# Russia-Georgia war and NATO:
# implications for European security

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On August 8, 2008, Russian tanks rolled into Georgian territory in order to defend the republic of South Ossetia from an attack by the Georgian army on its capital city, Tskhinvali. Overnight, this move by Russia transformed this remote region of North Caucasus into the fabled 'heartland'[1] or a new arena of global conflict. Predictably, there is a general clamour to understand the portentous changes wrought by this latest Russian military adventure.

The international response to the crisis has undergone a rather quick progression: one of initial shock at the sheer belligerence of the Russian/Great Power use of force against a small indefensible neighbour-to one of almost unanimous endorsement of the idea that the world is witnessing a return to a new Cold War.[2]

This 'back to the future' narrative emanating principally from Western print media and policy analysts, views the Russian intervention in Georgia as a trumpet call to a return to an era of Great Power competition. A resurgent Russia, awash in an energy windfall, is seen preparing to challenge the dominance of the U.S.-led unipolar world order and the military expansion of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation). Curiously, many of these sombre narratives are peppered with references to some revitalized concepts of Great Power rivalry over energy corridors and waterways, clearly borrowed from the 19th century School of geopolitics.

The wide acceptance of the viewpoint which approaches this new Russian resurgence as the 'rise of a Eurasian continental hegemon'[3] has dire implications for European security. A Europe heavily dependent on Russian energy can ill afford to be sucked into the polarizing dynamics of a new Cold War. The conflict constitutes an important stage in the confrontation between the United States and Russia for the constitution of spheres of influence in Eurasia. By virtue of the geographical proximity of Russia and the Caucasus, and its historic links with the United States, the EU is directly involved in the conflict.

However, despite divergent opinions regarding the roots of the conflict, there is no doubt that this conflict between Russia and Georgia illustrates certain fundamenal aspects of the contemporry international system : some of these factors have been in operation for a long time while others are new to the post-cold war era, but all of them originate from common geopolitical concepts:

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- The first important element underscored by the Russian military invasion is the control of territory. Capturing and controllng foreign territory has been an important and constant feature of the international balance of power but has often been ignored in the post-cold war system. The contemporary discourse on internatiopnal politics has been too preoccupied with ideological debates regarding the distinction of internatioal actors in a conflict as democratic versus non-democratic[4]. The past decade has also seen an intensive normative debate regarding the relationship between unipolarity and the respect for international law. These approaches with thier deep normative and ideological foundations have led to a deflection from a focus on more traditional geopolitical aspects of international conflict. The centrality of the question regarding the territorial expansion of the NATO alliance itself is a reminder of how this element of territorial control is shaping European security.

- The Russia-Georgia conflict is above all a clarion call to a return to a multipolar world order. By engaging in a military conflict beyond its borders, Russia has claimed the right to be involved in the highly strategic region of Eurasia, in pursuit of its national interest. This has placed Russia in open opposition to the sole claimant to power in a unipolar world, which consequently finds itself powerless to act. This return to a multipolar world order would entail a restructuring and redistribution of power between states. This redistribution translates into a geographic and territorial diffusion of the ability of global powers to influence developments around the world and consequently change the structures of the existing order. Predictably, this new multi-polar world system will be marked by the trend of growing of rivalry between states for the control of territories useful for their political and economic power, their security value and the significance of their identities. The geographical definition of the areas of influence of the various competing powers, the resolution of boundary disputes between states, and the changes consequent to their disintegration, are likely to be negotuiated through adjustments between the competing geopolitical designs of various actors in the international system. The various competing actors are likely to strike new balances, which are likely to be acheived either by conflict, that is, by warlike means, or in peaceful ways, i.e., by negotiations.

The following section attempts to reveal the ways in which the above two matrices can be seen to structure the defining security issues which underpin the Russia-Georgia conflict. It is argued that most of the critical security issues which form the backdrop of the conflict can be grouped under one of the above matrix to reveal the underlying geopolitical forces at work. These elemental security issues which have a direct bearing on European security include the expansion of NATO**,** European missile defence and the multi-polar world order.

