



Summary

ussia's attack on Ukraine in February 2022 has fundamentally changed the current security and defence landscape in Europe. Neighbouring countries to the east and southeast which are not currently part of any alliance are seeking closer

cooperation with NATO and the EU. Against the backdrop of the current geopolitical situation, this study discusses future scenarios that could form a basis for closer cooperation with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia and identifies possible recommendations for action.

Greater integration of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine?

This study examines the conditions under which cooperation with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine could be intensified and develops relevant scenarios for the period up to 2025. In pursuit of the main research interest, these scenarios are then analysed at the systemic level to identify those in which efforts can plausibly be made to include and reassure Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine in Western security structures. The three countries have several things in common: They are neither members of NATO nor of the EU but have in the past indicated their wish to join these organisations. The countries are already members of the Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme. All three countries have also terminated their membership in Russian-dominated economic and security organisations such as the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). They are located in the buffer zone between NATO, the EU and Russia, and they are former communist states whose armed forces mainly rely on Soviet military equipment. All three states have faced frozen conflicts (in the Donbas region, in Transnistria, and in South Ossetia and Abkhazia). Two of these frozen conflicts escalated into wars – the Russo-Georgian War in 2008 and the Russian war in Ukraine since February 2022.

All three countries are also vulnerable to hybrid threats from Russia. ²

Method

Following an introductory geopolitical assessment, the exploratory-narrative intuitive logics approach to scenario planning is used to develop a range of hypothetical scenarios with alternative future manifestations. Consistent scenarios are developed to evaluate greater potential integration of Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova and reassurance measures to preserve their territorial integrity. The scenario process is divided into six steps. The first step is to formulate the decision to be made, the time horizon, and the level of analysis. Relevant problem areas are also identified. The second is the identification of key factors that describe the current situation in the individual problem areas. In the third step, these factors are ranked on a scale of 1 (insignificant or development foreseeable) to 10 (highly relevant or development not foreseeable) in terms of their influence on the research interest and their degree of uncertainty, i.e. how difficult it is to determine how the factor will develop in the future (see Table 1). Factors with a high degree of relevance and a high degree of uncertainty are identified as key factors and are assigned plausible future manifestations (see Table 2). Factors with a high degree of relevance but a low degree of uncertainty in terms of their future development offer additional scope for action.

¹ See "Zeitenwende: The Russian invasion of Ukraine and its implications", Metis Study No. 31 (November 2022).

² See "New hybrid threats", Metis Study No. 26 (July 2021).



Obsolete (low relevance, low uncertainty) and secondary factors (low relevance, high uncertainty) are dismissed. As a fourth step, scenarios are created from a combination of the key factors and their possible manifestations (see Table 3). Consistent scenarios are identified and inconsistent ones are dismissed. The fifth step of scenario planning involves selecting and providing a narrative description of scenarios (see Table 4). The sixth step is to interpret these scenarios and extrapolate options for action.

Geopolitical starting position

The conventional war in Ukraine can be interpreted in two ways. A pessimistic perspective points to the demise of the rules-based order following the Cold War, with Russia openly challenging the hegemony of the US, the system of collective security, the spread of democratic values, and international law. For China, any potential weakness on the part of the West signalises that it too should start taking its chances. A positive perspective highlights that the West's swift response to Russia's aggression has revived the rule-based order under the leadership of the US. The war has not only jolted NATO out of its "brain-dead" state but has also prompted several European countries to abandon their passivity, indecision or neutrality and instead increase their defence budgets and confirm their commitment to further cooperation with NATO and EU integration. The following geopolitical and strategic assessment is based on the long-cycle theory, a structural realist systemic framework. The theory describes shifts in relative material power between major powers by analysing four phases - macrodecision, agenda-setting, delegitimation and coalitioning - which have recurred every 100 to 130 years since 1494. The theory focuses on global authority structures in the wake of global wars (macrodecision). It describes the political development of world systems in which a leading power provides public goods to system participants (agenda setting). When this order is contested by rising challengers (delegitimation), and antithetic alliances that reject the incumbent leadership state (coalitioning) emerge as a result, the cycle begins all over again with another macrodecision.

