

## A Glimpse of Baltic States over the Russia-Ukraine War

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### Abstract

This article examines the 2022 Russia-Ukraine conflict and its implications for the Baltic states. In the wake of July 11, 2023, the NATO summit was held in Lithuania with the participation of U.S. President Joe Biden. The summit occurred amid tensions between Russia and Ukraine and provided an opportunity for the East European nations of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to assert their positions on international platforms. Thus, the Baltic states serve as a transformed stage for the strategic alliance among the EU allies and NATO in opposition to Russia. Russia disclosed a list of unfriendly countries and territories, which includes the Baltic states. The war between Russia and Ukraine poses a security threat to the Baltic states, given their close geographical proximity and location as a junction between East and West. However, the Baltic states receive high-level military drills and special training for their nation-level armed forces as NATO member countries. Subsequently, the Russia-Ukraine conflict has multiple implications for the Baltic states. Thus, the paper argues that the Russia-Ukraine military escalation has strong geopolitical, economic, socio-cultural, and security disruptions over the Baltic states.

### Keywords:

Russia; Ukraine; Baltic States; Estonia; Latvia; Lithuania; EU; NATO.

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In the 16th month of the Russia-Ukraine war started in 2022, NATO meets its thirty-one allies in the Lithuanian capital, Vilnius, on 11<sup>th</sup> July 2023. The President of the United States of America, Joe Biden, has arrived to participate in the NATO summit, making it a historic summit of NATO. As a strategic spot between the West and Russia, Baltic states remain vital stakeholders in the Russia-Ukraine war mediation, arbitration, military capacity building, and imposing sanctions. NATO summit has also restated that Russia's military conflict against Ukraine brought the transatlantic bond, unity, cohesion, and solidarity to reinforce international security and peace.

This subsequent era witnessed a series of war disruptions; military aggression began between Russia and Ukraine on 24 February 2022 in Luhansk Oblast and the Kerch Bridge was attacked on 7 July 2023. Kerch Bridge was an important strategic bridge connecting the Russian mainland with the Crimean Peninsula in the Black Sea. Though the claim was that the Ukraine sea drone made this attack, in retaliation, Russia withdrew the UN-brokered deal that allowed Ukraine to export through the Black Sea. The recent incident at the Orthodox Cathedral attack in Odesa on 23 July 2023, was claimed as Russia's assault on the UNESCO-protected historic city center of Ukraine. Ukraine responded the Cathedral strike was a "war Crime." Moscow expressed it had hit all its intended targets in the Odesa strike, claiming the sites were being used to prepare a "terrorist act" against Russia ([AFP Agence France Press 2023](#)).

For more than a year, the geopolitical tensions and conflicts in this area have remained intense between Ukraine and Russia. The developments in Russia-Ukraine relations are important political, economic, geopolitical, and security matters for Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Thus, the Baltic states' governments are taking Ukraine's side and portraying Russia as an aggressor neighbour in Eastern Europe. Baltic states, as geographical entities, also had the legacy of the erstwhile Soviet Union in 1940; after the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1991, they became independent states. Baltic states joined the EU and NATO in 2004. Thus, their geopolitical affinity with Europe and Russia is sensitive, considering security, geopolitics, and foreign policy relations. Baltic states play a significant role in bringing NATO into the neighbourhood of Russia, the most powerful military grouping ever seen in the world. During the Cold War, it had various directives aimed at countering the military alliance of the Soviet Union, known as the Warsaw Pact. Thus, The Baltic states emphasized their diplomatic alliances on the grounds of Eurocentrism and concerns related to apprehensions or anxieties regarding Russia. However, NATO expansion toward Eastern Europe and beyond was perceived as a security threat to Russia.

Baltic states reacted harshly to Russia for their military aggression in the region. The Baltic states have a similar political stand against Russia as they condemn the Russian acts in the region. These states supplied Ukraine with economic and military aid in the war against Russia. Baltic states illustrated the Ukraine war as a 'war against the West' ([Bankauskaitė 2022](#)) as it triggered antagonizing West and Russia again in the

international scenario. Similarly, they participated in NATO operations, reinforcing NATO involvement in East European countries. In addition, economic sanctions and various bans were enforced against Russia by the Baltic states in collaboration with the EU. Baltic states advocated an isolation strategy against Russia, where they stood in solidarity with the West.

