

# ACTIVITY REPORT



August 1, 2024

## SFU NATO Field School attend Alliance's Washington Summit

Dr. Ryan Dean (NAADSN Coordinator and Simon Fraser University) Ethan Jang (Simon Fraser University), Amy Topshee (University of British Columbia), George Cade (University of Victoria), Josefine Paulsen (University of Glasgow, Universita di Trento), and Sasha Kardos-Machado (Bishop's University).

A delegation of alumni from SFU's NATO Field School and Simulation Program<sup>1</sup> attended NATO's Public Forum at the Washington in July 2024. The:

Public Forum aims to promote a better public understanding of NATO's policies and goals and the decisions to be adopted at the Washington Summit, through dialogue and engagement with a unique and diverse group of stakeholders, from Heads of State and Government and Ministers, to international security experts, opinion formers, academics, journalists and young people, in a series of panel discussions, debates, and interactive sessions on various topics on NATO's agenda.<sup>2</sup>

The NATO Field School had the privilege of being a Canadian institutional partner of the Public Forum for a second year.

Five NATO Field School alumni, along with NAADSN Coordinator and the NATO Field School's Assistant Director, Dr. Ryan Dean, were guests of NATO's Public Diplomacy Division and were able to interact with world leaders, senior government officials, and other self-professed "NATO Nerds" throughout the two-day event. Celebrating the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the alliance which now provides collective defence to over 1 billion people, US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin told attendees that "NATO is one of the greatest success stories the world has ever known."

Austin was one of several senior American officials who spoke to the Public Forum which 2024 alumnus Sasha Kardos-Machado cited as her favourite part of the experience. Both Austin and Secretary of State Anthony Blinken "reiterating the US' steadfast, enduring commitment to the alliance and to Ukraine's fight for its existence" stood out to her. She was impressed that Austin argued "America is stronger, safer, and secure with allies," a message echoed by Blinken who stated that "democracies that stand together are safer" from authoritarian states. Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and Supreme Allied Commander Europe General Christopher Cavoli emphasized Secretary Austin and Secretary Blinken's praise of the alliance and its support to its partner Ukraine, highlighting the transfer of new air defence systems and F-16s that are now becoming operational on Ukrainian soil.

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*At the NATO Public Forum, July 10-11 2024. From left to right, Dr. Ryan Dean, Amy Topshee, Ethan Jang, Sasha Kardos-Machado, George Cade, and Josefine Paulsen.*

Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine was top of agenda. 2023 Alumnus George Cade had looked forward to the presentation by US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan on the invasion. Sullivan's presentation examined how the fundamentals of that conflict were about artillery and air defence. Meeting funding targets and burden sharing were critical to providing the sort of long-term support Ukraine needed from NATO to survive the ongoing Russian aggression, Sullivan concluded. Cade later noted that the words from Sullivan were matched with action from the Alliance. Allies had collectively committed to provide Ukraine with "at least 40 billion euros worth of security assistance over the next year," including "the whole range of capabilities that Ukraine needs to be able to effectively fight and win."

The alumni were somewhat concerned that they would experience consternation from allies while at the Public Forum, given Canada was an outlier as one of nine members to have not reached 2% GDP spending on defence and one of two without a plan to get there. Canada had committed to this target ten years ago at the Wales Summit. However, the pressure was quickly lifted with Prime Minister Trudeau's announcement at the Summit that Canada would meet this target and would provide a plan to get there.

Norwegian alumnus Josefine Paulsen (2024) was struck by the divergence between this Canadian defence commitment and those made by alliance members along NATO's Eastern Front with Russia. She found it "powerful" when Polish Foreign



Minister Radosław Sikorski stated that his country “will do whatever it takes not to be a Russian colony again – irrespective of what anyone else does.” She found this point underlined by Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis who observed that “defence spending is not just a diplomatic award – for some of us it is very tangible.”

Another theme at the Forum was NATO’s increasing ties with its Indo-Pacific Partners (IP4) of Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea. Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg affirmed that NATO will remain a regional alliance, emphasizing that “It will not be a global NATO. NATO will be North America and Europe”. However, argued that global challenges require cooperation with global partners.

2022 Alumnus Ethan Jang’s “standout moment” came during an address by South Korean President Yoon Seok Yul to the Forum pledging to work with the “NATO family” to support Ukraine. In addition, President Yoon reaffirmed South Korea’s cooperation through the Individually Tailored Partnership Program (ITTP) including the areas of cyber defence and new technologies, but also by facilitating other projects with IP4 partners. “As a Korean Canadian... I was delighted to see the cooperation between NATO and the like-minded partners with aligning values” Jang commented. “I am confident that the cooperation between NATO and the IP4 will result in synergy over the next decades and shape our future.”



*World Leaders discuss strengthening NATO. From left to right: James E. Risch, Ranking Member, Foreign Relations Committee, US Senate, Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen (Denmark), Prime Minister Kaja Kallas (Estonia), President Petr Pavel (Czechia), and moderator Róbert Vass, President of GLOBSEC.*

In addition to the key focuses of Ukraine, burden-sharing, and the Indo-Pacific partnerships, several other topics including climate and energy security, mis and disinformation, cyber security, and cognitive warfare were addressed at the Public Forum. 2022 Alumnus Amy Topshee was particularly encouraged by NATO’s work to address and understand the security

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implications of climate change, an issue that was once again described as a “defining challenge” by the alliance in the Washington Summit Declaration. The Public Forum featured a dedicated panel to discuss how climate change’s impact on security and how it acts as a threat multiplier.

Overall, alumni found the entire event to be an incredible experience and a rare opportunity to engage with international relations and security at the highest of levels.

SFU’s NATO Field School is an official institutional partner of NATO’s Public Diplomacy Division.

You can follow the field school and its experiences both in Washington and further abroad at <https://www.sfu.ca/politics/natofieldschool.html> or on [Instagram](#), [Facebook](#), or [Linked-In](#).

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the NFS, see Simon Fraser University, “NATO Field School and Simulation Program,” at <https://www.sfu.ca/politics/natofieldschool.html>.

<sup>2</sup> NATO Public Forum, “Event Overview,” at <https://www.natopublicforum.org/>.