulations. Student learned about what it takes to best represent a national positions and work towards agreement with their peers.Field School alumnus Officer Cadet Nolan Skolski also led a Canadian Armed Forces 101 briefing, helping students become more familiar with the CAF before their military engagements in Europe.

Finally, a Young Professionals Panel with Joe Waugh, a Policy Officer in the Government of Canada, Sasha Kardos-Machado, a Policy Advisor in Global Affairs Canada and Ben Martin, a Policy Officer at NATO HQ, gave students space to think about their own next steps. Hearing from alumni building their careers offered a different perspective on where an interest in security and defence could lead.

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Estonia

MAY 11-18, 2026

Estonia marked the start of the cohort's time in Europe. There, NATO Field School students explored the country's approach to national defence through engagements with CR14 and the Estonian Ministry of Defence. A briefing from the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence and an introduction to cyber security led by Martin Hansen examined the evolving cyber threat landscape and Estonia's contribution to NATO's digital security.

Moving from cyber defence to air operations, the cohort visited Ämari Air Base, where students were welcomed by Colonel Fredi Karu, Chief of Staff of the Estonian Air Force. Briefings from the Air Defence and Air Surveillance Wings introduced Estonia's work to protect and monitor its airspace. Students then toured the base and met with the Portuguese detachment supporting NATO's Baltic Air Policing mission, with the opportunity to observe F-16s conducting flight operations.

The programme also brought students to Threod Systems to explore the defence industry's role in supporting these capabilities. Vahur Maljamae discussed the industry's contribution to Estonia's national defence, while Anneli Meier introduced aircraft launcher systems. Briefings on defence innovation and adaptable supply chains were followed by a live systems demonstration and a student panel on the future of emerging technologies within NATO.





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Day Trip to Helsinki, Finland

MAY 15, 2026

During their stay in Estonia, students travelled by ferry from Tallinn to Helsinki for a day at the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats. Briefings explored the hybrid threats facing the Alliance and the challenges of coordinating a response across countries.



Students then took part in a dilemma game, working through a complex security scenario and making decisions as events developed. The exercise required them to weigh possible responses and consider how their choices could affect the wider situation. After the visit, the cohort had time in Helsinki before catching the evening ferry back to Tallinn.



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Latvia

MAY 18-27, 2026

In Latvia, students began at the Latvian War Museum with a Ministry of Defence briefing led by Rolands Henins, followed by a session with the Autonomous Systems Competence Centre. Guided tours of the museum and former KGB headquarters provided historical context for the country's defence priorities and its experience of Soviet occupation.

The following day, the cohort visited the University of Latvia for an introduction to Task Force Latvia led by Lieutenant Colonel Francis Lavoie. Students then joined smaller roundtable discussions with personnel from across the brigade, exploring how different functions support a multinational mission. Conversations covered intelligence and operations alongside the legal and logistical responsibilities involved in maintaining readiness. An afternoon NATO 301 lecture with Dr. Alexander Moens built on these discussions.

At Camp Ādaži on May 21, students saw the multinational military presence firsthand. Briefings introduced Multinational Division North and the Canadian-led Multinational Brigade Latvia, followed by sessions on human security and military law. The programme included an IRON SPEAR display and an American vehicle display, with opportunities to speak with personnel from contributing nations and view equipment stationed at the base.





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Back at the University of Latvia, experts from NATO's Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence examined communication in an era of hybrid threats and the changing information environment. An introduction led by Colonel Margus Valdre was followed by specialist briefings and a practical strategic communications exercise.

The cohort also visited Latvia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where Canada's Ambassador to Latvia, Brian Szwarc, welcomed students before a briefing from Latvian Foreign Minister Baiba Braže. Discussions addressed Latvia's foreign policy priorities and defence investment, with particular attention to support for Ukraine and cooperation among Allies.

Alongside these visits, students continued preparing for the programme's simulations. Patrick Andrews led a briefing on how NATO works, while Hannah Christenson guided simulation training and the Balkan Amber exercise. Further preparation introduced the Negotiation, Mediation, and Decision-Making Exercise that students would undertake at the NATO Defense College in Rome.



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Germany

MAY 27-JUNE 1, 2026

For the first time, Germany was fully included as a stop on the NATO Field School programme, with visits to Wiesbaden and Darmstadt.





At NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine (NSATU), students examined a military priority that remained central to discussions throughout the programme: sustained support for Ukraine. Opening remarks from Major General Häussler and Dr. Moens were followed by an overview of the mission and briefings from its Training, Force Development and Support Divisions.



Students explored how NATO coordinates assistance and responds to Ukraine's changing needs, including the challenges of sustaining training and equipment support during a prolonged war. The visit concluded with a tour of the NSATU operations hub, where students saw the setting behind this coordination.

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Germany

MAY 27-JUNE 1, 2026





The cohort then visited ESA's European Space Operations Centre in Darmstadt, building on last year's engagement with the agency in Italy. Following a welcome from Simon Plum, Jutta Huebner introduced ESA's mission operations and the cooperation and precision required to manage spacecraft. A tour included the Control Room and Interplanetary Missions Unit, giving students a closer look at the infrastructure supporting these missions.