## The Territorial Dimension: NATO and Russia

*Post-Soviet History*

When NATO was created in 1949, the alliance was based on a system of "collective defence" which meant its member states agreed to mutually defend each other in response to an attack by any external party. For most of the second half of the 20th century, the most likely external party was the Soviet Union. Not long after the signing of the treaty which brought NATO into being, the Cold War intensified and pitched NATO members in a standoff with the Warsaw Pact signatories which lasted over 40 years. Until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, NATO's primary goal was to contain the threat that was thought to originate from across its eastern borders.

The collapse of the Soviet Union heralded a new era of security dynamics in Europe and the rest of the world. Consequently, the need for cooperation between the two entities, Russia and NATO, was discussed even before the final dissolution of the USSR in December 1991.[5] President Yeltsin, in one of his first major policy statements, pledged Russia's participation in the North Atlantic Cooperation Council and even suggested that Russia might one day become a NATO member.[6]

In the Russian view, the fall of the Berlin Wall was the catalytic event which necessitated a reordering of the European security architecture and it was imperative that Russia become a part of such developments. Despite strong criticism at home, it was this realization that informed Yeltsin's conviction that it was in Russia's interest to cooperate and engage with NATO. And, for a while, during the early years at the end of the cold war, it did seem that NATO was inevitably moving towards two future scenarios both equally acceptable to Russia. One of them proceeded from the basic assumption that the alliance, having lost its *raison d'être*, will eventually disappear. It was viewed as a relic of the cold war era, expected to linger on for some time only due to political and bureaucratic inertia. The opposite view envisioned a restructured NATO as the core of a future pan-European security system, with the Alliance radically transformed to include Russia.

However, by the mid-1990s, it became evident that neither of the above two scenarios was likely to be realized. NATO as a security alliance in Europe was to follow a different trajectory which contained several elements that are of considerable concern to Russia. First, this on-going scenario envisages the consolidation and growing role of NATO rather than its gradual erosion. Secondly, new military and political tasks are being ascribed to the Alliance in addition to the 'old' ones rather than instead of them. Thirdly, the Alliance, far from getting a lower profile, is carrying out a kind of triple expansion – extending its functions, its membership and its zone of responsibility. The above perceptions underlie Russian concerns regarding the new dynamism of NATO.

Looking back, Russia's early romance with NATO was not to last very long. As early as 1993, the relationship came under a strain as Poland and the Czech Republic moved to join NATO as the first round of NATO enlargement got underway. The proposed enlargement was severely criticized by Russian parliament and the military which saw an enlarged NATO as a direct threat to Russia's security. The pro-Western Euro-Atlanticism[7] of Yeltsin and his foreign minister Andrei Kozyrev came under sharp domestic criticism as NATO was accused of violating assurances Russia had received as part of the agreement to accept the German reunification. Kozyrev responded to criticism domestically by calling for a new security system based on the European Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), and suggested that NATO subordinate itself to this new supra organization. While this idea was summarily rejected by NATO, plans for its enlargement started gaining momentum.[8]

In 1994, during the Brussels summit meeting, the Alliance reaffirmed its commitment to the idea of enlargement in Europe and opening up to new members. As it became obvious to Russia that it had little leverage inside NATO, Russian policymakers were faced by a dilemma. They had a choice: either to distance Russia from the alliance or increase its engagement. Yeltsin and Kozyrev choose the latter as they believed that NATO enlargement could lead to Russian isolation. That led to Russia's proposing to formalize NATO-Russia ties.[9]

## Russia-NATO Relationship: Formal Structures

The first formal platform which served as a foundation for the new Russia-NATO cooperation was the newly-launched Partnership for Peace Program (PfP).[10] However, Russia desired something more than a simple membership of the PfP, and in 1994 Russia agreed to participate in the organization only if NATO agreed to a far-reaching cooperation with Russia which went beyond the platform of the PfP. Despite reservations expressed by certain NATO members, Russia was able to carve a special "16+1" status in the North Atlantic Council and Political Committee in the spring of 1995; a status not granted to any other member in the PfP.[11]

While the NATO-Russia negotiations were going on, the Russian Foreign Ministry presented the Alliance with two conditions that needed to be met for Russia to accept NATO enlargement: first, there would be no deployment of nuclear weapons, and, secondly, no allied/NATO combat forces would be allowed on the territories of the new member states. NATO eventually agreed to both the conditions, although some experts believed that these commitments were unsustainable in the long run.[12]

The formalization of Russia's relationship with NATO was outlined in the "NATO-Russia Founding Act", which was signed by both the parties in May 1997. The signing of the agreement led to the creation of the Permanent Joint

Council (PJC), a consultative forum that would allow the NATO members and Russian officials to consult regularly on various security issues.[13] Moreover, Russia was also invited to establish a mission at NATO headquarters. That finally led to a conditional acceptance by Russia, of the first round of NATO enlargement to Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungry in 1997. President Yeltsin made it amply clear that Russia strongly opposed the additional rounds of enlargement, especially of the Baltic countries.

