TOPIC I

Crimea:

On February 27th, 2017 Russian President Vladimir Putin congratulated members of the Russian service for Special Forces Day, a holiday created on the anniversary of the pro-Russian troops taking control of Ukrainian buildings in Crimea. Although Russia does not take responsibility, this shows their continued support for what they refer to as the “modern heirs to the feared Soviet special forces.”

http://www.newsweek.com/putin-congratulates-russian-special-forces-crimea-anniversary-561760

On February 21st, 2017 U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Nikki Haley spoke in the Security Council about the state of American relations with the Federation, particularly how they pertain to the sanctions placed on them. She stated that the sanctions will remain in place until Russia shows “a commitment to peace – by fully implementing the commitments under the Minsk agreements and ending its occupation of Crimea.”


Syria:

The main opposition group to the Syrian Government is calling for support from Russia in peace talks in Geneva. They argue that since December 30th, ceasefire violations have resulted in the deaths of 1,161 civilians, including many women and children. They also feel that any talks towards peace have been without progress up to this point due to the emphasis on “terrorism,” which the opposition argues is overplayed. In all, the opposition calls for a political transition, beginning with the removal of Bashar Al-Assad and sees this as the only way towards peace.


Kaliningrad:

With Russia continuing to build up their weapon capabilities in Kaliningrad, countries like Lithuania have been feeling a lot of pressure. Russia are attempting to create an unrest in the
former Soviet Baltic states by creating propaganda for the Russian speaking population and interfering with Lithuania’s imports of gas. NATO also remains on high alert and pledges to completely support Lithuania in the event of a conflict.

Cyber Security:

NATO has forged a partnership with Finland over the topic of Cyber-Security. This “Political Framework Arrangement” focuses largely on information sharing between the Finnish government and the NATO Alliance, as well as training to help the body be fully prepared for an attack.

TOPIC II

Montenegro:
NATO enlargement is very much a contentious subject in the international community. From the point of view of NATO, expansion into Eastern European nations is harmless and beneficial for all, however to juxtapose it is noticed that possible expansion into former Soviet States can create a dangerous scenario. As recent as last week, February 20 2017, allegations of an attempt to coup elections in Montenegro in October of 2016 by Russian security services. Russia did decline the claims of these, however it was reported that these were based on an attempt to prevent the Balkan nation from joining NATO. The spokesperson of Vladimir Putin stated that that these accusations were “absurd” and that Russia does not “interfere in the internal affairs of other countries.” Following that, Serbian nationalists were arrested before the vote, where Montenegrin special prosecutor, Milivoje Katnić, suggested that the Russian authorities cleared Serbian nationalists to coup the government. Having already invited Montenegro to join the Treaty in 2015, they are now in the final steps of joining the organization. As a result, if Montenegro joins the Treaty, NATO member states must abide by Article 5 if Montenegro, or other nations that are viewed as threats by the Russian Federation, are attacked.

Russian Point of View:
Expansion has always been uneasy and controversial from the Russian point of view. During the 2017 Security Conference in Munich, Germany, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stated that, “NATO's expansion has led to an unprecedented level of tension over the last 30 years in Europe”. He followed that up by saying that the Russian Federation does not want to look for conflict, but still needs to protect their own interests. Lavrov recalled that the NATO-Russia Founding Act in Paris was signed off 20 years ago, and that the Rome Declaration on NATO-Russia Relations was signed 15 years ago. Lavrov cited these as essential towards mutual trust between the two bodies. It must be noted that expansion is beneficial for many Eastern European nations for financial and military reasons, but do these reasons outweigh possible struggles between NATO and the Russian Federation? Russia sees themselves as the victim in expansion.


https://sputniknews.com/europe/201702181050827861-nato-russia-europe-tensions/