At present, the global order is in the delegitimation phase, and the West is at a crossroads. A lengthy conventional war combined with hybrid warfare and threats, an ensuing low-intensity conflict or a new frozen conflict in Ukraine will damage European security while a negative peace will reinforce international divisions. Cooperation in international organisations is faltering and new global initiatives are highly controversial and politicised. Economic deglobalisation, a trend triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, is further intensified by the shift in relative material power from West to East in an increasingly multipolar world. The UN Security Council is plagued by vetoes and weak resolutions, which undermines the system of collective security. Regional

powers use the blockade to establish their own conflict settlement mechanisms as a counterweight to existing practices. Public goods such as the freedom of maritime routes, trade mechanisms and legal systems are gradually being undermined. As a Western hegemon, the United States will not be able to sustain these systemic goods in the long term without the support of its allies. Viable means to counter any further delegitimation of the rules-based order are the planned enlargement of NATO to include Sweden and Finland in the short term and, in the long term, the integration of the Western Balkans into the EU and NATO and the revitalisation of defence readiness in Europe. How existing buffer states can be tied to Western security structures and how their territorial integrity can be ensured must also be examined. Intensified cooperation or integration with other countries such as Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia can reverse the current delegitimation phase.

Relevant problem areas and factors

The key problem area for the research question at the centre of this study is international security. Possible factors are the outcome of the war in Ukraine, the position of other major powers such as China and India, the situation of frozen conflicts in Moldova and Georgia as well as the impact of Russia's hybrid threats against Western states and potential partner states. Relevant factors in the problem area of domestic policy, on the other hand, are the willingness of Western societies and governments to support the admission of further countries, the domestic political preferences of the partner states Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, the fact that pro-Russian parties and positions are gaining strength in the West as well as the effect of hybrid threats on Western societies. Significant factors in the problem area of international organisations are the ability of the UN Security Council to function, a uniformly positive position of the Western alliances on enhanced cooperation as well as potential counteroffers from alternative organisations such as the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), the Shanghai Cooperation, or BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). When it comes to the problem area of economic policy, the financial costs resulting from the Russian-Ukrainian war, the energy-import dependency and energy vulnerability of European states as well as the opening of new markets as a result of the greater involvement of new partner states play a role. Table 1 provides an overview of relevant problem areas and factors as well as an assessment of their influence and degree of uncertainty.

An assessment of the influence of each factor on the research interest and the established degree of uncertainty determines the key factors, which are highlighted in beige in Table 1. Table 2 summarises these key factors with their respective positive and negative manifestations.



Problem area	Factor	Influence	Uncertainty
	Position of other major powers	4	6
International Committee	Outcome of the Russian-Ukrainian War	8	9
International Security	Hybrid threats posed by Russia	4	4
	Role of frozen conflicts in Moldova and Georgia	7	6
	Willingness to accept new EU/NATO members	5	2
Domestic Policy	Domestic political preferences of partner states	6	6
	Pro-Russian parties gaining strength in Europe	7	1
	Effect of hybrid attacks on public security	4	2
	Ability of the UN Security Council to function	7	2
International Organisations	European and transatlantic cohesion	6	6
	Offers from other security organisations (e.g. CSTO)	3	3
	Financial costs resulting from prolonged conflict with Russia	6	2
Economic Policy	Energy-import dependency of European states	3	3
	Opening of new markets as a result of greater integration	2	1

Table 1 Problem areas and identified factors. ³ Key factors in beige

KF 1	Outcome of the Russian-Ukrainian War	Russia loses (+)	Russia wins/stalemate (-)
KF 2	Frozen conflicts in Moldova and Georgia	inactive (+)	reactivated (-)
KF 3	Domestic political preferences of partner states	pro-Western (+)	pro-Russian (-)
KF 4	European and transatlantic cohesion	yes (+)	no (-)