The post-9/11 era proved to be a turning point for Russia-NATO relationship. The supportive Russian response that the United States received on September 11 created a more cooperative environment. President Putin's policy address after 9/11, besides offering support to the U.S. and its allies in Afghanistan, offered the use of airbases in Central Asia to the United States. That was considered a significant development as it allowed the U.S. forces to operate in areas which were considered to be in the Russian "sphere of influence".

*The Kosovo Crisis*

The year 1998 saw the outbreak of conflict in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. As NATO started preparing the ground for a military intervention, The Russian government used the first PJC meeting to caution against the use of force without authorization from the United Nations. Ignoring all Russian warnings, the North Atlantic Council (NAC) of NATO authorized in Oct. 1998 "limited air strikes" and a "phased air campaign" in case Yugoslav authorities failed to comply with Security Council Resolution 1199.[14] The military operation of NATO against Yugoslavia produced the most traumatic impact on Russia's official and unofficial attitudes towards the Alliance.

On March 23, 1999, as NATO launched "Operation Allied Force" against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Russia officially suspended its ties with NATO and withdrew its representative forms the NATO headquarters. However, there were some contradictions in Russia's attitude towards NATO in the context of the Kosovo crisis. After strongly condemning NATO's military operation, Russia did return to NATO, and in June 1999 Moscow endorsed the NATO-promoted logic of resolving the crisis in Kosovo[15]. Russia appointed former Prime Minister Victor Chernomyrdin as their key negotiator and deployed peacekeepers to support NATO's Kosovo force in the summer of 1999.[16] The deployment of the peacekeepers gave rise to some tense situations such as the takeover of the Pristina airport by Russian troops. Yet, on the whole, the Russians were able to send the clear signal that they were prepared to play a positive role in stabilization of the Balkans.

*NATO's Expansion into East- Central Europe and Russian Opposition*

The first wave of Russia's opposition to NATO was provoked when the Alliance started negotiations for its expansion into East-Central Europe. Russia's

official opposition was also accompanied by a massive campaign against the enlargement of NATO. The scale of the campaign was unprecedented in Russia's post-Soviet history. The intense debates in Russia on how to meet this challenge concentrated on a number of essential questions: (a) whether the ECE (East-Central Europe) countries will join NATO with Russia or without it ; (b) whether membership of NATO for the ECE countries will jeopardize Russia's security; (c) whether membership of NATO will make ECE (and NATO) more friendly or more hostile towards Russia; (d) how to make others respect Russia's security interests in the region; and (e) whether the West or the ECE would be more favourable to Russia's requirements.[17]

Internationally, Russia's 'anti-enlargement' campaign also looked rather ambivalent and produced contradictory results. In East-Central Europe, it was clearly perceived as a manifestation of Russia's 'Big Brother' syndrome and brought about greater domestic support for joining NATO. The nationalist sentiment whipped up by the strong Russian reaction in the ECE countries in turn drowned other critical voices opposing the enlargement within these countries. In the West, some opponents to NATO enlargement also found themselves in a tough predicament: while they objected to enlargement in principle, they were reluctant to grant the power to veto in the matter.

The proposed expansion of NATO's strategic defence forces into the Balkans and eastward into Ukraine and Georgia has been a thorny issue in Russia's relations with the West as well as within NATO itself. The traditional Russian vision of East-Central Europe[18] was conditioned by two geopolitical circumstances. The first is the conviction that Russia's security zone begins with the ECE countries: Russia was invaded from there by the Poles, Swedes, French and Germans. The two world wars and the cold war began there. The other is a belief that from the point of view of security, the region is far more important for Russia than for Europe. Russia and previously the USSR have therefore been tempted to view the ECE and all of the post-Soviet space as its sphere of influence.

