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# **GLOBAL SECURITY GOVERNANCE AT WORK: THE CASE OF 2008 RUSSIA-GEORGIA CONFLICT**

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## **GLOBAL SECURITY GOVERNANCE AT WORK: THE CASE OF 2008 RUSSIA-GEORGIA CONFLICT<sup>2</sup>**

This paper concentrates on the activities of different actors on the international arena in the area of security, their cooperation with each other and the overall role diplomatic activities play in the twenty-first century global security governance. After the two world wars the international community adopted the principle of collective defence and tried to establish a comprehensive multilevel international security system headed by the UN. Nation-states ceased to be the only actors participating in the international relations, instead they acquired the role of the smallest elements in a global UN-system, often linked together by regional intergovernmental organisations (ROs) to build smaller regional subsystems. On top of that, they still enjoyed all the powers they had as sovereign states. Given the non-hierarchical character of the described system the functions of its components often overlapped and intertwined. With the rising involvement of non-state actors, the system is as intricate as ever. For the system to be effective, it is very important that all the actors are able to participate in the governance processes adequately and equitably. In the age of urgent security challenges, the response has to be quick and concerted. In the present paper, we provide a detailed analysis of the activities of different actors directed at resolving an interstate conflict. We chose to focus on the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict in South Ossetia, in which directly or indirectly was involved a whole bunch of intergovernmental organisations (CSTO, OSCE, SCO, UN, EU, NATO), sovereign state and non-state actors. It is particularly remarkable that despite the fact that both states were members of the UN and a number of ROs, which should have been enough to ensure proper cooperation, there were still organisations and institutions involved neither of the states were members of, as, for example, the EU. Thus, in regard to the activities of different actors the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict is illustrative of at least two phenomena: (i) actors trying to exert influence beyond the territory of their concern (ii) actors trying to exert influence beyond their policy domain. Using case-study approach, the paper will present an investigation of these two phenomena and the logic behind them. We will scrutinise the actual way the conflict was handled and what role each of the actors involved played in resolving the conflict in order to determine why they chose to participate

in the first place, to define their goals and objectives and to estimate the influence each of them had on the outcome and the general ability of the existing system to provide a concerted response to the challenges of global security despite coinciding scopes. The findings of this study will help to draw conclusions about the role of different players in the global security governance and evaluate the efficiency of the existing global governance mechanisms.

**Key words:** global governance   conflict resolution   security governance   Russia   Georgia

**JEL classification:** Z00

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## Introduction

After the two World Wars the international community adopted the principle of collective defence and tried to establish a comprehensive multilevel international security system headed by the UN. Nation-states ceased to be the only actors participating in the international relations, instead they acquired the role of the smallest elements in a global UN-system, often linked together by regional intergovernmental organisations (ROs) to build smaller regional subsystems. On top of that, they still enjoyed all the powers they had as sovereign states. Given the non-hierarchical character of the described system the functions of its components often overlapped and intertwined. With the rising involvement of non-state actors, the system is as intricate as ever. As Bühl and Rittberger (2001) point out, for the system to be effective, it is very important that all the actors are able to participate in the governance processes adequately and equitably. In the age of urgent security challenges, the response has to be quick and concerted.

This paper provides a detailed analysis of the activities of different actors directed at resolving an interstate conflict. We chose to focus on the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict in South Ossetia, in which directly or indirectly was involved a whole bunch of intergovernmental organisations (CSTO, OSCE, SCO, UN, EU, NATO), sovereign state and non-state actors. It is particularly remarkable that despite the fact that both states were members of the UN and a number of ROs, which should have been enough to ensure proper cooperation, there were still organisations and institutions involved neither of the states were members of, as, for example, the EU. Thus, in regard to the activities of different actors the 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict is illustrative of at least two phenomena: (i) actors trying to exert influence beyond the territory of their concern (ii) actors trying to exert influence beyond their policy domain. Using case-study approach, the paper presents an investigation of these two phenomena and the logic behind them.