Table 2 Manifestations of the key factors

KF1 – Outcome of the Russian-Ukrainian War

The further course and outcome of the conventional conflict in Ukraine will have a considerable influence on the options of Western states when it comes to intensifying cooperation with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. A clear defeat or a complete withdrawal of Russia offers the best opportunities for cooperation and integration. The materialisation of a de facto annexation or other partial military successes achieved by Russia in Ukraine have a major impact on Russia's ability to take action in other countries. Transformation of the Ukrainian war into a new frozen conflict could be considered a Russian success and would damage opportunities for cooperation with Ukraine. Given how difficult it is to determine the effects of partial Russian mobilisation, a potential weakening of Western support, and the effects of an anticipated spring offensive by both sides on the further course of the conflict, this factor is associated with a high level of uncertainty.

KF2 - Frozen conflicts in Moldova and Georgia

The frozen conflicts in Moldova and Georgia are particularly significant because they can be used by Russia as a means of destabilisation. They are a source of unrest and could have a disruptive or obstructive effect in the constitutional phase of an intensified partnership. They must be considered the greatest obstacle to the integration of Georgia and Moldova because, in the event of integration, the presence of Russian troops in the conflict regions entails the risk of direct confrontation with NATO. With Russia so deeply committed in Ukraine, it is not entirely clear what capabilities it has to reactivate the frozen conflicts in Moldova and Georgia. In the course of the Ukrainian war, subversive activities and false-flag operations have been conducted to distract from failures in Ukraine or to strengthen support from the Russian public. For now, however, the extent of such measures has remained minimal. A political solution to the frozen conflict, or at least a situation in which the status quo is maintained as a basis for further reconciliation, offers the West the best chance of success.

³ For reasons of space, the table does not document how factors are assessed. These assessments of the key factors are outlined under KF1 to KF4.



KF3 – Domestic political preferences of partner states

A pro-Western orientation in terms of domestic political preferences is a prerequisite for closer ties with the West. The governments of partner nations as well as large parts of their societies are in favour of closer cooperation or even integration into the EU and NATO. In addition, they are seeking security guarantees to deter future attempts at intervention by Russia. Since the middle of 2022, Ukraine and Moldova have held the status of EU candidate countries, while Georgia has only been granted a European perspective. This is partly due to the pro-Russian position of Georgian oligarchs who are seeking to normalise relations with Moscow despite the fact that the majority of the Georgian public rejects this. In Georgia and Moldova, Russia is using hybrid methods to try to influence national preferences in its favour. These measures include bribery of political elites, coercion by raising energy prices, and staged demonstrations. The success or failure of the Russian measures to influence national preferences in Ukraine and in particular in Moldova and Georgia is highly relevant yet also highly uncertain.

KF4 - European and transatlantic cohesion

A common position amongst Western states on enhanced cooperation and reinsurance when it comes to Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia is the key to their success. If a consensus is found, the three countries can be offered a long-term perspective for partnership or integration. Particular interests of individual countries as well as a conflict of interests between Europe and the US may hamper closer cooperation. Election results in Western countries could change the positions of individual governments, but the possibility of closer cooperation with partner countries remains as long as a critical mass of key Western states is open to such cooperation. In these circumstances, too, Russia is likely to use subversive measures to influence the position of the Western countries. Some countries may also respond with more restraint to anticipated economic disadvantages. Given how difficult it is to assess the sustainability of cohesion between Western states when it comes to intensified cooperation with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, this factor has a medium degree of uncertainty.

Scenario development and selection

Up to 16 scenarios can be derived on the basis of the selected key factors. Table 3 provides an overview of possible combinations of key factors and their manifestations.

All scenarios are consistent and outline probable and plausible future manifestations. The following describes three consistent hypothetical scenarios (scenario 1 as the best case, scenario 10 as the most probable, and scenario 16 as the worst-case scenario). Table 4 breaks down the selected scenarios on the basis of key factors and manifestations.