After the collapse of East European socialism, the disintegration of the USSR and the weakening of the Russian position in Europe, this scheme is no longer palatable to the ECE countries and the West. The Western view is that in the post-Soviet era, Russia's zone of security has shifted, and the ECE is as important for Western security as it is for Russia, if not more so. As for the countries of the region themselves, the post-Soviet era saw them ready to join Western security structures. The new outlines of a European security system which are emerging as a result and the role assigned in it to Russia do not entirely suit Moscow.

Since the removal of the Soviet threat, NATO's goal in Europe has changed from defending its eastern borders to pushing those boundaries as far east as possible. In 2004, the alliance executed the biggest expansion in its history, to

include seven new members: Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia -- all formerly part of the Soviet Union or the Warsaw Pact.

The Alliance's expansion looks unlikely to stop there. A further five nations have been shortlisted for NATO accession. While the membership of Albania, Croatia and Macedonia would mark a concerted effort by NATO to shore up the shaky Balkan region and consolidate its role there, a potential eastward push into Ukraine and, further still, Georgia has raised questions about NATO's current motives and approach to its former Cold War adversary, Russia.

During April 2 to 4, 2008, in Bucharest, Romania was the site of NATO's largest-ever annual summit.[19] The leadership of every Alliance country, as well as the presidents of Afghanistan, Georgia, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Russia attended the summit meeting. The meeting was a landmark achievement as it represented the freedom of the former Eastern bloc countries and the expansion of voluntary partnership in security to most of the European continent.

However, more than any past NATO summit, Bucharest was at the same time characterized by the looming presence of one key non-Alliance member: Russia. According to one interpretation of the summit outcome, President Putin's presence, along with determined Russian pressure for months in advance, achieved what was unthinkable only a few years ago: a Russian veto over Alliance expansion. Germany, Moscow's closest NATO member, pulled out all the stops to block the extension of Membership Action Plans – the first step towards membership – to the former Soviet republics of Georgia and Ukraine. Yet, despite all pressure from Moscow, the Alliance leaders at Bucharest agreed to an unprecedented statement promising eventual membership to the two Black Sea states, Georgia and Ukraine.

One important thing the NATO summit in Bucharest underscored was that the issue of the Alliance's future mission and makeup was no longer confined to the realm of academic debate. With its expansion eastward into the greater Black Sea region and largest ever operations in Afghanistan, history's most powerful alliance was for the first time seen as poised to play a major role in the grand geopolitics of Eurasia. However, this enhanced exposure of the Alliance in Eurasia was not matched by any coherent approach to the dominant Eurasian state: the Russian Federation.

NATO's April 2008 Bucharest Summit showcased the intra-Alliance muddle over further enlargement. Even though Alliance leaders could not agree to develop a Membership Action Plan (MAP) with either Georgia or Ukraine, they announced that the two countries would in fact be members some day. This decision offers important political assurance to Georgia and Ukraine; but it also threatens to undermine the integrity of the MAP process; relieves applicants from

undertaking tough reforms necessary to add capability and value to the Alliance when they join, and sends the wrong signal to Moscow about its ability to influence internal NATO decisions.

The short-sightedness of the above approach became all too apparent four months later in August 2008 when Russian forces moved into Georgia to stake claim to what it considered its own "sphere of influence". The changed thinking on the question of NATO expansion became evident during the NATO ministerial meeting in December 2008 that followed the Georgian war. The NATO foreign ministers' decision on December 2 not to offer Membership Action Plans to Georgia and Ukraine did not come as a surprise to anyone. Although the meeting reaffirmed the provision enshrined in the final document of the April 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest that those two countries would at some unspecified future date join the Alliance, the question of whether and when Georgia and Ukraine would be offered a MAP had been left open.

Instead, both the countries will be required to fulfil annual reform programmes that will be formulated within the framework of the NATO-Georgia and NATO-Ukraine commissions. That approach will enable NATO to monitor closely Georgia's progress in redressing the political shortcomings that Secretary-General de Hoop Scheffer publicly identified during his visit to Tbilisi in mid-September, including the lack of media freedom and of an independent judiciary.