## **Methodological Notes**

The analysis adheres to a blend of qualitative methods and content analysis of reports and official documents. This study used the official websites of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Russia, and Ukraine. According to the themes, the documents are used and analyzed. The Baltic states' security perceptions have been elaborated upon, and their reactions are marked in this paper.

### ***Contextualization***

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, a new international order was constituted on the grounds of unipolarity, neoliberalism, and democracy. Thus, the Baltic states and Ukraine stepped into the systemic transition from the planned Soviet economy model to a liberal economy. The Ukraine-Russia war in 2022 turned into a full-fledged war and drove a bipolarity in the region. As a result, the Baltic states' security concerns increased in the context of the Ukraine-Russia war. Baltic states expressed severe anxiety because if they range against Ukraine, they expect they will be the next target of Russia ([Bergmane 2020](#)).

The historical trajectories of Ukraine-Russian aversion developed after the EU Eastern Partnership Summit was conducted on 28-29 November 2013 in Vilnius, Lithuania. The Eastern Partnership was focused on economic integration and political involvement with East European countries. Ukraine was offered an Association Agreement and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) as part of the EU's Eastern Partnership deal. [Ash et al. \(2017, 4\)](#) pointed out that "it has sealed a landmark Association Agreement with the EU, opening up economic opportunity and making it clear that it sees itself as a fundamentally 'European' country rather than a Russian satellite or tributary." Consequently, a series of developments occurred in Ukraine in the 2014 Euro-Maidan protests, change in the political regime, Crimea annexation, the Separatist movement in the Donbas region, and finally, the full-fledged war between Russia-Ukraine in 2022.

## **Estonia's Peril: The Comprehensive Fallouts of Russia-Ukraine Military Escalation**

Estonia shares borders with Russia, which is around 180 miles away. During the Second World War, Estonia was part of the Soviet Union, and the disintegration of

the Soviet Union resulted in Estonia's independence in 1991. Estonia recognized Ukraine's independence on 9 December 1991. They formed diplomatic relations on 4 January 1992 onwards. On 1 October 1993, Ukraine formed an Embassy in Estonia. Estonia maintained a cordial relationship with Ukraine thereafter ([Embassy of Ukraine in the Republic of Estonia 2012](#)).

Historical legacy, geographical location, and linguistic and religious affinity are major discourses in Estonia-Russia relations. The Soviet legacy and Russian cultural influence through the Russification policy and Sovietisation policy, as well as the memory and people-to-people connections, produced complex and confusing present situations among the people in Estonia. The geographical determinants, history, politics, and culture drive the Russia-Ukraine war scenario a serious security challenge for Estonia. The Ukraine-Russia war has generated severe security concerns and distrust in the thirty-two years of Estonia's independence.

Kaja Kallas assumed Estonia's Prime Minister's office in 2021 after forming a coalition with the Centre-right Party. On 14 July 2022, Kallas dismissed seven ministers from the coalition party over welfare schemes. However, Estonia's economy was severely impacted by inflation. Kallas formed a three-party coalition government composed of Kalla siding Reform Party, Right-wing Isamaa Conservatives, and the Social Democrats. There were assumptions that the Centre Party had ties with the United Russia Party. The political uncertainty, financial troubles, and insecure frontlines were significant after-effects of the Russia-Ukraine war on Estonia. However, Estonia also spends on military support to Ukraine from their per capita income ([Sytas 2022](#)).

The Prime Minister of Estonia, Kaja Kallas has stated about the Ukraine-Russian war:

“We first of all, exactly 18 years ago today, we joined NATO, which makes a huge difference. No NATO country has ever been attacked. We don't see any military threat, and we feel secure. At the same time, we also discuss in NATO to boost our defense because if we have such an aggressive neighbor and are clearly invading neighbor countries, then our deterrence should be boosted as well because in order to have peace, you have to prepare for war.” Moreover, Kaja Kallas added that “Vladimir Putin has to be isolated politically on all the levels, because what we see in Ukraine, why there are more civilian casualties than there are military casualties, is because they are targeting the civilians and this is a war crime.” ([Kallas 2022](#))

Estonia's political setup stands with Ukraine and points to Russia as an aggressive neighbour. The President Alar Karis tweeted that:

