



## NATO membership expansion: Georgia and Ukraine

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### Introduction

Nothing since 1991 has changed European security as much as Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008, ending with its annexation (permanent claim) to parts of the country, and its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The War in Ukraine initially appeared to be an attempt to conquer the entire country, still in 2025-26 with goals of conquering much of it.

Both Georgia and Ukraine have applied for formal membership in the alliance. So far, NATO Member States have been generous with military assistance to strength both Georgian security and help Ukraine in its war with Russia.

But NATO hesitates to make them formal members.

Russia's attacks pose a fundamental dilemma for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, NATO expanded east. It accepted countries previously forced to be Soviet allies (members of the Warsaw Pact), as part of NATO. And it admitted former Soviet Republics, countries previously ruled by Moscow as part of Russia and the Soviet Union. Membership was meant to restore the security of countries and regions previously conquered by the Soviet Union, assuring their independence and making them part of the Western Community.

But NATO expansion also posed serious challenges to Russia, bring the alliance directly to its borders, humiliating Russian nationalists, and depriving Russia of any hope of restoring its rule to lands most Russians regard are part of their country. From Moscow's point of view, NATO membership for Georgia or Ukraine would be an extraordinary provocation. It has long been understood that making them formal members could lead to a new Russian invasion of Georgia, intensification of its war against Ukraine, and other retaliation, such as attacks on Western Europe (Mearsheimer, 2014).

Security against Russia is the reason NATO exists, and no countries need such help as much as Georgia and Ukraine. But admitting them as Members would be highly provocative and pose grave problems for the rest of the alliance, bring commitments to help defend countries far beyond the borders of most NATO members, and exposing them to Russian retaliation.

Resolving Georgian and Ukrainian membership applications will be a major challenge for the NATO alliance at ODUMUNC 49.



## Background

In 1949 when NATO was just a handful of Western countries banding together against threats from the Soviet Union, the alliance has been at the epicenter of Europe's security framework. Over the years, it has grown sometimes cautiously and at the same time made bold moves by bringing in new members and changing the shape of Europe's political landscape (Goldgeier, 1991).

The most controversial moves arise when former Soviet republics like Georgia and Ukraine made attempts to become members. Their hopes of joining have triggered domestic reforms and sparked by fierce debate inside NATO which provoked some of the region's worst crises (Asmus, 2010).

For its supporters, NATO membership is about their sovereign right to choose friends and not about getting pushed around by Russia. For critics, it is a recipe for conflict with Moscow and headache for the alliance which would have to deal with messy border disputes and even direct conflict. This is not just a question for Ukraine and Georgia but what kind of security mechanisms for Europe and the limits to the western sphere of influence build to achieve a stable world order after the Cold War (Trenin, 2011).

A brief historical background would explain how it got to this point and why the alliances attempt to expands by having a critical look on what is happening inside Georgia and Ukraine. Also, how Russia sees things from a realist security perspective, and what is splitting NATO internally against the membership of these two controversial countries. A critical analysis with the aid of official documents, policy reports, and journals gives a clear look at one of the most important as well as complicated questions regarding international politics.

## The function of NATO

NATO was created in 1949 through the Washington Treaty. It was a response to widespread fears of Soviet invasion or political pressure on Western Europe, fear that these countries were doomed to succumb to Soviet control, unless the United States offered a counterweight. Instead, a dozen countries from Western Europe and the United States pledged to deter a Soviet attack. With this guarantee from the United States, it was hoped World War Three could be avoided and Western European security assured.

Crucial to the alliance is the Washington Treaty's Article 5, usually interpreted as a pledge of mutual defense, promising to support each other if any was attacked. For decades, NATO's main objective was to keep the Soviets in check and make sure the Western alliance did not fall apart (Waltz, 1979).

## Collapse of the Soviet Union

When the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact were dissolved in 1991, the map of Europe was upended. Suddenly, a bunch of countries that had been under Moscow's thumb were free to switch sides as they needed democratic reform and security guarantees. NATO started to open

its doors by the late 1990s, Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic had joined, and by 2004, the alliance had admitted the Baltic countries such as Slovakia, Slovenia, Bulgaria, and Romania.