The decision to withhold MAPs does not, however, mean that NATO expansion is dead. On the contrary, Croatia and Albania will almost certainly be formally accepted as members at the April 2009 NATO summit. Macedonia has completed the reforms outlined in the MAP it received in 1999: the sole remaining obstacle to its admission to NATO is its still-unresolved dispute with Greece over the country's name.

But, barring a decoupling of the Georgian and Ukrainian membership bids, which is improbable in light of the very limited support for NATO membership among the Ukrainian population at large, no further NATO expansion is likely over the next five to six years.[20]

The NATO summit in April 2009 is expected to reinforce the Allied governments' Bucharest summit commitments to Georgia and Ukraine and to follow through on subsequent pledges of further assistance to both countries through the NATO-Georgia and NATO-Ukraine commissions and bilateral programmes in implementing the needed political and defence reforms.

However, the security challenges thrown up by the Russian willingness to militarily demonstrate its resistance to the expansion question is forcing the alliance to come up with innovative concepts. These new ways are expected to allow a continuation of a security partnership but move the actual membership to a future when the 'condition' within these countries seeking admission to the

alliance improves sufficiently.[21] According to these new trends, there is no need to believe that EU and NATO enlargement must proceed in lockstep or not at all. In addition, the proponents of the new policy believe that given these various challenges, a strategy for democratic transformation and collective security in the region is likely to be more effective if its goals are tied to conditions rather than institutions. Western actors are advised to work with the states in the region, and others, to create conditions by which ever closer relations can be possible.

Such an approach has the advantage of focusing effort on practical progress. The West has an interest in promoting democratic governance, the rule of law, open-market economies, conflict-resolution and collective security, secure cross-border transportation and energy links, regardless of the institutional affiliation of countries in the region. In short, the West should be careful not to close the door to the countries of the region, but it should focus on creating conditions by which the question of integration, while controversial today, can be posed more positively in the future.

A new focus on societal resilience, and transatlantic interest in projecting resilience to neighbouring countries, would offer an additional means to engage and draw closer the nations of wider Europe in ways that strengthen overall transatlantic security. "Forward resilience"[22] could inform a wide set of initiatives, from internal security sector reform to cooperation offered by the EU and NATO on the types of proposals we have advanced for allied nations themselves. It could be an attractive mission for the Partnership for Peace.

*NATO's Dilemma: US-Russia Missile Diplomacy*

Another issue confounding the already convoluted saga of NATO expansion in Europe is the proposed U.S. Missile Shield in Europe and Russia's response to it. In July 2008, Iran launched a series of missile tests which reportedly included the Shahab-3 ballistic missiles. While the Iranian tests stirred the advocates of the Missile Defence Program in the U.S., reports of Russia lobbing SS-21 ballistic missiles at Georgia, later in August, energized the pro-Missile Defence lobby into frenzied activity. The Georgian war reinforced what missile defence supporters took from Iran's series of missile tests earlier in the summer of 2008: there is a missile threat, and the U.S. missile defence system is the best response to counter that threat.

The nearly $6 billion scheme had its funding cut in earlier budgets by a Congress doubtful about its necessity or merit. Hence, its supporters latched on to the Iranian missile tests in July as vindication for the programme. According to Republican presidential nominee Sen. John McCain, these tests "demonstrate the need for effective missile defence now and in the future, and this includes missile defence in Europe as is planned with the Czech Republic and Poland."[23]

The Iranian tests expedited the heretofore slow process of negotiations, and finally the United States and the Czech Republic signed an accord in July 2008 that allows for deployment of American radar in the Czech Republic as part of the U.S. plan for establishing a European missile defence site. A secondary accord followed two months later that establishes the legal status of U.S. troops on Czech territory. The Senate has already approved the two treaties signed with the U.S. to place a radar station in a town 90 kilometers southwest of Prague, including a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) deal on the stationing of foreign soldiers on Czech territory. Both accords have yet to be approved by the Czech parliament, something that is questionable since well over two-thirds of the Czech population opposes them.

