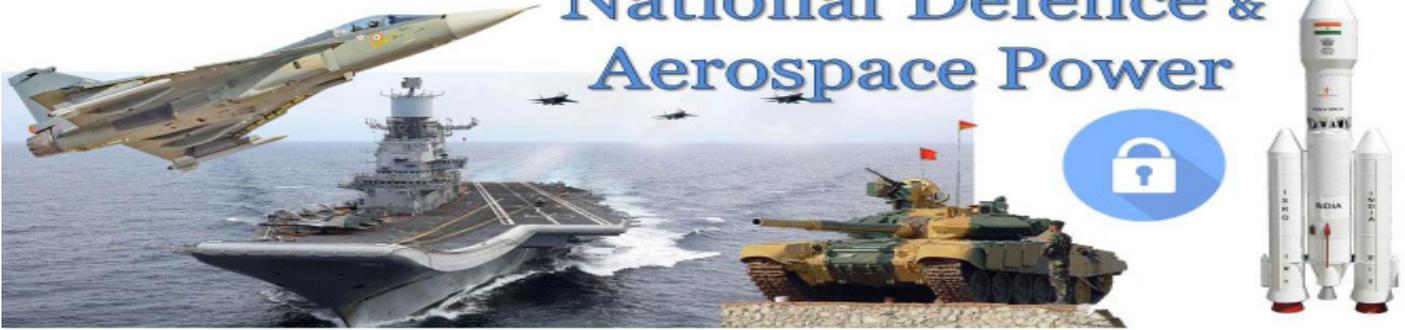




National Defence & Aerospace Power



RUSSIA AND THE WEST: THE SAME OLD GAME WITH NEW OBJECTIVES?

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Amidst the recently heightened security tensions around the Russia-Ukraine border, Russia underwent a series of talks with the US, NATO, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) from January 10 to 13, 2022. The discussion regarding creation of a new security framework for Europe stood as the primary aim of these talks. A similar demand was raised through the draft European Security Treaty (EST) by Kremlin in 2009 amidst a tense security environment in Europe.¹ Critical question which comes naturally - Is history repeating itself?

The agendas of NATO enlargement and EU enlargement were viewed with scepticism within political circles in Russia in the first decade of the 21st century.

Thucydides said, “The present, while never repeating the past exactly, must inevitably resemble it. Hence, so must the future”.² This holds true in the context of the current Russia-West standoff as well.

An atmosphere of cold peace that persisted in the post-Cold War period in Europe started fading away by the start of the 21st century. It further witnessed a new low in 2008, a critical year for the West’s relations with Russia. The April 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit fell short of providing a Membership Action Plan to the former Soviet states of Georgia and Ukraine on the organisation’s enlargement agenda, but added to Russia’s worries about ‘NATO coming to its door steps’.³ In August 2008, Georgia, an aspiring NATO member state, witnessed a lost war with Russia over the issues of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, raising the West’s concerns about Moscow challenging it militarily in Europe.⁴ The Pax Europaea of the 21st century was, hence, devastated. What followed was a Russian proposition for discussions on the EST, a draft of which was published in November 2009, with the objective of deviating

from a NATO-centric European security architecture towards a more inclusive one.

Russia got the West back to the talking table this time by proposing new draft pan-European military and political security agreements, in pursuance of a new security architecture for Europe.⁵ But, the objectives of the draft treaty of 2009 appeared to be more 'benign' than that of the recently proposed draft treaties. The former draft, EST, called for the creation of "a common undivided space in order to finally do away with the Cold War legacy", thus, attempting to do away with the notion of 'spheres of influence'. The EST was to be based on the principle of indivisible security. This principle finds a mention in the recent drafts as well. What becomes a staggering proposition is a demand for a NATO guarantee 'to refrain from any further enlargement', whereby the Kremlin wishes to become the doorkeeper of NATO's 'open-door policy' of membership.⁶

What further drives Russia to get the West on the table to discuss the former's draft security proposals is an urge to play a decisive role in the great power competition that has been unfolding in the Indo-Pacific between the US and China.