Scenario 1 – Best case – Back to agenda-setting

The best-case scenario would see Russia's military campaign fail, followed by a complete withdrawal from Ukraine. In this scenario, Crimea and the Eastern Donbas region remain an integral part of Ukraine. Moscow reverses the annexation of the four oblasts. Russia refrains from making any further territorial demands on Ukrainian territory. As a result of their military defeat and the losses they have suffered, the Russian armed forces and secret services are unable to carry out sustained hybrid attacks in neighbouring countries. Frozen conflicts in Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia remain inactive. This inactivity places Moldova and Georgia - with support from the EU - in a position to intensify political reconciliation processes. Formerly pro-Russian social classes in these autonomous republics increasingly follow the Western model and are supportive of closer cooperation and integration into Western economic and security systems. Political parties and decision-makers who previously held pro-Russian positions turn to Western positions. The strategic corruption, oligarchic networks, and pro-Russian media cultivated by Russia lose their significance. Governments and the majority of the people in Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia support efforts to establish ties with NATO and to gradually integrate into the EU. EU and NATO countries come to an agreement with their partner nations on a roadmap for accession modalities, the interoperability of armed forces, and reforms. Joint efforts are made to pursue strong links between the three countries and Western security architectures, to grant security guarantees, and ultimately to complete the gradual integration process. The global impact of NATO's resilience under US leadership and of the EU's integration capability lead to a trend reversal on

	KF 2 (+)	KF 2 (-)	KF 2 (+)	KF 2 (-)
KF 1 (+)	(1) ++++	(3) +-++	(5) ++-+	(7) ++
KF 1 (-)	(2) -+++	(4)++	(6) -+-+	(8)+
	KF3 (+)		KF3 (-)	
	KF 4 (+)			

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KF 2 (+)	KF 2 (-)	KF 2 (+)	KF 2 (-)	
(9) +++-	(11) +-+-	(13) ++	(15) +	KF 1 (+)
(10) -++-	(12)+-	(14) -+	(16)	KF 1 (-)
KF3 (+)		KF:	3 (-)	
KF 4 (-)				



	Outcome of the war in Ukraine	Frozen Conflict	Domestic political preferences	EU/NATO cohesion
– Scenario 1 – Back to Agenda-Setting Best Case (+ + + +)	Russia fails in Ukraine	Frozen conflicts remain inactive and political solution possible	Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia cultivate a strong pro-Western stance	EU and NATO willing to engage in closer cooperation
- Scenario 10 - Window-of-Opportunity Probable Case (-++-)	Russia occupies parts of Ukraine	Frozen conflicts remain inactive and political solution possible	Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia cultivate a strong pro-Western stance	Disagreement between EU countries and NATO on how to approach cooperation
– Scenario 12 – Coalitioning and Ukraine 2.0 Worst Case ()	Russia occupies parts of Ukraine	Conflicts in Ossetia and Transnistria remain active	Governments in Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia prefer neutrality or are pro-Russian	Disagreement between EU countries and NATO on how to approach cooperation

Table 4 Study scenarios with key factors and manifestations

the systemic level. The delegitimation phase initiated by Russia ends, especially as China draws lessons from Russia's failure and defers its own aspirations to become a hegemonic power. Consequently, a new agenda-setting phase is initiated for the West under US leadership which consolidates the existing rules-based order, establishes new global goods, and promotes new international initiatives.

Scenario 10 - Probable case - Window of opportunity

The most likely scenario assumes that Russia will continue to occupy parts of Ukraine in the long run. In addition to Crimea and parts of the Donbas, these include areas in the Kherson, Zaporizhzhia and Kharkiv oblasts. After a lengthy conventional phase, the war will transform into a low-intensity conflict. In the long term, Russia will likely establish the occupied territories as a new frozen conflict and use them to enforce security interests by reactivating them as a source of unrest and exploiting them to destabilise Ukraine. With Russian forces so tied up in Ukraine, the frozen conflicts in Moldova and Georgia will remain largely inactive. This makes it possible to gradually expand military and economic cooperation with Moldova and Georgia, for example by increasing the interoperability of armed forces or by reducing energy dependence on Russia. Russia's failure to achieve a decisive victory in Ukraine and the economic decline of the Russian economy reinforce the Ukrainian, Moldovan and Georgian people's