“Dear Zelensky, Ukrainian friends, Happy Independence Day. Estonia will stand with you until the war ends, we'll help to build a peaceful, democratic, and successful Ukraine. This morning we raised Ukraine flags and sang the Ukraine national anthem with the Khreshchatyk Choir from Kyiv. ([Karis 2022](#))

**TABLE 1: List of Sanctions by Estonia**

Sanctions by the Republic of Estonia	Adopted Date	Description
Imposition of sanctions of the Government of the Republic in connection with the aggression of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus in Ukraine	Adopted on 8.04.2022	Restriction over Russian and Belarusian entry into Estonia
Imposition of a sanction of the Government of the Republic in connection with the situation in Belarus	Adopted on 28.08.2020	Ban on persons listed in the Foreign Ministry of Estonia
Sanction of the Government of the Republic in connection with the attack on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine	Adopted on 4.3.2022	Ban on joint military forces and armed units of Russia and Belarus-valid for two years from its entry into force
Imposition of a sanction of the Government of the Republic to limit the provision of services in connection with the war in Ukraine	Adopted on 01.04.2022	Restriction on service applies to the economic entity Yandex NV
Imposition of a sanction of the Government of the Republic in connection with terrorist acts by Hezbollah	Adopted on 28.10.2020	The entry ban on Hezbollah members in Estonia is valid for five years.

(Source: Republic of Estonia, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <https://www.vm.ee/en/sanctions-arms-and-export-control/international-sanctions>)

On 18 October 2022, Estonian lawmakers announced Russia as a “terrorist regime” over Russia’s engagements in Ukraine for the illegal annexation and anxiety over the nuclear weapons role in the near future in the region. Members of the *Riigikogu* (unicameral Parliament) have declared that “the country will never recognize the violation of the territorial integrity of Ukraine through aggression and sham referendums”. (Riigikogu 2022)

As a neighbouring country to Russia, Estonia is directly affected by the conflict. The military escalation between Russia and Ukraine can have negative economic consequences for Estonia. *Eesti Pank* (2022) stated that “Russia’s invasion of Ukraine will affect the Estonian economy through supply difficulties and higher inflation”(Eesti Pank 2022). It may disrupt trade routes, affect energy supplies, and create regional instability. Estonia’s economy heavily relies on international trade, including its ports and transportation infrastructure. Any disruptions or trade restrictions can impact its export-import activities and overall economic growth. Estonian economy and monetary policy 2022/1 (23), viewed, “The sanctions on Russia will have some impact on Estonia’s foreign trade both directly and indirectly through the exchange of goods with Estonian trading partners (ERR News 2022)”.

The conflict can also have socio-cultural implications for Estonia. There is a significant Russian-speaking minority in Estonia, and tensions between Russia and Ukraine may have repercussions within this community. It can lead to increased divisions and polarization, affecting the country’s social cohesion and interethnic relations.

As a NATO member, Estonia has security concerns regarding the escalation of war between Ukraine and Russia. It raises the possibility of a spillover effect, where the conflict expands beyond the borders of Russia and Ukraine. Estonia is particularly wary of potential Russian aggression and will enhance its defense capabilities and readiness. It could also result in an increased military presence of NATO forces in Estonia as a show of solidarity and deterrence.

The Russia-Ukraine armed aggression escalation has significant geopolitical, military, and security implications for Estonia. Russia appears to rely on a geopolitical reading of its identity in terms of a traditional land power, which necessitates maintaining physical control and a sphere of influence over its border regions to guarantee safety and security (Karaganov and Suslov 2018). The ongoing conflict in Ukraine represents a matter of pure geopolitics. This involves securing strategic control over valuable resources and seeking to reestablish connections based on shared culture and language that existing national boundaries have distorted. The Russian diaspora has been employed as a strategic instrument in Russia's efforts to pursue cultural diplomacy in alignment with its broader strategic goals. This tends to be worrisome for Estonia (Terry 2023). Most Estonian military and political elite consider only the United States of America capable of deterring or properly responding to Russia. Nevertheless, based on the Ukrainian experience, collective effort from other NATO member states might have a sufficient effect.