This was not a smooth decision. Advocates argued expansion would make Eastern Europe more stable and democratically viable. Critics warned that expanding East would only disregard Russia's security concerns and risk dragging Europe back into old rivalries (Mearsheimer, 2014). Still, the "open door" idea the principle that any European democracy willing to play by NATO's rules could join remains key to the alliance enlargement principles (NATO, 2008).



Source: Jonathan Marcus, 'Ukraine-Russia clash: Nato's dilemma in the Black Sea', *BBC News*, 4 December 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-46425777>

## The Black Sea and Post-Soviet states

After the breakup of the Soviet Union, the Black Sea region especially Georgia and Ukraine became a new battleground for influence. Both countries became independent in 1991 and spent the next decades wrestling with

how to build strong states, fix domestic politics and keep themselves safe (Menon & Rumer, 2015). Their leaderships, sometimes more than their populations, kept pushing for deeper ties with the West. They signed up for NATO partnership programs and, by the early 2000s, made no secret about wanting to join the club (Sasse, 2008).

Things came to a heat point at the 2008 Bucharest Summit. NATO said Georgia and Ukraine "will become members someday" but stopped short of giving them the formal ticket for the Membership Action Plan because not everyone in NATO was convinced, and Russia was flat-out opposed to such adhesion. Since then, the issue has been stuck in limbo, with the region caught in between Russia's muscle-flexing and the West's cautious moves (Charap & Shapiro, 2014).

## Current Situation

### Russia's Invasion of Georgia: 2008

The Russo-Georgian War in August 2008 was triggered by escalating tensions in the breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, both internationally recognized parts of Georgia but with strong Russian support for separatist movements (Allison, 2008). The roots of the conflict trace back to the early 1990s following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, but tensions escalated in the years preceding 2008 due to Georgia's aspirations for NATO membership and its efforts to reintegrate the separatist territories (Cornell & Nilsson, 2008).

The spark came in early August 2008 when Georgian forces launched a military operation to retake control of the Georgian province of South Ossetia, after months of skirmishes and provocations by covert Russia forces.

Russia responded with a rapid and overwhelming military intervention, citing the protection of Russian citizens and peacekeepers

in the region (Allison, 2008). The conflict quickly expanded beyond South Ossetia to involve Abkhazia and parts of Georgian territory, resulting in a five-day war between Georgia and Russia.



Source: ‘Huge anti-Russian protests in Tbilisi echo Ukraine’s Maidan’, *The Economist*, 2 December 2024, <https://www.economist.com/europe/2024/12/02/huge-anti-russian-protests-in-tbilisi-echo-ukraines-maidan>

The international reaction was swift but measured due to the brief duration of the conflict. Western powers, including the United States, European Union, and NATO, condemned Russia’s military intervention as a violation of Georgia’s sovereignty and territorial integrity (Kramer, 2008). The EU quickly brokered a ceasefire agreement, known as the Six-Point Plan, which outlined the withdrawal of Russian troops and the return to pre-conflict positions.

NATO expressed support for Georgia’s sovereignty and condemned the use of force while calling for peaceful resolution (NATO, 2008). The United Nations Security Council was

unable to adopt a resolution due to Russian veto power, highlighting the limitations of multilateral institutions in managing the crisis (United Nations Security Council, 2008).

Russia justified its actions on humanitarian grounds and the protection of its peacekeepers and citizens in the breakaway regions. Following the conflict, Russia formally recognized South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states, a move rejected by most of the international community and considered an annexation in all but violation of international law.

The war had immediate and lasting consequences for regional security and international relations. Georgia suffered significant military and civilian casualties and displacement. The conflict entrenched the division of the country, with South Ossetia and Abkhazia remaining under de facto Russian control (Asmus, 2010).

Politically, the war marked a significant setback for Georgia’s Euro-Atlantic integration aspirations and highlighted the limits of Western support in the face of Russian military power. It underscored Russia’s willingness to use force to maintain its influence in its near abroad and to challenge NATO’s eastward expansion (Sharap and Shapiro, 2014).