The paper is structured as follows: in the first part we describe the conflict's background and scrutinise the actual way the conflict was handled; the second part shows what role each of the actors involved played in resolving the conflict; the third part discusses the implications of the 2008 regarding the ability of the existing system to provide a concerted response. Section 4 concludes.

# 1 Conflict overview

The conflict over South Ossetia is one of those conflicts that were contained during the Soviet rule, but spiralled out of control once the Soviet Union fell. The roots of the conflict stretch back into the indefinite past and revolve around the question most territorial conflicts share - who was the first to inhabit the land (Sammut and Cvetkovski 1996).

When the Red Army occupied Georgia, South Ossetia was assigned a status of Autonomous Oblast within the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic. The conflict was suppressed for decades, but as the Soviet central authorities became weaker, national aspirations amongst South Ossetians grew stronger. In 1989 South Ossetians asked the Supreme Council of Georgia for an upgrade of their status as an 'Autonomous Oblast' to that of an 'Autonomous Republic', but the Georgian Council declared the claim illegal. After some administrative-level confrontation with the Georgian authorities, on 20 September 1990 South Ossetia declared independence from Tbilisi as the South Ossetian Democratic Republic, to which Georgians reacted by completely abolishing South Ossetia's autonomy. A series of violent incidents that followed soon evolved into a full-blown war that devastated the region until in June 1992 Russia managed to broker a ceasefire known as the 1992 Sochi Peace Agreement.

The agreement established a joint peacekeeping force (JPKF) comprising three members with equal representation - Russian, Georgian and North Ossetian battalions - as well as a Joint Control Commission (JCC), a quadripartite commission including representatives from Russia, North Ossetia, South Ossetia and Georgia. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) joined the peacekeeping operation later in 1992, setting up a mission in Georgia to monitor the activities of the joint peacekeeping forces.

The ceasefire was relatively successful and the conflict remained frozen for more than a decade. Although there was no substantial military confrontation, during all those years very little progress was made in the conflict resolution efforts. Rivalries resumed in 2004, when the newly elected Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili announced the restoration of Georgia's territorial integrity his top priority<sup>3</sup> and attempted to change the status-quo. The tensions escalated to a brief armed confrontation that ended with a new Russia-mediated ceasefire achieved at an emergency meeting of the JCC. But the role of Russia as a mediator in this conflict was becoming as questionable as ever.

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<sup>3</sup> Saakashvili says Territorial Integrity is a Top Priority. Available at: <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=6661>

In the view of pro-Western inclinations of the Saakashvili administration Russia was seeking ways to assert its influence in the post-Soviet area. As relations between Georgia and Russia were going through a series of diplomatic crises (Allison 2008), the disputed regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia turned to an arena of Russian-Georgian confrontation with Russia increasing its presence in the region and Georgia building up its military with the help of its Western allies (Cheterian, 2009). That the situation irrevocably turned to much more than a local dispute aggravated the already complicated conflict of incompatible interests created by the collision between territorial integrity and the right to self-determination, with no foreseeable opportunity for unraveling this tangle.

After the new ceasefire was achieved, Saakashvili resumed its efforts to 'unfreeze' the situation, proposing in 2005 at the session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) a new US-backed and OSCE-supported peace plan that offered South Ossetia broad autonomy. South Ossetians, who for almost 15 years had been de facto separated from Georgia, chose to decline the proposal, which would have brought an end to their long-cherished aspirations of becoming an independent state.

The following few years were marked by periodic flare-ups in tension that reached their peak on the night of 7 August, when Georgia started a military operation to take control over its breakaway republic. On August 8 Russian President Medvedev denounced Georgia's incursion into South Ossetia and declared that the the aggressor would be duly punished<sup>4</sup>. To achieve this goal, earlier that day Moscow launched a large-scale military counterattack. By August 10 Russian troops had retaken Tskhinvali and controlled much of South Ossetia. They later extended their offensive and proceeded deeper into Georgia.