Estonia has stood out as one of the most significant contributors of military and other forms of assistance to Ukraine. By May 2022, Estonia had emerged as a leading global provider, donating substantial military aid totaling €230 million. This aid package included approximately 3,000 EUR pallets and 20 pieces of machinery. Among the items sent were Javelin anti-tank missiles, 122mm Howitzers, minesweepers, anti-tank grenade launchers, guided anti-tank systems, and various other military and supportive equipment. Estonia had also furnished Ukraine with 4x4 armored vehicles. This support highlighted Estonia's strong commitment to assisting Ukraine in the war with Russia (Hankewitz 2022). Like other Baltic countries, Estonia closely monitors the situation and takes measures to safeguard its interests and sovereignty.

### **Unravelling Dynamics: Russia-Ukraine Conflict's Manifold Impact on Latvia**

As a post-soviet country, Latvia is closely associated with Russia in terms of geopolitical, economic, and socio-cultural arenas. The Soviet authorities suppressed Latvian political institutions and implemented the collectivization of agriculture, nationalization of industries, and centralization of Latvia. The Soviet government also implemented policies aimed at Russification, promoting the Russian language and culture while side-lining Latvian cultural expressions. The history of Soviet occupation and the subsequent independence movement have shaped Latvia's



perception of Russia. There are still tensions and sensitivities related to historical events, particularly regarding issues such as the Soviet occupation and the status of ethnic minorities. Latvia has a large Russian ethnic population, pertaining to close relations with Russia. Moreover, Russia and Latvia have exchanged tremendous trade engagements. Although the independent Estonia demonstrates Russia as a jeopardizing element in Latvia-EU relations, rather Latvia seems to ignore the fact of the selective history of its origin for the EU integration process.

Latvia supports Ukraine, even in the United Nations meeting in Geneva on 3 March 2022, where the Latvia Ambassador condemned Russia's military aggression on Ukraine. Ambassador Bahtijors Hasans has made Latvia's official statement that "Russia's use of force in Ukraine gravely violated international law and agreements in the field of disarmament" ([Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Latvia 2022](#)). The Prime Minister of Latvia reacted to the Russia-Ukraine War in that:

"The security of all Europe which is at stake. I think that we have seen that Putin's Russia over the past three weeks has completely evaporated. Suppose the next step we need is the fear of Putin, and Putin's Russia also has to evaporate if we look at the Ukrainian people. We can see an incredibly strong determination not to be subjugated, not to allow this imperialistic dictator to destroy their independence, destroy their way of life. So we must always continue to support Ukraine, which we are doing through military, humanitarian with medicines, fuel, and food with everything. But at the same time, it's very important that in Europe and NATO especially, we shore up our own defenses and shore up the entire eastern flank from the Baltic down to the Black Sea; this is actually already happening." ([Karinš 2022](#))

Latvia's approach to the Ukraine crisis has balanced two opposing aspects. Latvia feels at risk from Russian aggression and has increased defense measures. At the same time, Latvia has close cultural and economic ties to Russia. Latvia's deep ties to Russia suggest that the country may be more open to engaging Russia to promote de-escalation in Ukraine, rather than isolating it ([Vilson 2015](#)).

On 11 August 2022, the Latvian Parliament mentioned Russian military aggression in Ukraine as an act of a "state sponsor of terrorism" ([Permanent Mission of the Republic of Latvia to the United Nations 2023](#)). Ukraine pressurized the Western partners to impose more sanctions on Russia to conclude the war. Latvia also acknowledges in the Baltic Assembly that the action of Russia in Ukraine was a targeted genocide against the Ukraine people. Latvia ceased its frontier for Russian citizens with Schengen visas. Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova condemned the vote as "primal xenophobia," adding it is necessary to call the ideologues delivered by Latvia nothing but neo-Nazi. Latvia even banned nine television channels owned by the Russians ([The Hindu 2022](#)).

Latvia supports Ukraine in the military field with EUR 200 000 000 worth of military equipment, weapons, and personal equipment, dry food rations, ammunition,

anti-tank weapons, anti-aircraft missiles ‘Stinger’, fuel, etc. The government of Latvia has spent EUR 900 000 in response to requests for assistance by the Government of Ukraine. The Ministry of Justice supports places of detention in Ukraine ([Public broadcasting of Latvia 2023a](#)). Grant project competition for development cooperation organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs supports development cooperation in recipient countries selected by Latvia for 2022. The Government of Latvia has allocated up to EUR 116,000,000 for the Refugees Support Plan, prioritizing aid for refugees from Ukraine, which contains delivering up to 120 days of free accommodation and catering to support them during their displacement ([Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of Latvia 2023](#)).