continuing orientation towards the West. This pro-Western orientation curbs the influence of pro-Russian forces and prompts the governments to try to institute reforms. Consequently, domestic political preferences increasingly adapt to Western standards, creating the basis for possible integration into NATO and the EU. One problematic aspect of this most likely scenario is the possibility of disagreement in the West. In principle, all states are in favour of closer cooperation, but they have contrasting views regarding the extent of this cooperation. What is more, some member states may reject the integration of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia for fear of Russian countermeasures. Increasing support for right-wing populist and pro-Russian parties in Western states may also severely affect support for Ukraine, for cooperation projects with Georgia and Moldova as well as for potential reassurances. A Republican victory in the US elections could also lead to disagreement over the degree of support to be provided by the West to countries that are being besieged by Russia.

The global effect of the most likely scenario currently provides the West with a temporary opportunity to counter the delegitimation of the rules-based order through expansion of its own legally guided sphere of interest. For this to happen, it is crucial that sustainable cooperation projects get off the ground in the short term. In the long term, this would pave the way for the integration of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia into NATO and the EU.



However, this window of opportunity is time-sensitive, as domestic political preferences in the partner nations and in Western states are highly fragile. Hybrid Russian countermeasures, economic losses, and electoral successes of populist or pro-Russian parties may undermine both the current pro-Western orientation in the partner nations and the willingness of individual Western states to stand by them against Russia.

Scenario 12 – Worst case – Coalitioning and Ukraine 2.0

The worst-case scenario assumes that Russia largely achieves its political and military objectives in Ukraine and that it permanently annexes parts of the country and holds on to them with fewer forces. Ukraine is unable to force Russia out of these occupied territories by military means due to the gradual reduction of support from the West. Freed-up Russian forces and resources are then used to reactivate frozen conflicts along Russia's spheres of interest in order to prevent Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia from further integrating with the West. New conflicts increasingly draw the world's attention away from Ukraine, while low-intensity conflicts in Moldova and Georgia do not evoke the same response from the West. Due to the lack of Western support, the societies and governments of the partner states turn to alternative Russian or Chinese models. This is a result of successful Russian campaigns of discreditation, disinformation, and subversion, strategic corruption and ongoing disagreement between the US and European states on the approach towards further Russian and future Chinese aggression.

The global impact of the worst-case scenario confirms the current trend of the delegitimation phase, in which the non-compliant behaviour of challenging powers is successful despite initial backlash from Western states. Russian success encourages other countries to pursue revisionist and aggressive foreign policy. It also lays the foundation for the formation of a serious counteralliance that politically and economically challenges the international order under US leadership.

Recommendations for action

These recommendations for action focus on ways to have a positive impact on the key factors examined here, particularly if the most probable and the worst-case scenarios materialise.

In order to influence the outcome of the war, Germany, in cooperation with Western partners, should continue to provide material, financial and political support to Ukraine and expand existing sanctions against Russia. In addition, support in the form of military materiel, information, funds and training needs to be better coordinated between Western countries. Swap deals are initially a good interim solution but need to be replaced with sustainable provision of materiel. In future, the provision of old Soviet systems should thus be scaled back in favour of appropriate and

modern Western systems. In doing so, however, it is important to keep in mind that providing support to Ukraine with dozens of different weapon systems generates a logistic supply and maintenance bottleneck that can undermine their military effect. Above all, it is important to ensure the reliable provision of ammunition for weapon systems that have already been delivered, as ammunition consumption will continue to increase. The spotty provision of different systems, hesitation to provide Western main battle tanks as well as piecemeal and delayed commitments hamper offensive operations to recapture occupied areas. Improved coordination and more efficient planning - primarily based on military necessities rather than on national debates – promise lasting success. It is also necessary to win over other international partners to support existing sanctions. A further substantial increase in the political and material cost to Russia is the only way to create the conditions to force the Russian armed forces to withdraw and to avoid a dictated peace.

