



საქართველოს სტრატეგიისა და საერთაშორისო ურთიერთობების კვლევის ფონდი
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Russian Military Aggression in Ukraine and Georgia's National Security System

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In the modern era, due to the increased and diversified variety of threats which are mostly intertwined, the security system of any country faces serious new challenges. These threats can arise as a result of the actions of specific countries or different groups as well as through various events. Against this background, it is quite natural that the terms "hybrid threats" and "hybrid warfare" have become established in our daily lives.

Russia's military aggression in Ukraine which, unfortunately, takes civilian lives, is still ongoing and it is too early to draw any in-depth conclusions. However, the Ukrainian example has already vividly illustrated the importance of a proper planning and implementation of a national security policy. Already at this stage, military experts give a high assessment to the effectiveness of the territorial and civil defense conducted by the Ukrainian military and special forces. At the same time, Ukraine is successfully operating on the diplomatic as well as informational and psychological warfare front lines. The actions of the Ukrainian intelligence services deserve special attention.

Response of Georgia's National Security System to the Russian Military Aggression in Ukraine

Unfortunately, information on how our security system responds to the threats posed by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which would reflect the activities of the Security Council and its apparatus, bilateral diplomatic relations with foreign partners and measures taken by our security services to strengthen the country, is either miniscule or non-existent. Therefore, primarily we have to rely on the information reflected in the statements of high-ranking government officials on this issue.

The day after Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 25, the Georgian Prime Minister [said](#) that Georgia was not in any danger and that he was discussing all necessary information with the Security Cabinet on an ongoing basis and at this stage did not see the need to convene Georgian National Security Council.

[In a statement](#) on the same subject on February 28, the Prime Minister of Georgia spoke about the risks, threats and challenges posed by the Russian security invasion of Ukraine to the European security system and the world in general. On the same day, at a briefing after the cabinet ministers' meeting, the Georgian Foreign Minister, Davit Zalkaliani, [said](#) that Russia would require no special mobilization to launch a new aggression against Georgia. If Russia were to make such a decision, then it would be able to carry out such endeavor quite quickly. And the Georgian government has relevant information about Russia's aggressive intentions.

On March 10, the Minister of Defense of Georgia, Juansher Burchuladze, touched upon the process of national security policy planning in Georgia. In particular, he [noted](#) that the Ministry of Defense has worked on its section of the Security Doctrine together with partners and it is already fully finalized and will be published in the near future. Regarding the threats facing Georgia, the defense minister [noted](#) that the war in Ukraine did not alter the classification of threats; however, their intensity did

change as "the challenge remains the same, the threat is the same." In the same statement, he said that he did not see the need to "formally" convene Security Council as law enforcement officials, with virtually the same composition, regularly meet with the Prime Minister.

On March 17, the Georgian Interior Minister and Security Council Secretary Vakhtang Gomelauri, [announced](#) that the Security Council convened after the start of the war in Ukraine on February 27. At the same time, he said that the "the Security Council and, furthermore, even a stronger composition than the Council" met for almost four days and nights under the leadership of the Prime Minister and discussed all possible threats that could face our country.

From the above statements, primarily, we can draw one simple conclusion - the statements of government officials are, to say the least, inconsistent and with little thought given to their negative effects on society and state institutions. At the same time, these statements indicate a lack of basic knowledge about the national security policy planning process as well as the role of existing legislation and key agencies in this domain.

For example, the Security Doctrine simply does not even exist in the list of national-level conceptual documents,¹ neither at the legislative nor practical levels, not to mention the issue of its development. Leaving this aside, the doctrine, in its essence, is completely different from the concept and strategy which have existed for a long time in the process of the planning and the implementation of Georgia's national security policy, both on a practical and a legislative level. It is also hard to understand the claim that "this document (presumably the Security Doctrine) will be completed in the near future" as Russia's military aggression in Ukraine and its aftermath will radically change not only Georgia's but at the very least the European and Euro-Atlantic security environment and therefore requires a fundamental review of the conceptual documents related to national security issues that already exist or are under development.

Also, information about "the security council and, furthermore, even a stronger composition than the Council" meeting with the Prime Minister is at the very least confusing. According to Article 19³ of the Law of Georgia on the Rule of National Security Policy Planning and Coordination, "by the decision of the Prime Minister of Georgia, if necessary, other persons who are not permanent members of the Council may be invited to the meeting." In other words, the Prime Minister has the discretion to invite anyone he deems competent to a meeting of the National Security Council.

In fairness, it should be noted that the Prime Minister, of course, can discuss national security issues beyond the format of the Security Council meeting; however, in such a case the questions arise:

Which state institution prepares information on the issues to be discussed by the Prime Minister, analyzes them and provides assessments?

¹ Law of Georgia on National Security Policy Planning and Coordination, Article 15 – National-level conceptual documents.

After the discussion on security matters between the Prime Minister and members of his cabinet, which state institution coordinates the implementation of the decisions among relevant agencies as well as the necessary practical measures and works to identify issues that will be problematic in this process and tries to adapt to the new realities?

Both under Georgian law and with its competence, such an institution is the National Security Council Apparatus and without its involvement, it is unclear how security issues are discussed and decisions implemented.

Practice of National Security Policy Planning in Georgia

Unfortunately, war brings human casualties and at the same time it is the most serious test for a country's national security system. The last time Georgia experienced this was in August 2008 during the Russian military aggression when Georgia's national security system was at the very least [inadequately prepared](#).