Latvia admitted 32,000 Ukrainian refugees from Ukraine. Residence documents with the right to work have been issued to 25,882 Ukrainian refugees. Refugees from Ukraine numbered 11,792, and they were accommodated in the houses provided by Latvian municipalities. The Latvian government has instituted a start-up employment allowance of EUR 500 per person, providing essential support packages for food and materials. Emergency guardians were appointed for 600 children in Latvia for the Ukraine refugees. Free regional public transport and free Latvian language courses were arranged in Latvia for the refugees ([Public broadcasting of Latvia 2023b](#)). President [Egils Levits \(2022\)](#) said,

“We Stand With Ukraine in this fight. Latvia provides all the support we can. But we all still need to do more. Military, financial, and humanitarian support is essential. but we also need to increase international pressure on Russia.#CrimeaPlatform”.

On 31 March, the Latvian Parliament declared and voted against banning the public display of the letter “Z” because they believed it was used to glorify the Russian invasion of Ukraine ([The Telegraph 2022](#)). The Latvian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal tweeted, “Banning Russia from #Swift must be included in the package of wide sanctions against the aggressor. We are looking forward to the robust response of our partner ([Shmyhal 2022](#))”.

The Russia-Ukraine military escalation has profound and far-reaching implications for Latvia across multiple fronts, including geopolitics, economics, socio-culture, and

**TABLE 2: List of Sanctions by Latvia**

Sanctions by the Republic of Latvia	Actions
Russian Airlines	Banned in Latvia
Russian gas import to Latvia	Banned from 1st January 2023
Visa entry to Russia in Latvia	Suspended
Reissuance of permits of Russians and Belarussians in Latvia	Suspended till 30th June 2023
Rebroadcast list of 20 Russian TV channels in Latvia	Excluded
Russian Consulates	Closed

Source: The Financial Intelligence Unit of Latvia, <https://sankcijas.fid.gov.lv/en>



security. Latvia is a member of NATO, and the conflict prompts a re-evaluation of security alliances and defense strategies. It may lead to an increased NATO presence and military activities in the Baltic region to deter any potential Russian aggression. The military escalation highlights the importance of border security for Latvia. There may be a need for enhanced border surveillance and cooperation with neighbouring countries to prevent any destabilizing activities. The conflict can disrupt trade routes, affecting Latvia's export-import activities. As an open economy heavily reliant on international trade, any disruptions or trade restrictions can adversely affect Latvia's economic growth and stability. Latvia, like other Baltic states, is dependent on energy imports. The conflict can impact energy supplies, especially if they pass through or are sourced from the affected regions. This dependency increases the vulnerability of Latvia's energy sector to potential disruptions ([Brzezinski 2023](#)).

Latvia has a significant Russian-speaking minority, and tensions between Russia and Ukraine can have socio-cultural implications within this community. It may lead to increased divisions, polarization, and potential influence on internal dynamics, affecting social cohesion within the country. The conflict can strain ethnic relations between Latvians and Russian-speaking communities. It may exacerbate existing tensions and create challenges for maintaining harmonious relationships, social integration, and cultural diversity ([Masters 2023](#)). To ensure its security, Latvia may increase its defense capabilities, readiness, and cooperation with NATO allies. This can include strengthening military forces, improving intelligence sharing, and participating in joint military exercises. It increases regional tensions, affects trade and energy supplies, strains ethnic relations, and necessitates a focus on national security and defense readiness. Latvia closely monitors the situation, engages in regional cooperation, and works with international partners to safeguard its interests and sovereignty ([NATO 2023](#)).

### **Comprehensive Impact: The Russia-Ukraine Conflict's Ramifications for Lithuania**

Lithuania's geopolitical, economic, and security connections with Russia have been complex and influenced by historical, political, and regional factors. While Lithuania and Russia share a border and have historical ties, their relationship has been strained in recent years due to various factors. The relationship between the Soviet Union and Lithuania during the Soviet era was complex and often contentious. During the early years of Soviet rule, Lithuania experienced contrived collectivization of agriculture, nationalization of industries, and suppression of political opposition ([Kundu 2007](#)). The Soviet regime implemented policies aimed at Russification, which included promoting the Russian language and culture at the expense of Lithuanian identity. Lithuania's desire for independence grew in the 1980s, fueled by the broader democratic and national awakening movements across the Soviet Union. In 1990, Lithuania declared independence, which was met with resistance from the

Soviet government. The Soviet era continues to influence Lithuania's geopolitical and historical perspective. The experience of Soviet rule has shaped Lithuania's commitment to independence and democracy and its desire to align with Western institutions like the EU and NATO ([Tulun 2013](#)).