Along with the Czech Republic, the United States has been courting Poland for the past year and a half to host 10 missile defence interceptors. The Poles, feeling unappreciated for their support in Iraq and worried about Russia's response, insisted on expensive increases to their air defence systems if the interceptors were to be fielded on their territory. This stalemate held until Russian tanks rolled into Georgia. Within days, a deal was struck where the United States agreed to field one Patriot battery in Poland and to come to Poland's aid should there be any advances on its territory.[24]

Russian officials have long been worried that the U.S. system was actually aimed at them, and not at Iran. Ironically, Iran tested the Shahab-3, a ballistic missile that would at best reach areas that would not be shielded by the theoretical umbrella of the European missile defence site. Of course, that assumes that Iran would wish to attack Europe with ballistic missiles – an idea that looks far from credible. As for the threat to the U.S., Iran does not currently possess, and is not likely to develop, missiles that could reach the United States for the next decade or so.

Russia's deep misgivings regarding the missile defence shield soon crystallized into action, and President Dmitry Medvedev, during his first state of the union address, threatened to deploy short-range missiles "Iskander" in the Russia enclave of Kaliningrad in Ukraine, virtually at the doorstep of the European Union. However, by January 28, 2009, Russia reportedly backtracked on its plans to deploy "Iskander". Nevertheless, Russia remains stridently opposed to the plan and is watching the situation carefully as the new administration settles in Washington. President Medvedev has stated time and again that the fate of the "Iskander" deployment in Kaliningrad remains conditional to the deployment of the interceptors in Poland and the Czech Republic.[25]

The Barack Obama-led new administration in Washington has repeatedly stressed the notion of a fresh start to relations with Russia. In a widely quoted speech at a security conference in Munich on February 7, Vice President Joe Biden described a "dangerous drift in relations" between Russia and NATO

member states," saying "The United States rejects the notion that NATO's gain is Russia's loss, or that Russia's strength is NATO's weakness."[26]

Biden repeated the measured support for missile defence plans voiced by Obama and his advisers during the presidential campaign and in the months since his victory: If the technology behind the shield shows itself to be sound and cost-effective, the administration would move ahead with development, but accompanied by dialogue with Russia and Europe.

Russia responded encouragingly to the U.S. administration's pledge to restart relations, but simultaneously announced plans to establish military bases in the breakaway Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions of Georgia, including a naval base at the Abkhazia Black Sea port of Ochamchira. As a result, leading NATO states find themselves, on the one hand, pushing for warmer relations with Moscow, while on the other, condemning Russian "expansionism".

"I cannot see how we can have such a serious discussion of such a new [security] architecture, in which President Medvedev himself says territorial integrity is a primary element when Russia is building bases inside Georgia, a country that doesn't want those bases," said NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer at the Munich conference.[27]

In the short term, there appears to be no end to the continuing posturing around the missiles defence shield in Europe. The Czech parliament has yet to ratify the controversial treaties, and those interceptors that the United States wants to install in Poland don't exist, and if they did, they could not defend against the number or calibre of missiles in Russia's arsenal. The Patriot battery that the United States has agreed to send to Poland is nothing more than a stop-gap measure to make the Poles feel better.

Yet, from a political standpoint, the planned U.S. missile defence system in Europe sends a powerful message. It is a symbol of American military might in Eastern Europe, a sign that is meant for Russia. Going ahead with the U.S. missile defence plans for the Czech Republic and Poland at a time when NATO's security role in Europe and beyond is increasingly ill-defined, only serves to compound the security dilemma for continental Europe.

*Conclusion-Back to the Future : A Multipolar World*

Despite strident denials by NATO states and the new U.S. policymakers, Russia continues to believe that the policy of enlargement of the Atlantic Alliance pursued by the United States and its allies aims to encircle it through a territorial extension of NATO. Whether or not this perception is exaggerated or pertinent does not alter the fact that it must be taken into account. In the conflict with Georgia, Russia has shown that an intrusion into its sphere of interest can now serve as the cause of a military intervention. The Georgian war has also

demonstrated the inability of NATO to react to Russia without risking a much more serious conflict. Although Georgia was admitted to the Membership Action Programme at the Bucharest summit in April 2008, at the behest of the United States and some European countries, the principle of mutual assistance which is at the heart of the Alliance's credibility may have been further weakened.