After the military aggression in August 2008, the Office of the National Security Council of Georgia, with the help of partners, launched a process aimed at identifying and correcting shortcomings in the national security architecture of Georgia.² Without going into the technical details, the main result of this process has been to increase coordination between the agencies involved in the security policy planning process and also to increase their knowledge of security policy planning.

The next step was to update the practical part of security policy planning which included the development of national-level concept papers in the inter-agency working format with the coordination of the National Security Council Apparatus.

First of all, the 2010-2013 Georgian Threat Assessment Document was developed which was [approved](#) by the President of Georgia in September 2010. Following this document, the National Security Concept of Georgia was also developed which was [approved](#) by the Parliament of Georgia in December 2011.

Consequently, by that time some progress, albeit insufficient, was made in the planning of national security policy, requiring further refinement and development. The Georgian Dream, which came to power in Georgia after the 2012 parliamentary elections, decided to establish a parallel council, as the responsibility for security policy shifted to the Georgian prime minister under the new constitution, but at the same time the Security Council remained the advisory body for Georgian president. As a result, the State Security and Crisis Management Council was [established](#) in early 2014 and national security policy planning was passed to the [apparatus](#) of this new council.

² A Project for the Georgian Security Sector Review - Final Report, Atlantic Council of Georgia, 2014, p. 38.

The Office of the State Security and Crisis Management Council, in the format of an interagency working group, has updated the Threat Assessment Document and the new edition - The Threat Assessment Document of Georgia for 2015-2018 - [was approved](#) in the fall of 2015. [The National Cyber Security Strategy of Georgia for 2017-2018](#) and [the National Disaster Risk Reduction Strategy of Georgia for 2017-2020](#) were also developed.

However, the national security concept, which is one of the main national level documents, has not been renewed while it should have been updated right after the threat assessment document.

By the decision of the Government of Georgia, the State Security and Crisis Management Council was [abolished](#) In December 2017. After the presidential elections in December 2018, a new constitution came into force in Georgia at which point the National Security Council under the President was [dismantled](#). Consequently, there was no agency left in Georgia that would act as a security policy planner and coordinator at the national level with its institutional arrangement, institutional experience and commitment.

National Security Council

Later, the Georgian government decided to set up a new agency tasked with planning and coordinating security policy at the national level. As a result, the new National Security Council and its Apparatus were [established](#) as an advisory body to the Prime Minister of Georgia in April 2019.

Creating a new council was undoubtedly the right decision but its institutional arrangement was wrong. In particular, in contrast to the widely established international practice according to which the Secretary of the Council is an independent political figure who usually assumes the function of National Security Advisor, the functions of the secretary are assumed by one of its members in the current model of the National Security Council of Georgia.

On the one hand, this makes the work of the Council less efficient because its secretary, who also runs one of the agencies in the security architecture of Georgia, already has a great responsibility within its competence. Combining these two responsibilities does not contribute to the effective management of the National Security Council Office. On the other hand, impartiality should be a key feature of the Council and its Apparatus which is one of the most important prerequisites for national security policy planning. If the head of any agency assumes the function of the secretary of the council, impartiality will be a priori in jeopardy.

As for the activities of the Council and its Office in terms of national security policy planning, the situation here is also quite unfavorable. A few months after the creation of the new council on November 13, 2019, the need to update national-level conceptual documents in the field of security [was discussed](#) at a meeting of the National Security Council. In this regard, the update of the Georgian Threat Assessment Document and the Georgian National Security Concept were rightly prioritized.

However, these documents have not been updated to this day. It had its objective reason as well. In particular, after the spread of the coronavirus, the Council's Office, its infrastructure, as well as other government agencies, largely switched to the task of preventing the spread of the pandemic. Nevertheless, probably after more than two years it should have been possible to make more progress in terms of updating the aforementioned documents. This is even more so when the progress in developing concept papers in various fields has indeed been apparent. For example, strategies for [cyber security](#), the [fight against organized crime](#) and [the reduction of chemical, biological, radiation and nuclear threats](#) have been updated.

According to [official information](#) released after the meeting of the National Security Council on December 13, 2021, the submission for approval of the final version of the new National Security Concept to the Parliament was planned in February 2022. In addition, update of the Threat Assessment Document was also planned in the first quarter of 2022.

[A meeting was held](#) on January 31, 2021 between the Office of the National Security Council and the representatives of various non-governmental organizations and academic circles, unveiling the draft of the new National Security Concept. According to the meeting-related information, intensive cooperation with civil society and foreign partners was planned prior to sending the document to the Parliament of Georgia for approval. This collaboration involved receiving recommendations and opinions from the expert community on a new national security concept draft which is a commendable practice.

However, before sending the final version of the new National Security Concept to the parliament, Russia started the military intervention in Ukraine. Consequently, an event of such magnitude took place, and is still unfolding, that will lead to significant changes in both the regional and international security environment. Therefore, Georgia, like many other countries, will have to take these circumstances into account while planning its own security policy, reflecting them in one way or another in the national-level conceptual documents. Against this background, no matter how banal it may sound, the working version of the new National Security Concept is already outdated and requires fundamental revision.

In addition, it is unclear why it was decided to revise the National Security Concept first instead of the Threat Assessment Document. First of all, the already established practice was to start with the Threat Assessment Document. Even if this were not the case, we should consider it more appropriate to start updating the conceptual documents of the national security policy with the Threat Assessment Document as it is a much more important document in terms of content and practicality and both the National Security Concept and other security strategies should be based upon it.