A six-point ceasefire was mediated by France on the behalf of the EU<sup>5</sup> on 15 August, 2008. The ceasefire provided for: 1. no recourse to the use of force; 2. a lasting cessation of hostilities; 3. free access for humanitarian aid; 4. the return of German forced to their usual barracks; 5. the return of Russian forced to the positions they held prior the outbreak of hostilities; 6. international discussions on security and stability arrangements for Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

The tardy withdrawal of Russian troops continued to occupy the international community for a while, but large-scale violence was successfully stopped.

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<sup>4</sup> VESTI channel. Video available at <http://korrespondent.net/video/world/547643-medvedev-o-yuzhnoj-osetii-vinovnye-ponesut-zasluzhennoe-nakazanie>

<sup>5</sup> France was holding the EU rotating presidency

## 2 International involvement

Both Georgia and Russia are members of multiple international organisations. However, not all of them chose to involve in the conflict resolution and not all of those involved have either Russia or Georgia as a member.

### EU

Although neither Russia nor Georgia are members of the European Union, the EU's involvement in the conflict settlement per se was not at all out of order. Both countries have Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCA) with the European Union<sup>6</sup>. In 2005, following the closure of the OSCE Border Monitoring Mission due to a Russian veto, the EU launched within the framework of the EUSR set up a small Border Support Team (initially consisting of only three experts) to monitor the Georgian-Russian border. Since 2006 Georgia has been included in the EU's European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)<sup>7</sup>, a framework for cooperation and promotion of prosperity, security and stability throughout the EU's neighbourhood. In the text of the ENP Action Plan, a document which lays out the strategic objectives of the cooperation between Georgia and the EU, promotion of peaceful resolution is listed as one of the eight priorities of cooperation and the EU commits to 'support the settlement of Georgia's internal conflicts, drawing on the instruments at the EU's disposal, and in close consultation with the UN and OSCE'<sup>8</sup>. This demonstrates that whilst the European Union was inclined to participate in promoting peace in South Caucasus, it was not the primary mediator conflict resolution actor in the region.

Nevertheless, when the fighting broke out, the European Union quickly took an active stand showing that it was not prepared to stand idly by while the conflict in its neighbourhood was impairing the regional security. On 9 August French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner together with the OSCE Chairman-in-Office and Finnish Foreign Minister Alexander Stubb flew to Tbilisi to start negotiating a ceasefire with the Georgian side (Forsberg and Seppo 2010). The European Union

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<sup>6</sup> Decision 97/800/EC of 30 October 1997 for the Russian Federation and 99/515/EC of 31 May 1999 for Georgia

<sup>7</sup> Georgia shares a maritime border with Romania and Bulgaria

<sup>8</sup> see EU/GEORGIA ACTION PLAN

reasserted its role as a mediator and put all the other international actors into the shade when French President Nicolas Sarkozy personally went to Moscow and Tbilisi and on August 12 secured a ceasefire agreement.

In september 2008 the EU appointed a new European Union Security Representative (EUSR) for the crisis in Georgia<sup>9</sup>, whose mandate included preparation for international talks and facilitating the implementation of the peace agreements and established a civilian monitoring mission (EUMM)<sup>10</sup>, which to date remains the only international presence on the ground.

## OSCE

### OSCE Mission to Georgia

The OSCE was one of the first international organisations directly involved in promoting a peaceful settlement to the Georgian-Ossetian conflict. The OSCE Mission to Georgia, established as early as in 1992, aimed at promoting dialogue between the conflict parties. In 1994 the mandate considerably expanded to include in relation to the Georgian-Ossetian conflict amongst other goals enhancing security and stability by monitoring the situation on the ground (the main object of monitoring being the Joint Peacekeeping Forces) and reporting it to the OSCE participating States<sup>11</sup>. In regard to the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict, the OSCE Mission was meant to support the UN-led negotiating process. The new objectives also entailed throughout-the-country activities aimed at promoting respect for human rights and assisting in democratic institution-building.