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JUNE 1-13, 2026

June began in Italy, where the cohort visited Joint Force Command Naples for briefings on the command's responsibilities and readiness. Discussions explored strategic communications and cognitive warfare, alongside security developments in North Africa, the Middle East and the Sahel. During the visit, the NATO Field School also received an award from JFC Naples. We thank the command for this important recognition of the work that has gone into developing the programme over the past ten years.







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Students then visited the NATO Security Force Assistance Centre of Excellence to learn how the Alliance trains and supports security forces in partner countries. Briefings examined capacity building and preparation for different missions, followed by a tour of the facilities. Students viewed equipment and observed a training procedure.







Finally, the programme included a day at Monte Cassino, guided by Colonel Soren Knudsen. Students explored the historic battlefield and hiked to Point 593, the contested high ground that played an important role in the fighting. They paid their respects at the Polish Memorial before visiting the Abbey of Monte Cassino, destroyed in 1944 and later rebuilt, and the Commonwealth War Cemetery.



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

Beginning in 2018, the NATO Field School has been grateful for the opportunity to participate in a simulation used by the NATO Defense College's own Senior Course. This year, students returned to the College for the Negotiation, Mediation, and Decision-Making Exercise (NMDX). Set within a fictional scenario, the exercise replicates the challenges of responding to an escalating conflict requiring multinational military coordination and humanitarian support. Students represented national positions and worked towards consensus as the crisis developed. Policy briefings and press conferences required them to explain their decisions clearly while responding to new developments.

We thank Thomas Park, an alumnus of the 2025 cohort, for helping facilitate the exercise and supporting preparations in the weeks leading up to the simulation. We also thank Ted Whitecross, Patrick Andrews, and Colonel Soren Knudsen, our academic mentors, and our student mentors, Julia Reinhard and Daria Furtak, for their guidance and support throughout the week.



Congratulations to Umar Ahmed Badami, who received Best National Representative in Working Group A. Zachary Chung received the award in Working Group B, and Elizabeth Liteplo in Working Group C. Daisy Mottershaw was recognised as Best Official, while Joana Le Louarn received Best Secretary General. Congratulations to all five recipients and the entire cohort for completing this demanding exercise.

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Day trip to JFC Brunssum, Netherlands

JUNE 15, 2026

Right as the cohort arrived in Brussels from Italy, they were whisked off to the Netherlands for a day trip to the Joint Force Command Brunssum (JFC-B). As the second NATO operational command visited during the programme, Brunssum offered students a point of comparison with their earlier visit to Joint Force Command Naples.



Lieutenant Colonel Bart Bams delivered a command briefing introducing the headquarters and its area of responsibility. An afternoon briefing and discussion with the command's Political Adviser introduced the political considerations informing the headquarters' work. The day concluded with a guided tour which allowed students to explore the headquarters' place within the local community. We thank the personnel at JFC Brunssum for welcoming the cohort and sharing their experience with our students.



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After their Brunssem day trip, students returned back to Brussels and started their Belgium agenda by visited Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE). Following opening remarks from Canada's National Military Representative, the SHAPE Historian briefed the students about the history of the headquarters and the alliance. Student then to learn about the importance of strategic communication and got to hear more about the future of SHAPE as well as Canada's contribution to NATO. At the end of their visit, students also got to engage durectly with the Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe (DSACEUR).

At the European External Action Service (EEAS), students explored the EU's approach to security and defence with Aili Ribulis before hearing from Dr. Rafał Domisiewicz about the EU–NATO strategic partnership. Lieutenant Colonel Janez Pungaršek then introduced the EU Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine, adding an EU perspective to the cohort's earlier discussions at NSATU in Germany.



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On Friday, June 19, 2026, students headed to the University of Antwerp for a day of academic exchange. They were joined by a cohort of students from the home university and their faculty. Opening remarks from Dr. Alexander Moens and Dr. Steffi Weil, Associate Dean for International Outreach, were followed by a lecture from Lieutenant General Marc Thys (Retired), Honorary Aide-de-Camp to the King of the Belgians.



The day was followed by expert seminars, moderated by senior NATO Field School students. Dr. Toms Rostoks examined the war in Ukraine and its impact on European defence, Dr. Luca Ratti addressed Germany's changing role in European and transatlantic security, Jim Stokes discussed NATO's nuclear deterrence and the emerging French-led European nuclear deterrent, and Dr. Elis Vllasi explored grey-zone conflict and hybrid warfare, including the role of information.



The final reception gave students the opportunity to network with peers as well as the guest lecturers that joined for the day.

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JUNE 13-26, 2026

NATO Summit Simulation (NSX)

The final week of NFS 2026 brought the cohort to the NATO Headquarters, joined by 20 additional participants from across the Alliance and its partner countries, to participate in NSX. Students took on the roles of national representatives and NATO officials, while a student press team followed negotiations and questioned decisions at press conferences.



Following an introductory briefing from Dr. Alexander Moens, negotiations began in the Political Committee before moving to the Defence Policy and Planning Committee. Participants developed national positions and worked towards agreement with their counterparts. The final day took place at KU Leuven's Brussels campus, where the simulated North Atlantic Council met before a concluding press conference.