Internationally, the conflict exposed divisions among Western states on how to respond to Russian assertiveness. While sanctions and diplomatic pressure were applied, no military intervention occurred, leading to debates about deterrence and credibility (Gotz, 2020).

The war also had strategic implications for NATO and the EU’s approach to post-Soviet states, influencing policies on enlargement, security cooperation, and conflict prevention. It demonstrated the vulnerability of states caught in the geopolitical contest between Russia and the West and highlighted the complexity of frozen conflicts in the post-Soviet space.

The Russian invasions of Ukraine (2022) and Georgia (2008) share common immediate causes



rooted in Russia's perception of threats to its sphere of influence, NATO expansion, and the status of breakaway regions with strong Russian ties. Both conflicts elicited strong international reactions characterized by condemnation, sanctions, and diplomatic efforts, though the scale and global impact of the Ukraine invasion have been far greater (Giles, 2022).

While the Georgia war was relatively brief and resulted in frozen conflict, the Ukraine war has evolved into a protracted, high-intensity conflict with significant humanitarian and geopolitical ramifications. Both cases illustrate Russia's use of military force to assert regional dominance and challenge Western influence, highlighting ongoing tensions in post-Cold War European security architecture (Trenin, 2011).

Understanding these conflicts requires analyzing the interplay of immediate triggers, international responses, and long-term consequences that continue to shape the security environment in Eurasia and the broader international order.

Bringing Georgia and Ukraine into NATO has been a major flashpoint between Russia and the West, leaving things stuck in a tense standoff. Both countries have been pushing them to get closer to Europe, hoping that means more security, more sovereignty, and a shot at a better future.

The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, was the culmination of complex buildup tensions that intensified dramatically in the months prior. Key immediate causes included Russia's longstanding objections to Ukraine's growing ties with Western institutions such as NATO and the European Union, which Moscow perceives as a direct threat to its sphere of influence and national security (Mearsheimer, 2014).

The Ukrainian Revolution of 2014, a pro-Western, pro-European revolt, overthrew pro-Russian President Yanukovich. It shifted Kyiv's geopolitical orientation westward, provoking

Russian attack (D'Anieri, 2019). Russia used the chaos of 2014 to launch a covert invasion of Ukraine, relying on soldiers disguised as rebel Ukrainians from the country's Russian speaking minority. The 'Little Green Men', named for their uniforms, from which all insignia had been removed, took over much of the Ukrainian east, the Donbas region, and conquered the Crimea peninsula, which Russia immediately annexed, claiming it as a permanent part of Russia. The annexation claim has been rejected by most of the world, except close Russian allies, but it remains in effect.



## Russia's Invasions of Ukraine: 2014, 2022

In the months leading up to the 2022 invasion, Russia amassed an estimated 100,000 troops near Ukraine's borders, citing concerns over NATO's eastward expansion and alleged threats to Russian-speaking populations in Ukraine (Kimmage, 2022).

Russia's demands included a legal guarantee that Ukraine would never join NATO and the withdrawal of NATO forces and infrastructure

from Eastern Europe. A request that were firmly rejected by NATO and Western states (NATO, 2022). Diplomatic efforts to de-escalate failed, and Russia launched a multi-front invasion, aiming to quickly seize key regions and possibly overthrow the Ukrainian government.



Russian conquests in Ukraine, 12 August 2025, in pink. The Crimean Peninsula, conquered and annexed in 2014, at the bottom. *Source:* Paul Adams, 'In maps: The war-ravaged Ukrainian territories at the heart of the Trump-Putin summit', *BBC News*, 15 August 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cgkrm433lk2o>

The Russian invasion provoked a swift and robust response from much of the international community. Western states, led by the United States and the European Union, condemned the invasion as a blatant violation of international law and Ukraine's sovereignty. They imposed sweeping sanctions targeting Russian banks, oligarchs, and key sectors such as energy and defense (Edmond, 2025).

NATO increased its military presence in member states bordering Russia and Ukraine, reaffirming its commitment to collective defense (Brzezinski, 2022). New deployments included

moving military forces, ground forces, air defense and air patrol forces, from other NATO countries to the Baltic States, Poland and Romania.

