



February 2022

Georgian Institute of Politics

EXPERT COMMENT

Issue #19

## What the ongoing NATO-Russia stand-off over Ukraine holds for Georgia?

Since Autumn of last year, the world has been observing yet another Russian military build-up on the border of Ukraine. At first sight, it appears similar to the war scare the Kremlin [conducted](#) in the spring of 2021. However, this time Russian officials went a step further by presenting the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) with a list of demands aimed at creating a new legal framework that would prevent its enlargement to the East i.e., integrating Ukraine and Georgia.

The meeting, comprised of high-level diplomats from both Moscow and Washington, as well as NATO representatives, ended without any concrete results. Western countries formally remain committed to the 2008 Bucharest summit declaration. The OSCE chair, meanwhile, has [warned](#) that the risk of war in Europe is at its highest in the last 30 years.

The looming military invasion of Russia into Ukraine and the ongoing *Mexican stand-doff* between the West and the Kremlin over NATO's open-door policy, places Georgian security under increased pressure as well. The outcome of the current crisis will have far-reaching implications for the geopolitical future of the region and European security architecture in general.

At the invitation of the Georgian Institute of Politics (GIP), a selection of foreign and Georgian experts has given their responses to the following two questions:

1. **In your opinion, what will be the major implications of the current standoff between NATO and Russia for the European security architecture as a whole, and for Georgia's place within it?**
2. **In light of the potential Russian intrusion in Ukraine, what should be Georgia's short-term and long-term security strategy?**



**Dr. Licinia Simão,**  
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The latest tensions regarding Russia's policies towards Ukraine should be assessed considering similar crises in the past. Looking at Russia's action in Georgia, in 2008, and in Ukraine, in 2014, a pattern of behavior emerges, where Russia is looking to achieve i) changes that reinforce its military and political presence in the former-Soviet republics that were closer to western institutions; ii) to dispel domestic contestation, by creating an external source of tension; iii) to raise its status in international affairs by positioning itself as an indispensable interlocutor with the US and European powers. These three objectives remain valid today.

How Russia's actions are perceived and managed is critical for the future of the European security architecture, not only because it will shape the terms of the conversation between Russia, the US, NATO, the EU and individual EU member states, but because it might determine a trend towards a marginalization of smaller European states to the benefit of more powerful ones. This would have vast negative effects, not least on the sovereignty of these states and their ability to act responsibly vis-à-vis European security.

Demanding that all European states participate in whatever decisions are being made is, therefore, crucial. Georgia is strongly invested in its relations with the US and European states and the EU and its security relies very much on the future of these relations. Actively demanding to be included in the current discussions on the European security

architecture is the best guarantee that it will benefit all equally.

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**Dr. Tracey German,**  
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The ongoing crisis between NATO and Russia has significant implications for the future shape of Europe's security architecture, and threatens to undermine the foundations of the system that has been in place since the end of the Cold War. At the heart of the political conflict lie very different views of the security architecture that post-Cold War Europe requires. Moscow has consistently stated its opposition to any enlargement of NATO, arguing that the alliance is a relic of the Cold War, which threatens Russian national interests. This view is incompatible with NATO's cooperative approach to security. Enhanced cooperation and partnership with Ukraine and Georgia demonstrates the basic friction between the motivations of those who have sought to develop close ties with NATO since the end of the Cold War and the alliance's declared logic for engaging with them, most notably its desire to expand the 'zone of peace and stability' that surrounds it.

The crisis between Russia and NATO over Ukraine throws into question whether the alliance can continue to ensure the security of its member-states whilst simultaneously developing partnerships with states within the post-Soviet space. Enhanced cooperation and partnership with

these states, combined with vague promises about membership at 'some point in the future', ultimately undermine the alliance's objective of fostering stability on its periphery.

While both Georgia and Ukraine continue to contribute, as partners, to Euro-Atlantic security by deploying troops on NATO operations and missions, and make an important contribution to the alliance's efforts to advance cooperative security, ultimately the issue of their prospective membership threatens to undermine alliance security and cohesion because of continuing Russian antagonism. The offer of Enhanced Opportunity Partnership in 2020 was an illustration of the difficult position that NATO finds itself in vis-à-vis the two states: on the one hand, it recognising their extensive contributions to NATO-led operations, but also suggests that accession remains a distant dream.



**Prof. Taras Kuzio,**  
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The West will not accept any of the demands in Russia's ultimatum and therefore European security architecture will remain unchanged. Russian demands of "America out, NATO down, and Russia up" are long standing since the USSR and were revived by Medvedev in 2008. Russia's demand to be given exclusive sphere of influence in Eurasia has been the Kremlin's policy since 1993. Russia's demand for a new Yalta agreement

on spheres of influence will not be given by the West. What will have changed is the deterioration of Russia's relations with the West to the lowest level since 1991.

Georgia's future as part of the West is tied up with Ukraine. German and French opposition to both countries joining NATO has existed since 2008. The new Cold War with the West will negatively impact upon Russia's relations with its neighbours, but more so for Ukraine as he Kremlin's nationalism denies the existence of Ukraine and Ukrainians.

Georgia should adopt five policies. Firstly, deepen military cooperation with Turkey whose interests are different to Russia's and which is the only major power willing to balance against Russia in the South Caucasus. Secondly, closely align with the Turkish-Azerbaijani strategic partnership, especially in security issues and energy. Thirdly, revive the GUAM security framework without Moldova expand its members to include Turkey, Poland, and the UK (GAUUKPT) which should closely work with the three Baltic states. Fourthly, Georgia and Ukraine should lobby for the US to return to the South Caucasus from which it has been absent for over a decade. Fifthly, work with the EU to formulate a security component to the Eastern Partnership.



**Prof. Tornike Sharashenidze,**  
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The current standoff between Russia and NATO endangers Ukraine and tests Western unity. NATO allies easily agree on the adoption of new economic sanctions against Russia, however sanctions have been already imposed in the past. Thus far, they have not achieved the desired results. Therefore, new sanctions may not be insufficient to deter Russia. Additionally, it is not clear enough whether the West will be able to agree on sufficiently severe sanctions, capable of seriously damaging the Russian economy (such as excluding it from SWIFT).

If the West fails to implement severe sanctions, then it must stay united when it comes to other

specific measures aimed at deterring a new aggression against Ukraine, - such as by providing new armaments to Kiev.

If a new war is launched, much will depend on Ukraine. If (assisted by the West) it manages to repel the aggression and inflict serious damage on Russian forces, then NATO can claim a big victory. But, if Ukraine fails, Russia will emerge much stronger than it is currently, in the context of a severely damaged European security architecture and demoralized NATO.

That would leave Georgia in a much more precarious position than it is now. Already, Georgia's options are severely hampered by the existence of a Russian military base stationed 40 kilometers from Tbilisi. This prevents NATO integration and leaves the country in a state of constant threat. Tbilisi should pursue two goals at any costs: 1. Increase military and political support from NATO; 2. Support Ukraine politically, to avoid providing Russia with any pretext for renewed aggression.

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Georgian Institute of Politics (GIP) is a Tbilisi-based non-profit, non-partisan, research and analysis organization. GIP works to strengthen the organizational backbone of democratic institutions and promote good governance and development through policy research and advocacy in Georgia.

#### HOW TO QUOTE THIS DOCUMENT:

*“What the ongoing NATO-Russia stand-off over Ukraine holds for Georgia?”*, Expert Comment #19, Georgian Institute of Politics, February 2022.

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