When in 1999 the mandate further expanded to include border monitoring, the OSCE Mission launched a Border Monitoring Operation<sup>12</sup>, which initially covered only the border between Georgia and the Chechen republic of the Russian Federation, but later grew to include the border between Georgia and the Ingush Republic<sup>13</sup> as well as the Georgian-Dagestan border<sup>14</sup>, summing up in total

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<sup>9</sup> COUNCIL Joint Action 2008/760/CFSP of 25 September 2008 appointing the European Union Special Representative for the crisis in Georgia

<sup>10</sup> Council Joint Action 2008/736/CFSP of 15 September 2008 on the European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia

<sup>11</sup> The Georgian-Ossetian Conflict. Available at <http://www.osce.org/georgia-closed/44630>

<sup>12</sup> PC.DEC/334

<sup>13</sup> PC.DEC/450

<sup>14</sup> PC.DEC/523

to 280 kilometres of the Georgian-Russian border. On 31 December 2004, after Russia refused to prolong the operation, the Border Monitoring Operation was closed due to the expiry of its mandate.

After the August hostilities in South Ossetia, Russia was strongly opposed to the renewal of the OSCE Mission to Georgia's mandate. On 31 December 2008 the mandate of the Mission to Georgia expired. The mandate of 20 unarmed military monitoring officers deployed to Georgia for a six-month period by the Permanent Council's decision on 19 August 2008<sup>15</sup> in order to monitor the compliance with the six-point agreement was extended in February 2009<sup>16</sup> to finally expire in June 2009.

## OSCE and Conflict Resolution Process

Despite the seeming inactivity of the OSCE prior and during the August hostilities, the organisation was aware of the growing tensions in the Georgian-Ossetian conflict zone and a number of OSCE officials were engaged in diplomatic efforts aimed at preventing the outbreak of violence. Already in April the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Finnish Foreign Minister Alexander Stubb, was expressing his concern over the situation in South Ossetia and calling on the conflicting parties for dialogue. On 30 April he speaks on the phone with Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, urging them to de-escalate tensions in the region. On 7 July Ambassador Heikki Talvitie, Special Envoy of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, goes to Moscow to discuss the situation in South Ossetia with Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Grushko. A few days later Ambassador Talvitie travels to Tbilisi and Tskhinvali to meet Georgian key officials and the Commander of the Joint Peacekeeping Forces. On 14 July during a special meeting the matter is discussed in the OSCE Permanent Council. The OSCE continues expressing its concern and calling on the conflicting parties for immediate dialogue until hostilities break out. On 8 August OSCE Permanent Council holds a special meeting on the situation in Georgia. Interestingly, even at this point the OSCE still seems to maintain its position at the helm of the conflict settlement process. According to the 'European Union statement on the escalation of the situation in South Ossetia (Georgia)' from this meeting, containing the following declaration – 'The European Union fully supports the endeavors of the Chairman in Office of the OSCE, including those of its field mission,

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<sup>15</sup> PC.DEC/861

<sup>16</sup> PC.DEC/883



and calls upon all parties to cooperate with it without delay’ – the EU has not yet assumed the reins of the primary mediator. However, a few days later Alexander Stubb of the OSCE and French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner, representing the EU, both go to Tbilisi in what appears to be a joint effort to broker a ceasefire. They present to Mikheil Saakashvili a OSCE/EU-drafted four-point ceasefire plan, which Georgian president signs. On presenting the plan to Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, the leading role in the negotiations goes over to the European Union as French President Nicolas Sarkozy personally comes to Moscow to negotiate an agreement.

## UN

The United Nations Security Council reacted to the outbreak of hostilities remarkably fast. It met for the first time at Russia’s request on the night of 7 August and continued meeting, alternating between private consultations, closed and open meetings, almost daily until the French-brokered ceasefire. The Council was deeply divided over whether to pursue any formal actions as well as the nature of the possible options<sup>17</sup>, even when the conflict reached Abkhazia, where the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) had been present since 1993. Nevertheless, the frequency and intensity of the meetings demonstrates that the United Nations contributed to the cessation of the fighting at least by providing a platform for all the actors to express their views.