The United Nations General Assembly voted to condemn the invasion, calling for an immediate withdrawal of Russian forces. Many countries, including Japan, Canada, Australia, and others, aligned with Western sanctions and diplomatic condemnations. Conversely, some states, such as China, India, and several Global South nations, adopted more neutral or ambiguous positions, emphasizing dialogue and restraint without explicitly condemning Russia (Giles, 2022).

Ukraine received unprecedented military, financial, and humanitarian support from NATO countries. Many supplied advanced weaponry, intelligence assistance, and economic aid, bolstering Ukraine's defense and resilience. Humanitarian organizations mobilized to address the massive displacement and civilian suffering caused by the conflict. This support continues, at great expense, playing an essential role in Ukraine's ability to survive in face of almost four years of Russian onslaught.

The invasion has resulted in profound humanitarian, geopolitical, and economic consequences. Militarily, Ukraine mounted unexpectedly fierce resistance, preventing Russia from achieving a swift victory and turning the conflict into a protracted war with heavy casualties on both sides. Millions of Ukrainians were displaced internally or became refugees abroad, triggering one of the largest refugee crises in Europe since World War II.

Geopolitically, the invasion has reshaped European security architecture. It galvanized NATO unity and accelerated discussions on membership for Sweden and Finland (NATO, 2022). The war exposed vulnerabilities in global energy markets, as Europe sought to reduce its dependence on Russian gas, prompting energy



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diversification and inflationary pressures worldwide (Edmond, 2025).

The conflict also deepened East-West divisions reminiscent of the Cold War era, with heightened military posturing and diplomatic confrontations. Economically, sanctions have isolated Russia from parts of the global financial system, while Russia's economy faced contraction but adapted by pivoting towards Asian markets (Edmond, 2025).

Finally, the invasion has severely damaged Russia's international reputation, with many countries viewing it as a pariah state. The war's outcome remains uncertain, Russia as slowly gained every more Ukraine territory, but its immediate and long-term impacts continue to reverberate globally.

## Issues to Consider

### Georgia: Ambitions, Roadblocks, and the Legacy of 2008

Georgia's pursuit of NATO membership has been marked by a mix of bold reforms and harsh setbacks. After the Rose Revolution in 2003, new leaders set their sights firmly on the West, overhauling institutions and bringing the military in line with NATO standards (Mitchell, 2009).

The bulk of Georgians have long supported joining the alliance, seeing it as their best shot at shielding themselves from Russian threats.

Everything shifted in 2008. At the Bucharest Summit, NATO told Georgia that membership was in the cards someday but stopped short of making it official (NATO, 2008). Later that year, war erupted in South Ossetia, Russia intervened, and both South Ossetia and Abkhazia ended up firmly under Russian protection (Allison, 2008). NATO, wary of

escalating things, pulled back, and Georgia's hopes were put on indefinite hold.

Despite these setbacks, Georgia has kept working toward alliance standards and has stayed a steady partner. But with Russian forces entrenched on Georgian soil and persistent political division at home, NATO remains hesitant to take the plunge and offer full membership (Sasses, 2008).

### Ukraine: From Revolution to All-Out War

Ukraine's relationship with NATO has been a rollercoaster. After breaking from the Soviet Union, Ukraine tried to balance relations with both East and West. The Orange Revolution in 2004 ushered in a pro-European government, but internal divisions and pressure from Moscow kept the country's path uncertain (Kuzio, 2015).

Like Georgia, Ukraine was promised eventual NATO membership in 2008, but real progress stalled. The game-changer came in 2014: after mass protests ousted a pro-Russian president, Russia annexed Crimea and backed separatists in the Donbas. Suddenly, NATO looked more appealing to Ukrainians facing down Russian aggression (Razumkov, 2022).

Fast forward to 2022, when Russia launched its full-scale invasion. Ukraine's NATO ambitions became more urgent than ever, but the alliance has stopped short of offering a concrete path to membership. The war has laid bare the stakes: NATO membership could lock in Ukraine's security, but it also risks pulling the alliance into direct conflict with Russia (Smith, 2023).

### Russia's Perspective and Strategic Concerns

For Russia, NATO's eastward expansion is just a political headache tangled up with history,

pride, and old wounds. Russian leaders have repeatedly claimed that the West broke promises from the end of the Cold War, and every new country joining NATO feels like another encroachment on what Moscow sees as its backyard (Sarotte, 2014).