For reforming the European security architecture through its proposed EST, in 2009, Russia invited states and organisations relevant to European security like NATO, the EU, the OSCE, and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), which have stakes in the security of the Euro-Atlantic region, to the discussion table. This reflected Russia's concerns regarding the West's expansion in economic as well as in political and security spheres. The agendas of NATO enlargement and EU enlargement were viewed with scepticism within political circles in Russia in the first decade of the 21st century. What features distinctly in the draft treaties posted on Russia's Foreign Ministry's website in December 2021 is an overt concern for NATO enlargement and the primacy of the US and NATO in agreeing to a new European security architecture. The EU and Russia-led CSTO failed to find seats at the table during the security talks in which the organisations have major stakes.⁷

Furthermore, Russia in 2008, waking up from the slumbers of the 1990s, wanted a reset not only in its security relations with NATO but also advocated for a larger set of reforms in global political and economic spheres.⁸ It sought to claim primacy for the G-20 amid the 2008 financial crisis, instead of the G-8, as the former's inclusive global representation. Similarly, in the energy sector, Moscow found the Energy Charter Treaty redundant and pushed for a reset in Europe's energy architecture as well.⁹ Thus, the question arises: what drives Russia to push the West for security guarantees at this juncture by heightening tensions on its borders with Ukraine?

Moscow knew in 2008 that the Russo-Georgian war had portrayed it as a strong security actor in Europe. Moreover, even amidst the atmosphere of strained relations, the West needed Russia to cooperate on global issues, for instance in finding common ground to deal with the threat of Taliban insurgents in Afghanistan.¹⁰ Thus, it put forth

a draft EST in November 2009 to negotiate a new security architecture for Europe from a position of strength. Today, the Kremlin is aware of the fact that the West needs its cooperation on security issues in the Mediterranean region, in the Maghreb, in addressing the Afghanistan crisis and also to salvage the Iran nuclear deal.¹¹ In addition to this, with Crimea's annexation in 2014 and the present intensified tensions along the Russia-Ukraine border, Russia seeks to leverage its current position to extract maximum concessions for improving its influence in the European security architecture.

New Delhi has embraced strategic autonomy as a linchpin of its approach to international politics. It has been trying to balance its strategic ties between Russia and the West.

What further drives Russia to get the West on the table to discuss the former's draft security proposals is an urge to play a decisive role in the great power competition that has been unfolding in the Indo-Pacific between the US and China. On his first overseas visit as the President of the United States to Europe, Biden's prime focus was to initiate a consensus-building on the China challenge.¹² Russia is cognisant of the fact that the US would need it by its side in dealing with China's rise. Velina Tchakarova, Director of AIES, Austria, opines, "By showing muscle (with troops buildup along Russia's border with Ukraine), Putin makes Russia an indispensable player, without which neither of the two rivals - USA & China, could win the future competition against each other".¹³

Russia's exclusive importance to the US and NATO over other organisations, while calling for a renewed security architecture and its continued military presence along its frontier with Ukraine, would aid NATO to reinvent itself in the times to come. Talks of 'the right to seek membership in NATO' in the political circles of Finland and Sweden have already been resurfacing.¹⁴ No breakthrough was achieved after the talks between Russia and the US, NATO, and the OSCE in January 2022

As the dialogue continues in different formats (the Normandy format, bilateral and trilateral at the Foreign Ministerial level, and between Russian and Western leaders) to lessen tensions on the Ukraine-Russia frontier, India has called for "a peaceful resolution of the situation through sustained diplomatic efforts for long-term peace and stability in the region and beyond".¹⁵ Furthermore, India abstained from a procedural vote ahead of a discussion on the Russia-Ukraine crisis at the UNSC. T.S. Tirumurti, Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations, emphasised the importance of "quiet and constructive diplomacy" and said, "India's interest is in finding a solution that can provide for immediate de-escalation of tensions, taking into account the legitimate security interests of all countries and aimed towards securing long-term peace and stability in the region and beyond."¹⁶

New Delhi has embraced strategic autonomy as a linchpin of its approach to international politics. It has been trying to balance its strategic ties between Russia and the West. Moscow remains a 'steady' and traditional defence partner for New Delhi.

India has been engaging with the West in economic as well as security spheres, especially concerning the Indo-Pacific region. Thus, any military escalation in the ongoing crisis will not serve India's strategic interests.