## NATO

Official relations between Georgia and NATO have been gradually increasing since 1992, when Georgia became a member of North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC). After the 2003 Rose Revolution, which brought to power pro-western Mikheil Saakashvili, the relations between Georgia and NATO drew substantially closer, as the Georgian authorities as well as the population of Georgia<sup>18</sup> developed aspirations for acceding to NATO. In 2006 during an informal meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the NATO member-states it was decided to invite Georgia to engage

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<sup>17</sup> UN Security Council Remains Deadlocked Over South Ossetia. Deutsche Welle, 09.08.2008.  
<http://www.dw.de/dw/article/0,,3550565,00.html>

<sup>18</sup> A non-binding referendum held in Georgia on 5 January 2008 resulted in 77% of voters supporting NATO accession

in an Intensified Dialogue on NATO Membership issues. At the consultations held within the frame of Intensified Dialogue the issue of conflict resolution was repeatedly touched upon. At the Bucharest Summit in April 2008 the Allies officially recognised Georgia's aspirations and agreed that Georgia will eventually become a member of NATO. Nevertheless, Georgia was not invited to participate in the Membership Action Plan (MAP).

Despite close cooperation with Georgia, NATO's reaction to the August events came down to two unseasonable meetings: the first one was held on 12 August (with the EU represented), when not only the hostilities but also the international efforts to stop them were fairly under way, and the second one was held on 19 August 2008, when the ceasefire had already been agreed upon and signed by both parties to conflict. Beside verbally expressing its deep concern over the armed conflict between Russia and Georgia and at most finitely deep respect for Georgia's territorial integrity, NATO agreed to support and assist Georgia in its post-conflict recovery.

## USA

Diplomatic relations between the United States and Georgia, established in 1992 soon after Georgia had declared its independence, are best described as close. The US has greatly contributed to Georgian democratic reforms. Beside bilateral cooperation in different areas and American diplomatic backing, Georgia enjoys US large-scale assistance, including military and security assistance.

Due to such close relations, when the conflict between Georgia and Russia broke out, Washington could not openly act as a mediator because of its pro-Georgian bias (Tocci 2008), but in the view of US interests simply standing aside was also unacceptable. During the crisis the White House reiterated its support for Georgia and its democratic government, strongly denouncing Russia's actions. The US chose to participate in the conflict-settlement process via diplomatic channels. The US President and senior officials were constantly in touch with their Russian, Georgian and also French colleagues. Nichol (2008) mentions the following phone conversations: between US President Bush and Russian Prime Minister Putin on August 8; between Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and US Secretary of state Condoleezza Rice on August 10 and between US Vice President Cheney and Georgian President Saakashvili on the same day. On August

13 President Bush announced that he was sending Secretary Rice to France for talks with President Nicolas Sarkozy and then to Georgia, where she arrived on August 15, determined to get Russian troops out of Georgia.

Because of the US constant warnings and threats to Russia, the US diplomatic intervention as a third party was most likely meant to take the form of ‘power’ mediation, which was not backed by other international actors<sup>19</sup>. Although the US is to be praised for its intensive engagement, its efforts for peaceful settlement of the conflict were mostly confined to diplomatic confrontation with Russia, rather than facilitating an agreement.

### 3 Preventing the conflict

One can distinguish several worrying features in the dynamics of the 2008 events with regards to conflict prevention. First, despite the multitude of actors guarding the peace in the Caucasus region, the international community was unable to prevent the outbreak of fighting, and not for the lack of warning signs indicating the possibility of such a course of events (Antonenko 2008). In the Georgian-Russian relations, the year of 2008 was marked with multiple episodes of heated rhetoric and verbal aggression. The tension on the ground was increasing no less than in the area of diplomacy. In July 2008 Russia conducted large-scale military exercises tagged ‘Caucasus 2008’, to which Georgia reacted by joint US-Georgian military exercises ‘Immediate Response 2008’. The polarisation between the parties and the bellicose atmosphere reigning in the region suggest that an escalation of confrontation to the level of bloody conflict which the world witnessed in August, only some weeks after the muscle-demonstrating exercises, did not, or at least, should not have come as a complete surprise and caught the peace-promoting actors off guard. It can be argued that overcrowdedness on the conflict resolution arena caused the dilution of responsibility, so that even those actors that were directly or by proxy involved in the problems of the region’s security failed to give the situation the necessary attention, knowing that the region was not void of institutional presence. That the war did erupt shows that whatever efforts based on whatever reasons the international community made to address the rising tension in the region, it was not enough to prevent the conflict from turning into violent.