Russia-Ukraine military aggression had serious implications for Lithuania. In this scenario of Russia-Ukraine armed aggression, Lithuania has cut the oil and gas imports from Russia. Lithuania's Energy Minister Dainius Kreivys said:

“Today Lithuania imports no oil, no gas, and no electricity from Russia. Lithuania does not pay a single penny to Russia for energy resources. For this, today we are completely independent of Russia's energy resources. But it took us time and huge effort to find ourselves in the position we are now ([Seimas 2022](#)).”

Gitanas Nausėdas, the President of Lithuania, also tweeted the same and mobilised the rest of Europe to boycott Moscow's oil and gas. Thus, Lithuania has had multiple reactions and actions against Russia at the policy level.

The Nordic-Baltic Eight (NB8) Foreign Ministers meeting was held in Kaunas on 6 September 2022; the Foreign Minister of Lithuania, Gabrielius Landsbergis, emphasized that,

“In the context of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, we must continue to keep the unity of NB8, the whole of Europe, and the democratic world, provide political, economic, humanitarian, and military support for Ukraine, maintain pressure on Russia in an effort to end its military aggression against this country, and defend democratic principles within international forums ([Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania 2022a](#)).”

Lithuanian Prime Minister Ingrida Simonyte states that “if Russia invades Ukraine, the European Union should act quickly and decisively against Moscow and warn against thinking the Kremlin is bluffing over Ukraine” ([RadioFree Europe Radio Liberty 2022a](#)). Gitanas Nauseda tweeted that they “talked, as close friends and allies with Secretary Blinken, about the appalling war against Ukraine and security threats in Europe. Stressed the urgent need to move from deterrence to real defense. Reinforced NATO and the US military presence in the Baltic region is crucial ([Nauseda 2022](#)).” Karolis Vysniauskas (2022) wrote, “If Putin succeeds in Ukraine, will the Baltic states be his next target? ([Open democracy 2022](#)).”

On 24 February 2022, President Gitanas Nauseda declared a state emergency in the wake of Russia-Ukraine military aggression. Lithuania was under serious security anxiety over Russia-Ukraine military aggression ([Reuters 2022](#)).

There are apprehensions that hybrid attacks, potentially involving Russian and Belarusian engagements, could be strategically aimed at Lithuania's borders. President Gitanas Nauseda said, “We are witnessing Russia's criminal actions against Ukraine. We cannot remain indifferent to this unprovoked military aggression, which threatens millions of innocent lives and undermines the foundations of international order” ([Mitra 2022](#)).

Moreover, Lithuania's *Seimas* (Parliament) passed new legislation with 71 votes out of 117 casts and banned public events supporting "Russia or Belarus actions which led to this state emergency ([Reuters 2022](#)).” They have identified that Belarus has supported the Russian action, which Moscow terms “a special operation”. Lithuania has banned TV and radio stations formed or maintained by Russian or Belarus subjects other than state or European Union broadcasting was allowed. Moreover, Lithuania stopped issuing visas to Russians and Belarussians.

[Adam O’Neal \(2022\)](#) remarked that Lithuania is shaken but not surprised by Russia’s aggression in Ukraine. This apprehension likely derived from concerns about Russia’s involvement and volitions in Ukraine, stimulating a prudent approach or vigilance toward Russia’s activities in the region. Viktor Denisenko expressed, “The Kremlin has been trying to influence our information space for a long time ([Abend 2022](#)).” The Foreign Ministers of Lithuania and Ukraine met on the 20<sup>th</sup> day of the Russia-Ukraine war in Lviv, where they declared a Joint statement on 15 March 2022;

“Lithuania and Ukraine demanded Russia to immediately stop its unprovoked and unjustified aggression and to unconditionally withdraw all its occupational military forces from the entire territory of sovereign Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders.[...] The ministers paid tribute to the bravery of the people of Ukraine and its military in defending their Homeland from the invaders, as well as for defending our shared European values, freedom, and democracy ([Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania 2022b](#)).”