Russia has recently announced a drawdown of troops from Crimea, signalling the de-escalation of tensions. But the US and NATO remain sceptical of any such move by Russia, indicating that the crisis is far from over. Reaching accommodative conclusions through further dialogue and engagement remains in the interests of both the West and Russia. Richard J. Krickus' proposition for 'giving Russia a voice but not a veto in a new European security system' is worth considering in this regard.

Notes:

- ¹ "The draft of the European Security Treaty", *Kremlin*, November 29, 2009, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/6152>. Accessed on January 27, 2022.
- ² Graham Allison, "The Key to Henry Kissinger's Success", *The Atlantic*, November 27, 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/11/kissinger-ferguson-applied-history/417846/>. Accessed on January 20, 2022.
- ³ "Bucharest Summit Declaration", *NATO*, April 03, 2008, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm. Accessed on January 12, 2022.
- ⁴ Ivan Krastev, "Russia and the Georgia war: the great-power trap", *European Council on Foreign Relations*, August 20, 2008, https://ecfr.eu/article/commentary_ivan_krastev_on_georgia/. Accessed on January 15, 2022.
- ⁵ Steven Pifer, "Russia's draft agreements with NATO and the United States: Intended for rejection?", *The Brookings Institution*, December 21, 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2021/12/21/russias-draft-agreements-with-nato-and-the-united-states-intended-for-rejection/>. Accessed on January 14, 2022.
- ⁶ Andres Fogh Rasmussen, "On Russia, NATO cannot fold", *Politico*, January 03, 2022, <https://www.politico.eu/article/russia-nato-vladimir-putin-ukraine/>. Accessed on January 04, 2022.
- ⁷ Steven Erlanger, "U.S. and Russia Will Discuss European Security, but Without Europeans", *The New York Times*, January 10, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/10/world/europe/us-russia-europe-ukraine-nato.html>. Accessed on January 17, 2022.
- ⁸ Richard Weitz, "The Rise and Fall of Medvedev's European Security Treaty", *The German Marshall Fund of the United States*, May 01, 2012, https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep18640?seq=1#metadata_info_tab_contents. Accessed on January 15, 2022.
- ⁹ "Andrei V. Belyi, "A Russian Perspective on the Energy Charter Treaty (ARI)", *Real Instituto Elcano*, June 16, 2009, <https://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/en/analyses/a-russian-perspective-on-the-energy-charter-treaty-ari/>. Accessed on January 21, 2022.

¹⁰ “Russia edges closer to Afghanistan role in response to NATO requests”, *Deutsche Welle* (DW), November 06, 2010, <https://www.dw.com/en/russia-edges-closer-to-afghanistan-role-in-response-to-nato-requests/a-6194059>. Accessed on January 11, 2022.

¹¹ Patrick Wintour, “US seeks Russian and Chinese support to salvage Iran nuclear deal”, *The Guardian*, December 05, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/dec/05/us-seeks-china-and-russia-support-to-salvage-iran-nuclear-deal>. Accessed on January 05, 2022.

¹² “For Biden, Europe Trip Achieved 2 Major Goals. And Then There Is Russia”, *The New York Times*, June 17, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/17/world/europe/joe-biden-vladimir-putin-usa-russia.html>. Accessed on January 13, 2022.

¹³ See- Velina Tchakarova [@vtchakarova], *Twitter*, December 24, 2021, <https://twitter.com/vtchakarova/status/1474133265086885892>. Accessed on January 07, 2022.

¹⁴ Richard Orange, Joe Barnes and James Crisp, “Finland and Sweden’ closer than ever’ to joining Nato after Putin’s threats backfire”, *The Telegraph*, January 08, 2022, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2022/01/08/finland-sweden-closer-has-ever-joining-nato-putins-threats-backfire/>. Accessed on January 12, 2022.

¹⁵ Shubhajit Roy, “Ukraine crisis: India calls for ‘peaceful resolution’”, *The Indian Express*, January 29, 2022, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/ukraine-crisis-india-peaceful-resolution-7746108/>. Accessed on January 30, 2022

¹⁶ Prashant Jha, “At UNSC, India abstains from Ukraine vote, calls for immediate de-escalation in region”, *Hindustan Times*, February 01, 2022, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/at-uns-c-india-abstains-from-ukraine-vote-calls-for-immediate-de-escalation-in-region-101643653591880.html>. Accessed on February 01, 2022.



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