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/32664dba-6aca-11dd-b613-0000779fd18c.html>

Second, the same overcrowdedness in the region may have undermined international capacity not only to prevent the crisis, but also to manage it. In their attempts to deal with the crisis once it had been unleashed the international actors were considerably slackened by the lack of previously assigned and sharply defined roles and the inability to distribute them on the spot in a timely manner. The mediation efforts started as a combined enterprise mounted by the OSCE Chairman-in-Office and French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner, but ultimately the ceasefire was almost single-handedly secured by French President Sarkozy. Furthermore, according to the UN Security Council Update Report from 12 August<sup>20</sup> the option ‘to pursue the French draft resolution’ was still under consideration, with other options being discussed as well. When it came to the roles and functions of the involved actors, all united by a shared interest of stopping the violence, the international community tarried in indecision.

Third, the international community was divided not only over *who* should be the primary mediator, but also over *how* the conflict was to be mediated in terms of approach, in other words, whether it should be soft or hard power and which political, economic or even military measures might be taken. The lack of common approach made the conflict all the more difficult to resolve because it involved former poles of a once bipolar world, each with its own geopolitical agenda. Even when the ceasefire had finally been reached, the choice of leverage to ensure compliance with the ceasefire provisions was deeply limited by the actors’ own security interests, such as that of not alienating Russia towards themselves. Neglecting geopolitical dimensions of a seemingly localised conflict when committing to conflict resolution in the region imposed considerable diplomatic limits to conflict resolution efforts.

These all appear to be the drawbacks of not dealing with the scenarios the conflict might follow proactively. Nevertheless, it is important not to ignore the fact that restoring human safety is the most important reason for diplomatic intervention, and in August 2008 the violence was stopped relatively quickly. Whether it could have been avoided we may never come to know.

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UPDATE REPORT NO.2, GEORGIA, 12 AUGUST 2008. Available at <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org>

## 4 Conclusion

The contemporary security system is characterised by both globalisation, which increases the actors' interdependence, and regionalisation (Vorkunova 2007), as the actors create new frameworks or broaden the scope of the existing ones in order to ensure effective cooperation in collectively defending their region's internal and external security against shared or common threats. With different, but intertwined levels of security (national, regional, international) and overlapping membership in regional organisations the existing system is complex both vertically and horizontally.

The 2008 war has put to test the ability of the existing system with its multitude of diplomatic actors to provide a concerted response, and not to some new unexplored global challenge, but to a sadly familiar and quite conventional military clash between two states. Although the diplomatic efforts to mediate the conflict have been successful, the Georgian-Russian conflict revealed the lack of coordination and the lack of common approach within the international community.

The actors who were supposed to guard the region's security, proved to be either too biased to engage in either peacekeeping or mediation operations, too concentrated on structural conflict prevention to prevent or resolve the conflict operationally, or for some reason unacceptable in the role of mediator to one or the other conflict parties (Grono 2010). The European Union, which assertively stepped up to the challenge of mediating the conflict, proved to be more acceptable to conflict parties and the international community than the traditionally involved the OSCE and the UN, not to mention all the other organisations for which the conflict would be right in their midst and not just on their doorstep.

The challenge for the international community is not only to ensure proper coherent cooperation, with actors having cut-out functional domains, but also to be able to quickly provide a concerted multilateral response or to choose a diplomatic actor to speak the global community's mind on its behalf and let them do what they have been trusted with. In other words, the new security governance with its multitude of involved actors wherever something occurs has to take choice when to step up and when to let go.

In case of the Georgian-Russian conflict, the violence was stopped by the parties' disinclination to engage in a long-term war and by the French readiness to act as a mediator. This might not work every time.

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