At the heart of the problem lie the divergent geo-political concepts of what constitutes European security. The enlargement of the Atlantic Alliance desired by the United States and some European states does not correspond to the security interests of the EU, as any largescale conflagration in Eurasia would directly threaten the EU. At the same time, the insular geographical position of the United States may encourage it to take more risks to achieve its geopolitical objectives in Eurasia. If the EU still harbours the strategic ambition to build a European political identity, it must be able independently to identify and defend its interests in the multipolar world that is taking shape. A realistic analysis of its interests suggests that from the European prespective, the type of relationship desirable with Russia differs considerably from the approach followed by the United States and the most Atlanticist European states. Moreover, it is important to deconstruct the debate dividing the protagonists between Westerners and Russia, as it conceals the differences that exist between the United States and the continental European heartland.

It is important to expose and disscuss this important divergence that lies at the heart of the EU. The United States and its European allies such as Britain, Poland and the Baltic States desire the enlargement of the Atlantic Alliance as a way of weakening Russia by reducing its traditional sphere of influence built over several centuries. For the core of continental Europe (Germany, France, Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Austria and Hungary, supported by Italy, Portugal and Spain and also Greece and Cyprus), on the other hand, Russia remains a historic partner and these European states are convinced that cooperation should take precedence over confrontation.

Although the question of relations with Russia continues to divide the members of the EU, they will continue to conduct relations with Russia bilaterally as geography makes Russia an unavoidable partner for the Eurasian area. It also constitutes the energy and commercial hinterland of the EU.

Russia will always exercise a determining influence over its borders for obvious historical and geographical reasons. Prudence suggests that the enlargement of the EU should not be carried out precipitately, and that of the Atlantic Alliance even less so. A buffer zone including Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova transitioning gradually into a region of cooperation between Russia and the EU is a more realistic option.

The EU's security strategy is still embryonic. The Russo-Georgian conflict is, therefore, a chance for in-depth study of strategic questions between Russia, a

growing actor in world multipolarity, and the EU, in concert with the Atlantic Alliance, for the constitution of a new Eurasian security system. The identification of its interests and geographical priorities by the EU must be conducted in parallel. That is a necessary precondition for the development of an independent geostrategic strategy over the long term for its ultimate goal : a European political identity.

Without calling relations with the United States into question, a rebalancing of the Atlantic Alliance is also necessary in order to take European interests more into account. This new balance would form the basis of a new Eurasian security architecture by taking into account Russia's security interests and by facilitating the stabilisation of the continental hinterland of the EU. It must not be forgotten that, for historical and geographical reasons, Russia will always remain an important actor in the new emerging multipolar world order.

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[6]   Julianne Moore, 'The NATO-Russia Relationship-defining moment or Déjà vu', *Centre for Strategic and International Studies,* Washington, DC, November 2008, p 2.

[7]   Under President Boris Yeltsin and Foreign Minister Kozyrev, Russia was defined as part of a "*Euroatlantic*" community that was conceived as stretching from "Vancouver to Vladivostok". That community was to be based not only on close foreign policy cooperation but on common values, which for the new Russia meant democratization, the construction of a market economy with fair competition, a law-based state, revamping of the federalist structure, military reform, and the construction of a civil society. For the rest of Eastern Europe, *Euro-Atlanticism* came to represent the advantages offered by the American-backed security umbrella of NATO membership and the good government and economic advantages associated with the path to membership of the European Union.

The "Euroatlantic" approach, however, did not last long, essentially only until the fall of 1992 or spring of 1993. The conservative foreign policy, military, and internal security establishment successfully began to reassert their influence over policy-making. The advocates of a "great power" position for Russia, members of the power and force structures, and old communist and new "national patriotic" ideologues combined to force a change of course.

All sorts of foreign policy alternatives were being discussed, and some implemented:

"Eurasianism," i.e., the view that the world was essentially divided into a "Euroatlantic" bloc led by the United States and a continental "Eurasian" bloc presumably led by Russia, embracing the countries of the "Near Abroad" and "strategic alliances" with China and India. There was even the idea of a "strategic triangle" comprising Russia and the CIS, China, and India. There was also talk of improving relations with Moscow's "traditional allies", that is, Iraq, Iran, Syria, Libya, North Korea, Vietnam, and Cuba, the problem being that almost all of them were on the U.S. list of "rogue states" or "states of concern".

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