Georgia and Ukraine getting closer to NATO is especially nerve-wracking for the Kremlin. These are not just mere neighbors, they are really seen as part of Russia's "oversea territories," an area it considers vital to its influence and security. The thought of NATO troops or bases there is Moscow's red line (Mearsheimer, 2014).

From a military point of view, every new NATO member chips away at Russia's buffer zones and limits its room to maneuver (Gvosdev & Marsh, 2014). That's why Russia has resorted to tough tactics using force in Georgia and Ukraine, backing separatists, and keeping things unstable. It's a way to make sure the West thinks twice before moving in even further.

But it's not just about tanks and troops. Russian politicians frame NATO expansion as a plot to isolate or weaken their country. This story gets repeated at home to rally support and justify whatever moves the government makes abroad. Moscow's used a mix of diplomacy, pressure, and outright force to try to lock NATO out and the 2022 invasion of Ukraine was, in part, an attempt to slam the door shut for good (Giles, 2022).

## Role of the United Nations

Why no effective solution at the United Nations? In theory, the UN is supposed to help maintain peace and stability amongst nations (Weiss, 2014). In practice, its hands are tied. Russia holds a veto power on the Security Council and does not hesitate to use it if a resolution threatens its interests (UN Security

Council, 2008). The UN's peacekeeping missions have run into brick walls, too like the UN Observer Mission in Georgia, which did not get far because the parties involved could not agree, and Russia was not interested in cooperating.

Paralyzed by Russia's veto over all action by the UN Security Council, the UN cannot play an aggressive role in either situation. NATO membership is, in a fundamental sense, an alternative to UN action.

Still, the UN is not totally sidelined. It has provided neutral places for talks, help with humanitarian aid, and encourage efforts to build trust. If the international community can get creative with diplomacy and work with other regional groups, there's a chance to ease tensions even if a full solution is not in sight yet.

What's clear is that the deadlock over NATO expansion is a complicated mess of security worries, frozen conflicts, and big-power rivalry. The UN's not in a position to fix it singlehandedly, but it's still a forum for dialogue and relief especially when other channels are blocked to usher in peace. What is at stake for the UN? More confidence-building mechanisms, reforms, and creative diplomacy to keep the door open for dialogue.



Russia uses its veto to paralyze the UN Security Council on its war in Ukraine and blocked consideration of issues relating to Georgia.



## NATO's Policy, Internal Debates, and Member State Positions

Officially, NATO sticks to its “open door” promise: any European country willing and able to support alliance principles and security can in theory join (NATO, 2008). That’s been reaffirmed at multiple high-profile summits. But in practice, it’s not so simple.

The Membership Action Plan (MAP) is supposed to be the roadmap for joining, but both Georgia and Ukraine have been left waiting. The alliance is split. The U.S., U.K., Poland, and the Baltic states are all for moving forward (Pifer, 2017). But heavyweights like Germany and France, plus some southern European members, are more cautious (Ratka, 2022). They worry about provoking Russia, getting dragged into conflicts, and the headaches that come with unresolved territorial disputes. The result? NATO keeps kicking the can down the road endorsing the principle of membership but putting off any real moves.

There’s also anxiety about what it would mean for NATO’s own readiness. Admitting countries with active conflicts could mean the alliance is expected to jump into a war with Russia at a moment’s notice. At the same time, NATO has ramped up support for Georgia and Ukraine through training, joint exercises, and military aid just not the final step of membership (NATO, 2023).

Public opinion is not unanimous either. People in Eastern Europe generally want to see NATO grow, while skepticism lingers in parts of the West. The war in Ukraine shifted attitudes, with more countries like Finland and Sweden seeking membership, but it’s also prompted tough questions about how far NATO should go and who it’s willing to defend (Brzezinski, 2022).

## Regional and Global Security Implications

Much of the tension centers on the Black Sea, a strategic area connecting Europe, the Caucasus, and the Middle East. Control over this region means influence over energy routes, trade, and military

operations. NATO’s deeper involvement in Georgia and Ukraine, especially its naval activities, has only heightened friction with Russia (Giles, 2022). The result of the war in Ukraine and the fate of Georgia’s disputed territories will have ripple effects across the region for years to come.