In order to create positive conditions for dealing with existing frozen conflicts and pro-Western domestic political preferences in its partner states, the EU must do a lot more to improve political and economic cooperation with Moldova and Georgia. This includes committing to reform plans for further association with the EU as well as ambitious timetables for implementing accession criteria. In economic terms, measures must be implemented to reduce dependency on Russian energy in order to mitigate vulnerability to Russia's enforcement measures. Judicial reform projects as well as financial and political measures to strengthen civilian society actors, the free press and other interest groups should help to combat the strategic corruption sponsored by Russia. In this context, financial support from the EU needs to be linked to concrete conditions, subjected to ambitious timetables, and combined with measures designed to counter disinformation campaigns. Resources and know-how must also be made available to ensure that, in the face of Russian hybrid attacks, society remains resilient and critical infrastructure is protected in Georgia and Moldova. In addition, sanctions against pro-Russian oligarchs should be considered if they counteract reform measures, support Russian narratives, or impede the fight against corruption. All measures must be implemented gradually while taking into account the prevailing social preferences and expectations to avoid their discreditation by Russian disinformation as neoliberal attempts to foster dependencies. In the case of Ukraine in particular, the financing models designed to provide support against the Russian invasion must not give the impression that Western states are seeking to profit over decades from loans or market guarantees. For the future, this means that the remission of part of Ukraine's war-related national debt must be negotiated in order to avoid putting a strain on its pro-Western outlook and to support post-war reconstruction.





There is also a need to expand armed forces cooperation within the NATO framework, to increase the PfP budget for the three countries, to improve interoperability through coordinated procurement and implementation of NATO standards, and to standardise training. Moldova should therefore be offered an initiative that is identical to the Substantial NATO-Georgia Package process, while the latter process should be accelerated. This could ensure that both nations can press ahead with cooperation with NATO on the basis of the same guidelines, procedures and processes. There should also be an increase in the number of common manoeuvres and exercises. In the case of Moldova, given the anticipated stagnation of the 5+2 format and the Joint Control Commission, unification of the de facto state territory with Romania or Ukraine must be reviewed from a political perspective if the majority of the Moldovan people were to opt for such a move in future referendums. For Transnistria, this would mean further isolation. In the case of Georgia, implementation of the criteria of the 12-Point Plan should be accelerated

and involvement of the Georgian public in the process should increase. To find a political solution and to reintegrate the separatist republics in Georgia, the Western nations should continue with their work in the framework of the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia, the Geneva International Discussions, and the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism despite the war in Ukraine. They should also create incentives for the pro-Russian republics to pursue further political rapprochement and normalisation. With the help of Western partners, Georgia could also consider autonomy guarantees in order to forestall an annexation by Russia and to keep open the option of a political solution.

A Ukraine summit should be sought in the interest of cohesion between NATO and EU nations when it comes to a common political line. This summit could be used to establish constant cornerstones of a coordinated political, economic and military position towards Russia. This would allow the scope and duration of support for Ukraine to be sustainably determined. The aim would



be not only to determine a common and irrefutable fundamental consensus but also to strengthen internal cohesion and improve internal strategic communication. This consensus would reduce current differences between the Western nations, e.g. between western and eastern Europe, in terms of their preferences regarding the scope of sanctions or military support. This would enable more effective coordination and implementation of joint measures, which have given the impression of taking shape at

a halting pace so far, created an internal sense of urgency between allies and lacked planning security. This would not only increase the deterrence effect against further escalation by Russia but would also signal to Ukraine a common, long-term and lasting assurance of Western aid. A clear and long-term formulation of a Ukraine policy of the Western nations could also help win over further international partners to contain Russian aggression.



Fig. 2 Foreign Affairs Council Roundtable with MFA of Ukraine in Brussels on 18 July 2022 | photo: © European Union, author: Creator: Alexandros Michailidis

