



Georgia in Search of a New Security Strategy Amid the Russian Invasion

Russia's invasion of Ukraine changed the security agendas of the great and small geopolitical actors. It pushed a rewrite of relevant strategies in the USA, EU and broader Europe, which will most likely lead to a new shape for the security architecture of the West. NATO is considering Nordic enlargement while the leading EU states have intensive talks on how to rearm themselves to enhance resilience against the Russian threat. This awakening [creates both](#) new possibilities as well as additional security risks for Russia's small neighboring pro-Western states, like Georgia.

The failed ambition to enshrine Russia's influence over the post-Soviet states, considered in the Kremlin as its backyard, is shaping the new security environment for Tbilisi. Russia has [demonstrated](#) that the country is not strong enough to restore its former empire and re-earn the role of superpower in the modern multipolar world. But for Georgia, with the experience of the 2008 August war with Russia, this does not necessarily mean that the threat from the Kremlin is diminishing. On the contrary, in the diversity of [scenarios](#) major risks are arising for Georgia. At the request of the Georgian Institute of Politics (GIP), selected experts from **The USA, Great Britain, Poland and Georgia** responded to the following questions:

1. *What are the major risks and challenges that Georgia might face in the swiftly changing global security environment?*
2. *What can be strategies for Georgia to ensure its security amid Russia's invasion of Ukraine? Would a strategy of building small alliances increase Georgia's defenses against the Russian threat?*



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Georgia is severely challenged today both in international relations and domestic security. Russia occupies twenty percent of Georgia territory and its military forces are less than 50 miles from Tbilisi. Georgia's near term hopes for NATO membership are slim and its chances for candidate membership in the EU have been put on hold largely due to concerns about Georgia's extreme polarization, shortcomings in judicial reform and freedom of the press, and treatment of minorities. In short, Georgia's desire to be part of the European security and economic community is directly tied now to its performance on domestic political and economic reform.

No one disputes the difficulty Georgia faces with its neighbor to the north but the greatest security challenge today is for the government to move in the policy direction favored by the majority of Georgian citizenry. Many democracies are facing challenges such as polarization, including the United States, and the path forward is not easy. Russia's invasion of Ukraine demonstrates the weakness of one-man authoritarian regimes which engage in brutal actions and undermine international security. No one else but Georgians can put Georgia irrevocably on the path to the EU and NATO. All of Georgia's friends stand ready to help.



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Russia's invasion of Ukraine has led to a dramatic shift in the international security environment. It is not yet clear whether it will ultimately undermine Russian influence across the post-Soviet space or strengthen it. Certainly, if Russia is perceived to have lost in Ukraine, then it could lose its position as the regional hegemon; much of its status depends upon the perception of other states and their acceptance of it as the dominant power. This could trigger instability, as states jostle for power and influence. However, in the wake of the 2020 Karabakh war and events in Kazakhstan in 2021, Russia appeared to strengthen its position within the post-Soviet area; its invasion could further reinforce Russia's dominance, acting as a(nother) warning shot to those states within what it considers its 'zone of privileged interest'.

Both of these scenarios pose a challenge for Georgia's security, with the risk of regional instability or Russian interference in the country's internal affairs as Moscow tries to ensure it has 'friendly' neighbours on its periphery. More broadly, rising prices for key global commodities, particularly energy, food and fertilisers, pose a significant challenge for Georgia (and many other states). High prices could exacerbate existing socio-economic tensions and political divisions, undermining Georgian security from within.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine demonstrates the importance of ensuring that actions today are not storing up problems for the future. It is imperative that policy-makers think strategically (and creatively) about issues such as energy and food security, rather than focus on short-term solutions. In order to ensure its own security, Georgia

should seek to avoid societal and political divisions that undermine social cohesion, whilst guarding against democratic backsliding. Achieving its ambitions of closer integration with European institutions requires not only the social construction of a new identity, but also adherence to liberal democratic norms and values, along with reform and regulatory restructuring in a range of spheres.



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The biggest risks are related to the aggressive policy of the Russian Federation. After a hypothetical victory in Ukraine, Russia could turn against other post-Soviet states, in particular Georgia. A prolonged conflict in Ukraine coupled with lack of adequate reforms in Georgia could also lead to the weakening of its ties with the West (the lack of a decision to grant Georgia candidate status to the EU is the best example here). Such a situation would also have a negative influence on Georgia's image and could easily lead to a decrease in inbound tourism to Georgia. Other potential challenges include escalation of the situation on the line of demarcation with Abkhazia and Southern Ossetia, food and energy shortages, as well as growing remigration

pressure from Russia due to the political and economic situation there.

The case of Ukraine suggests that there are no options which would fully guarantee Georgia's security at that moment. Georgia's security strategy should be based on three elements. First, the strengthening of political, economic and military ties with the West (EU, US, NATO). This process should be coupled with coherent internal reforms conforming to Western standards. Second, the development of cooperation, in particular economic, with other partners in the region (Azerbaijan, Iran, Central Asia, China). Third, as far as possible, Georgia should avoid a further escalation of the conflict with Russia. Taking into account its weak international position, Georgia should rather follow the international sanctions imposed on Russia, but not lead this process.



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Russia's desire or potential to expand or exert military-political pressure against Georgia may be considered a "risk". When both of these preconditions are present, it becomes a "threat", which Georgia already faces. Regardless of the scenario in which the war in Ukraine may end, threats to Georgia coming from Russia will remain: In case of success, Russia will continue its aggressive policy aimed at restoring the Soviet Union, which will pose a permanent and

existential threat to Georgia, as well as to Moldova and Kazakhstan. If this war turns out to be a failure for Russia (which is becoming more and more likely), Russia will try to rehabilitate itself in the eyes of its own population and its small number of allies with a “small, successful war” against Georgia, which is likely the most vulnerable country to Russia’s military-political influence considering its geographic location and the [military] basis in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

Events unfolding in Ukraine completely changed the existing international security paradigm. Let us remember the League of Nations, which had the aim of achieving disarmament, peaceful resolution of conflicts and wars through negotiations and arbitration, this is also the aim of

the United Nations (UN). Let us also remember that the ineffectiveness of the League of Nations was demonstrated in the 1930s by its inability to stop the aggressive policies of the axis powers and it was replaced by the United Nations at the end of World War II. The question is, is history being repeated and is there a need to come up with a new model for an international security system? The hope is that NATO will not be the same it was before the war in Ukraine and will return to its original state, when it was more efficient and active.

As for Georgia, it is undeniable that on its path to NATO membership, small (or regional) alliances are not only desirable, but also vital.



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