On a broader scale, the question of NATO enlargement is really about what kind of security architecture Europe will have gone forward. Supporters believe that bringing Georgia and Ukraine into the alliance would extend stability and serve as a check on Russian ambitions. Critics, however, warn that it could backfire fueling instability, sparking a new arms buildup and making it even harder to manage crises (Mearsheimer, 2014). The conflict in Ukraine has already laid bare the weaknesses in Europe’s current system, highlighting just how exposed states outside NATO can be (Kimmage, 2022).

This debate isn’t just a European issue it’s wrapped up in the bigger rivalry between the United States and Russia (and increasingly, China). How NATO navigates this moment will help define not only the future of European security but also global norms around sovereignty and the use of force. The alliance’s credibility, unity, and power to deter threats are all being tested, with the whole world paying close attention.



Ukraine President Vladimir Zelenskyy address the UN General Assembly in New York, condemning Russia’s invasion and occupation of large parts of his country. *Source*: ‘Ukraine is only the first’, Zelenskyy warns UN as he highlights global threats – as it happened’, *Guardian*, 24 September 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2025/sep/24/russia-ukraine-trump-zelenskyy-unga-drones-europe-latest-news-updates>



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## Obstacles and Prospects for Membership

One of the biggest roadblocks to Georgia and Ukraine joining NATO is the fact that both are entangled in unresolved territorial conflicts. NATO's Article 5 says an attack on one member is an attack on all, which makes members understandably nervous about admitting countries with active wars or "frozen" disputes. For Georgia, that means Abkhazia and South Ossetia both controlled and recognized by Russia. For Ukraine, it's Crimea and the ongoing war in the Donbas, not to mention the all-out invasion since 2022. For many NATO states, bringing either country in right now would be asking for a showdown with Russia (Smith, 2023).

Moscow is not shy about where it stands. It's made it crystal clear that letting Georgia or Ukraine into NATO is a line in the sand. Russia has already proven it would use force to stop this from happening and has plenty of other tricks including cyberattacks, propaganda, energy threats, and political meddling to keep the West and its neighbors guessing (Lucas & Pomeranzen, 2016).

There is also the issue of getting all NATO members on the same page. The alliance works by consensus, so one dissenting country can block progress. With shifting politics, changing public moods, and new global priorities (like dealing with China or unrest in the Middle East), it's never a done deal (Götz, 2020).

Georgia and Ukraine have made big strides in reforming their politics, economies, and militaries, but corruption and democratic backsliding still make some NATO members wary. Domestic political squabbles and periodic crises can stall progress, too.

Public support is strong in Georgia and soared in Ukraine since 2014, but there are still

divisions, especially in Ukraine's east and south. The current Georgian government is more sympathetic to Russia, and less inclined to pursue NATO membership aggressively. Building and keeping national consensus is crucial not just for getting in but for making membership work if and when it happens.

## Some Proposals for Action

NATO faces a wide range of choices as it tried to deal with the dilemmas posed by Georgian and Ukrainian membership applications. Granting membership to Georgia or Ukraine will transform NATO, strengthening its support for democracy and Western values, but also risking direct war with Russia. Denying membership would be transformative too, showing NATO members willing to abandon the security of democratic countries to enhance their own security.

Nato Member States can be creative as try to solve this riddle. Some possible proposals that might be considered include:

**Agree on full, formal membership for Georgia and/or Ukraine.** NATO Member States could accept the risk of provoking Moscow and complete the steps long ago set in motion. Another round of NATO expansion would be very different from last time, when Finland and Sweden were accepted in 2022 and 2024, because Russia makes further expansion a decisive issue.

The new Members should be expected to immediately demand an Article Five response from the alliance, asking the other members to come to their aid with military forces. The 32 existing members could find themselves quickly drawn into war with Russia. Rapid or unconditional membership should come with alliance-wide preparations for war. Knowing



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this, many Member States can be expected to oppose membership for Georgia and Ukraine.