They called upon the international community to provide Ukraine with comprehensive military, humanitarian, financial, and political assistance. Furthermore, they endorsed the rise of pressure on the Russian and Belarusian regimes, emphasizing the need for stringent measures to be implemented to sort out the Russian-Ukraine conflict. However, Lithuania advocated isolating Russia and its economy to undermine the Kremlin’s capacity to attack its neighbours.

Further, the Joint Declaration has mentioned the membership of Ukraine in the EU, as the President of Ukraine submitted a membership form on 28 February 2022. Even the representatives of members of the EU and a group of ministers met in Brussels on 22 March 2022. They discussed Ukraine’s membership in the EU, as many have encouraged EU membership in Ukraine ([European Commission 2022](#)). Many believe that Ukraine is fighting for its own security and that of Europe, and we must not forget this when assessing Ukraine’s prospects for EU membership. The extraordinary situation requires extraordinary measures and solutions. For many, Ukraine belongs to the European Union family. The ministers reconfirmed the strong commitments of Ukraine and the Republic of Lithuania to the provision of the joint Declaration on the Development of Strategic Partnership between both countries for 2020-2022, signed by the President of Ukraine to the Republic of Lithuania on 27 November 2019 ([Masters 2023](#)).

On 29 March 2022, Lithuania’s Ambassador Eitvydas Bajarunas to Russia was officially informed by Russia of the expulsion of employees from the Lithuanian Embassy. Lithuania’s government has passed a resolution to the withdrawal of the Lithuanian Ambassador from Russia. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania summoned the Ambassador of the Russian Federation to Lithuania Alexey Isakov, to whom the Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania, Mantas Adomenas expressed his strong protest over Russia’s illegal full-scale military invasion of Ukraine (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania 2022c).

**TABLE 3: List of Lithuanian Sanctions against Russia**

Sanctions by the Republic of Lithuania	Actions
Lithuanian airspace for all Russian aircraft	Closed
Import of Russian gas	Suspended
Issuance of visas permits to enter the country by exception or for medical rehabilitation services to Russian citizens	Suspended
Russian and Belarusian service and product certificates	Suspended
Trade in Russian and Belarusian publications	Suspended
Rebroadcast 6 TV programs in Russian	Suspended
Certificates of construction products manufacturers in Russia and Belarus	Suspended
The level of diplomatic representation with Russia-the Russian Ambassador is expelled from the country, and the consulate in Klaipeda is closed	Downgraded
Sanctions adopted by the EU apply in Lithuania	Implemented

Source: Government of Lithuania, Sanctions against Russia and Belarus, <https://lrv.lt/lt/informacija-apie-situacija-ukrainoje/aktuali-informacija-1/sankcijos-rusijai-ir-baltarusijai>

Lithuania’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs has extended restrictive measures imposed by the European Union in February 2022 in response to Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine. The sanctions included freezing the assets of Vladimir Putin and Sergey Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. An entry ban and freezing assets measures have been imposed on Russian State Duma members and specific Russian decision-makers (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania 2022d). Financial sanctions have been implemented, including measures restricting Russian access to crucial capital markets and prohibiting European banks from accepting deposits surpassing specified values from Russian nationals or residents. Further, there are bans on exporting certain goods and technologies related to oil refining to Russia. An export ban covering goods and technology in the aviation and space industry restricts exports of dual-use goods and technology. Russian diplomats and other officials will no longer be able to benefit from visa facilitation provisions, which allow privileged access to the EU. Dalia Grybauskaite (Former President of Lithuania) says, “Sanctions will not stop Russia’s aggression in Ukraine. Only a war can stop the war that has already begun” (Delfi 2022).

The Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis stated that

“We in Lithuania know it very well that Ukraine is fighting not just for Ukraine but for us in the region, Europe, and everyone in the democratic world. It is our obligation not just to punish Russia for its actions but to help Ukraine with all and every means available” ([Landsbergis 2022](#)).

Lithuania’s Foreign Minister calls on the EU Ambassadors to improve support for Ukraine. He further describes, “The EU could not give in to fatigue when supporting Ukraine’s fight for European values. Military and economic support is particularly important at the moment, as well as a clear prospect of Ukraine’s membership of the EU and future pressure on the aggressor –Russia ([Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania 2022e](#)).”