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NATO Summit Simulation (NSX)

Alongside the exercise, students heard directly from people working within the Alliance. Former NATO spokesperson Oana Lungescu and journalist Teri Schultz discussed their experiences communicating and reporting on NATO. A young professionals lunch offered an opportunity to speak with people building their careers at Headquarters. The cohort also met with Geoffrey van Leeuwen, NATO's Chief of Staff and Director of the Office of the Secretary General. Lieutenant General Greg Smith, Canada's Military Representative to NATO, addressed participants the following day, adding a Canadian military perspective to the week's discussions.



Congratulations to Harry Gibson, Andrea Ginevra Quai, Sara Della Civita and Marie-Alix Neau for receiving the awards for Best Political Counsellor, Best Defence Counsellor, Best Ambassador and Best Official, respectively. Grace Pancke and Tomos Land were recognised as Best Press Team. We congratulate all recipients and the entire cohort for their work throughout the simulation.

We thank NATO Headquarters for hosting us and Megan Minnion for her support in making the week possible. Our thanks also go to senior mentors Dr. Alexander Moens, Dr. Elis Vllasi and Dr. Mark Webber, alongside student mentors Julia Reinhard, Daria Furtak and Darcy Eygun. We are especially grateful to Oana Lungescu and Teri Schultz for sharing their time and guiding participants throughout the exercise.

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NEW Podcast



This year, we launched NATO Watch, the NATO Field School's new podcast! Our first five-episode series, "TKMS for Canada," hosted by Rémi Authier, featured Ambassador Tjorven Bellmann of the German Embassy in Canada and Ambassador Hanne Ulrichsen of the Norwegian Embassy in Canada; Dr. Christian Leuprecht of the Royal Military College of Canada; Jordan Freed of Kongsberg Geospatial; Oliver Burkhard of TKMS; and Dr. Alexander Moens of Simon Fraser University and the NATO Field School. We produced and launched the series weeks before TKMS was announced as the preferred supplier for the Canadian Patrol Submarine Project.



Building on our existing podcast assignment, NFS undergraduate students then also stepped into the studio in Belgium to film six episodes of their own, sharing what they had learned throughout the programme with a wider audience. We thank PAA for helping establish our partnership with TKMS, and both organisations for their invaluable support in bringing NATO Watch to life.



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Dr. Alexander Moens | Director & Founder

Dr. Alexander Moens is a Professor of Political Science at SFU and the founder of the NFS His teaching and research focus on transatlantic security and NATO. He previously chaired SFU's Department of Political Science and held an Eisenhower Fellowship at the NATO Defense College.

Julia Reinhard | Program Coordinator & Assistant Field Director

Julia is a 2024 NFS alumna and a graduate of SFU in Political Science and Criminology. She is pursuing an MA in Global Security Studies at King's College London. Through her role, she helps organise the programme and supports students throughout their time in the field.

Daria Furtak | Development Officer

Daria is a 2025 NFS alumna and a University of Ottawa graduate in Finance. Her work focuses on programme development and communications, including the launch of NATO Watch. She also supports the programme in the field and helps develop partnerships to support its future.

Thomas Park | Field School Assistant & NATO Defense College Intern

Thomas is a 2025 NFS alumnus who returned to support the programme while interning at the NATO Defense College. He helped prepare and facilitate the NMDX Exercise, supporting students in the weeks leading up to the simulation and throughout their time at the College.

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In 2027, we will welcome the tenth cohort of the NATO Field School! To celebrate, we are planning two alumni receptions: one in Ottawa before the programme begins, and another in Europe at the end of the field programme, bringing alumni together with our newest cohort. We look forward to reconnecting with the people who have helped shape the Field School over the years. Stay tuned for dates and details!

Behind the scenes, we have also spent the past year working on the next chapter of the NATO Field School. We are building a more sustainable future for the programme, with a focus on making it more accessible to students and expanding what we can offer.

That means thinking beyond our summer programme in Europe and exploring learning opportunities that extend beyond NATO to broader questions of international security and defence. The hands-on experience that defines the Field School will remain at the heart of this work as we develop new ways for students and alumni to stay involved.



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As we close the 2026 NATO Field School, we thank everyone who made this year's programme possible.

To our hosts and speakers, thank you for welcoming us into your workplaces and taking the time to answer our students' questions. To our partners and supporters, thank you for continuing to invest in this experience. To our staff and mentors, thank you for the work that went into preparing the programme and supporting students throughout their time abroad. Much of that work happens behind the scenes, but it makes every visit and simulation possible.

Last but not least, to the Class of 2026, thank you for the energy and curiosity you brought in field. You asked thoughtful questions and supported one another through an intensive programme, including negotiations that did not always come easily. It has been a pleasure to see you grow more confident in your ideas and in your ability to contribute. You now join an alumni community whose connection to the NFS continues long after the journey home. We hope you will stay in touch and share where this experience takes you next. Welcome to the alumni family!

And to our future cohorts, we cannot wait to share the NFSexperience with you!





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