**Make NATO membership conditional** on resolution of Georgia and Ukraine's conflicts with Russia. This would postpone membership indefinitely, until Russia can be persuaded to stop fighting and return occupied and annexed lands back to both countries. Conditional membership has the effect of giving Russia control over the membership process. It could escalate fighting at any time it wished to halt the membership process. Conditional membership will be aggressively opposed by Georgia, Ukraine and their supporters, since such conditions are exactly what Georgia and Ukraine want to prevent most. They also are very suspicious that Russia would use any break in the fighting to prepare for further invasions.

**Turn to the United Nations:** Although action in the UN Security Council is blocked by Russia's veto, with enough support from more of the UN's 193 Member States, it is imaginable that the UN General Assembly could authorize new action to enhance Georgian or Ukrainian security. The biggest barrier comes from countries supporting Russia and the 120 Member States of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the UN's dominant voting bloc, many of whom support Russia's claims again Georgian and Ukrainian land.

**Reopen the NATO-Russia Council.** This would give NATO Member States and Russia a place to talk. Mutual dialogues have been absent since 2008. A diplomatic forum could reduce the chances of unnecessary conflicts and creates more opportunities for development of their respective states which generate wealth and prosperity. Clear communication about boundaries and intentions could go a long way toward avoiding misunderstandings and costly mistakes.

But restoring such a dialogue would widely be seen as a victory for Moscow, giving Russia a major new forum to promote its criticism of NATO, and a strong voice in its criticism of Georgia and Ukrainian independence. Ukraine and its supporters are certain to oppose it, fearing it would only help Russia build support for its conquests. So long as Russia refuses to accept Western demands, and NATO countries give military support to the countries it seeks to conquer, such a dialogue is unlikely to help.

**The alliance should ramp up its political outreach campaigns in Georgia and Ukraine** to build more inclusive policies with time frame expectations realistically about what NATO membership takes and how long it might actually take. At some point, in order to maintain a durable peace in the region Russia should be considered to join the alliance if it agrees to uphold to the rules and stop attacking sovereign states.

Ongoing Western efforts to shore up democratic institutions, the rule of law, and crack down on corruption could help strengthen vibrant societies, where good governance can play a role in security development as well as democracy. The United Nations through its agencies such as UNDP, UNESCO, UNICEF and IMF could play a vital role in jointly reforming public and private institutions in these countries. The more Georgia and Ukraine can carry out these reforms too, the better their chances for prosperity and the stronger they will be at home.

But governance reform seems unlikely to bring either country closer to their security goal of NATO membership. Current NATO members may worry that expanded outreach programs will trap them, eventually building pressure to outright membership.



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## Conclusion

There is work to do inside NATO, hashing out differences, sharing the load, and being upfront about what's at stake will help keep the alliance steady. Social media, NGOs and corporate entities campaigns can play a vital role in reshaping the behavior of states that violate international law.

There is no a quick fix. The path to membership is long and unpredictable, so the West needs to stick with Georgia and Ukraine for the long haul, staying nimble and ready to adjust as things evolve. A more inclusive European security architecture including Russia is paramount for a suitable and sustainable peace security mechanisms in Europe.

Whether or not Georgia and Ukraine join near-term in the, NATO has become a make-or-break issue for Europe's security scene. For these countries, getting a seat at NATO's table is about much more than geopolitics it is their cry for real independence, lasting safety, and finally

fitting in with the rest of the West. On the flip side, NATO faces a moment of truth: Will it live up to its promise, and is it truly ready to take on new challenges?

The story of Georgia and Ukraine is complicated, shaped by old wounds, political infighting, and the constant tug-of-war between global powers. Both nations are eager to join, but the journey is anything but straightforward. They really up against unresolved territorial disputes, Russia's fierce resistance, disagreements within NATO itself, and the uphill task of internal reforms.

The invasion of Ukraine, then the war raging in Ukraine, have shaken the whole security equation in Europe, pushing Western countries to show more unity but also raising tough new questions about the continent's future. For NATO the challenge and dilemmas are inescapable. The decisions made will steer what happens to Georgia and Ukraine, and may set the tone for how much weight NATO and the wider international order really carry.

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