The military escalation underscores the importance of border security for Lithuania. Strengthening border surveillance and cooperation with neighbouring countries is crucial so as to prevent any destabilizing activities. The conflict can disrupt trade routes, impacting Lithuania’s export-import activities. As an open economy reliant on international trade, any disruptions or trade restrictions can have adverse effects on Lithuania’s economic growth and stability ([Bilali, Odhiambo and Kisito 2023](#)). Lithuania shares a border with Russia known as the Suwałki Corridor, which denotes a crucial 60 to 100-kilometer expanse of territory linking the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad Oblast with Belarus. Thus, it raises concerns about potential security threats. The military escalation raises the risk of regional instability and the possibility of spillover effects, including hybrid warfare tactics or cyber threats. The Russia-Ukraine military escalation has significant geopolitical, economic, socio-cultural, and security implications for Lithuania. It heightens tensions in the region, affects trade and energy supplies, strains ethnic relations, and necessitates a focus on national security and defense readiness. Lithuania closely monitors the situation, engages in regional cooperation, and works with international partners to safeguard its interests and sovereignty ([Abend 2022](#)).

## Conclusion

The military aggression between Russia and Ukraine led to severe geopolitical, economic, socio-cultural, and security implications for the Baltic states at the national and international levels. Baltic states strongly condemn Russia for the military aggression in Ukraine. With the support of the EU, Baltic states attempt to contain Russia within their borders with the presence of NATO. Baltic states believe that Russia has never attacked NATO members. However, the Baltic states’ security dilemma on Russia’s engagement in the region is critical because Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania have played a significant role in bringing NATO to Russia’s borders. The Baltic states are apprehensive about Russia’s engagements in the region because of their historical legacy, cultural affinity, geographical proximity, and energy

dependency. Furthermore, the Baltic states' security approach requires a reassessment regarding Russia's role in the region. Ignoring Russia's sphere of influence in the area poses significant challenges to the security of Baltic states, much like the situation in Ukraine. Although the concerns regarding Russia's intentions differ between the Baltic states and Ukraine, the seamless potential annexation by Russia remains a primary concern. This underscores the need for the Baltic states to reconsider their multilateral and bilateral relations with Russia. It is crucial to transform this powerful neighbor into a friend rather than an adversary in the state of affairs.

The Russia-Ukraine conflict acts as a multi-faceted catalyst, exerting significant implications across various realms within the Baltic region. The dynamic geopolitical landscape surrounding the Baltic states has been notably shaped by their perception of Russia as an aggressive neighbor with expansionist aspirations, leading to official condemnations against aggression and unequivocal support for Ukraine. Should Ukraine become a member of the EU and NATO, it would inevitably redefine the geopolitical scenario for the Baltic states, potentially altering regional power dynamics where Russia could change the geopolitical equilibrium in the regional system. The Baltic states strongly rely on NATO as a cornerstone of their national security instead of prioritizing the development of their robust national strategies and military capabilities. However, in the public domain, Baltic states assert that Russia has not directly attacked any NATO member state. Such statements can be seen as problematic and provocative and complicate diplomatic relations between Russia and the Baltic states, exacerbating existing tensions.

The Baltic states have deep historical ties to Russia, and this historical connection resonates in their socio-cultural fabric. In contemporary times, the status and living conditions of ethnic Russians within the Baltic states represent a significant aspect of their domestic challenges. Moreover, socio-cultural ramifications stemming from the conflict could lead to heightened societal tensions and ideological divisions within the Baltic states. These divisions might strain social cohesion and pose challenges in addressing the needs and perspectives of diverse ethnic groups. Economically, these nations are grappling with severe economic crises. However, through the support of the European Union and financial assistance from international organizations, governance in the Baltic states remains sustainable. These external aids and partnerships have been pivotal in stabilizing their economic situations and ensuring their continued functioning amidst challenging financial circumstances.

The paper contends that the Russia-Ukraine military escalation engenders robust and far-reaching impacts across the Baltic states, encompassing geopolitical realignments, economic uncertainties, socio-cultural tensions, and security vulnerabilities. The interplay of these multifaceted disruptions underscores the intricate and interconnected nature of the Baltic states' position within the ongoing conflict's broader context. As such, navigating these complexities demands a comprehensive and nuanced approach by Baltic states, Russia, and Ukraine to mitigate potential risks and cultivate stability amidst turbulent times.



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