



Weekly Briefing

**Lithuania external relations briefing:
Lithuania looks to enforce the red lines for Russia
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The recent month saw an unprecedented set of events to evolve that brought the region to the situation reminiscent of the peak of the Cold War period when tensions between the great powers threatened peace. On 17 April, the Czech Republic announced the discovered circumstances that point out Russia's foreign intelligence's direct involvement in detonating the munition depots on the territory of a sovereign country in 2014, which was the time when Russia's backed military push into Ukraine's Donbas region had unfolded.

A tough-speaking diplomatic row escalated with the reciprocal demonstrative measures of sending out numerous diplomatic staff from the Czech Republic and the Russian Federation. It triggered similar concerted actions of solidarity from Lithuania and other regional NATO allies. In parallel, the situation deteriorated as Russia amassed a disproportionate number of combat troops along the Ukrainian borders menacing with military action. It led Lithuania's diplomacy to rally the allies for the need to enforce the red lines for Russia.

Below is an overview of the main actions taken by Lithuania in response to the above events to decrease the strategic posture of Russia in the region. It considers the nature, scope, risks and limitations of the diplomatic choices available to address this old-new security challenge from the perspective of a "red lines diplomacy".

The security analysts agree that the end of the Cold War decreased the certainty and the effectiveness of the traditional means of deterrence due to the demise of one of two superpowers. During the stand-off between the United States and the Soviet Union, both countries developed an understanding of deterrence and its role in preventing war with one another. Yet, with the end of the competition, the concept of deterrence, which took a broader international dimension, lost its edge. The emerging regional powers challenged the superiority of the US, which had difficulty in deterring them directly. Hence, the need emerged for extended deterrence where regional allies could act on behalf of the remaining superpower to prevent or decrease the possibilities and the resolve of the adversaries to take the least unfavourable action against the superpower. The definition of the "red lines" (that came into practice during the Middle East crisis in the 1970s when Israel acted as a pursuer of the red lines) became the foreign policy tool for implementing the extended deterrence.

As defined by Bruno Tertrais, the senior expert in the international defence policy community, the existing definition of the "red lines" is as follows. The red lines manipulate an

adversary's intent through (primarily public) statements for deterrence purposes, referring to the deliberate crossing of a certain threshold by an adversary and relevant counteraction if this threshold is crossed. Since it is a dynamic process, the scope and the limit of existing threshold points often is obscured and could be fixed on a more permanent basis only by mutual recognition of threats and risks that the crossing of the perceived and/or actual threshold could bring.

Lithuania has been acutely aware that its national security has overwhelmingly depended on the clearly defined "red lines" that separated the former occupying power (the Soviet Union) from the guarantors of Lithuania's independence (the United States and the transatlantic allies, members of NATO). However, the "red lines" in the region have changed as the geopolitical situation evolved and the state-system evolved in a multipolar world. The initial "red lines" on the former Soviet territories had been crossed was in the 1990s, when Russia had breached the borders of the newly established post-Soviet states of Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan. The "buffer" zones emerged there based on the permanent Russian military presence in the contested regions of Transnistria, Abkhazia, most recently, Nagorno-Karabakh. The intermediary "red lines" had been penetrated in 2014, when Russia, in breach of the 1975 Helsinki Accords and numerous international agreements, occupied Crimea and other parts of Ukraine. Additional "buffer zone" emerged behind the "control lines" along the so-called "ceasefire" line as defined in the Minsk-2 agreement.

In both cases, Russia had crossed the red lines because the opposing powers had not clearly defined the consequences of their crossing. These "red lines" also failed because the perceived penalty for crossing the red lines had not been superior to the potential benefit of not crossing them. One can even argue that these were not the "real" red lines as there was no sufficient resolve to enforce them from the start. Equally so, the entrance of the Eastern and Central countries into NATO had not been a real "red line" for Russia, which had not perceived their membership as strategically significant as long as the deployment of ballistic missiles remained under control. The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, which banned land-based ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, and missile launchers with ranges of 500–1,000 kilometres for short medium-range and 1,000–5,500 km for intermediate-range missiles, ended in 2019 after the US and Russia pulled out of the treaty. It has changed the overall security situation, with Ukraine announcing that it had the right now to develop intermediate-range missiles to counter the threats posed by Russia's missile systems set in Crimea.

Thus, the red lines had been redrawn in 2019 by the US and Russia, with the involvement of allied countries. According to the public announcements, the red lines for Russia are the

direct or indirect efforts to extend deterrence on the territory of Ukraine and Georgia, which have been aspiring to become the NATO countries. The red lines for the US are the direct or indirect efforts by Russia and its proxies to overcome Ukraine and take full control of the Black Sea, which is key for ensuring the security of six NATO countries next to the sea.

Lithuania has taken a very active position in rallying the EU and NATO countries in support of enforcing the red lines for Russia. Firstly, Lithuania's diplomacy vociferously supported the Czech Republic during the diplomatic clash with Russia and on 23 April sent out two Russian diplomats. Also, Latvia, Estonia, Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria joined the show of solidarity. Secondly, Lithuania created a diplomatic alliance to support Ukraine during the build-up of Russian military presence on the Ukrainian borders. Amidst the heightened tensions, on 15 April, Lithuania's, Latvia's and Estonia's foreign ministers went to Kyiv to express their support for the red lines – the Ukrainian borders controlled by the Ukrainian military. Thirdly, Lithuania has endeavoured to raise the support among the EU Member States to endorse the red lines concerning the Ukrainian-Russian conflict asking for a tougher line on Moscow and a greater show of unity and solidarity.

Lithuania's President Gitanas Nausėda, participating at the Bucharest Nine (B9) virtual summit, addressed the B9 leaders, the US President Joe Biden and NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, by stating that "Russia remains the key long-term threat to NATO". Lithuania's President pointed out that "Russia's unprecedented military build-up on the Ukrainian border only confirmed that it did not intend to abandon aggressive behaviour and continued to threaten its sovereignty and territorial integrity to intimidate neighbouring countries pointed out that Russia's growing military threats could only be offset by sufficient NATO defense and deterrence capabilities on the eastern flank".

President Nausėda urged to support the membership of Ukraine and Georgia in NATO. Both countries are the Enhanced Opportunities Partners of the North-Atlantic Alliance, which provides a preparatory step towards closer integration of those countries into NATO. Lithuania has launched a bid to host the 2023 NATO Summit in Vilnius, which could offer the opportunity to more comprehensively address the security concerns of Ukraine and Georgia within the security architecture of NATO by taking a step further towards membership. The President expressed hope that "principled decisions would be made at the NATO summit in Brussels next June, which were necessary for the Alliance to adapt to the ongoing changes in the complex security environment and ensure indivisible collective defence".

The efforts to commit the EU and NATO allies to enforce the red lines in Ukraine have had a mixed record so far. The "red lines" have been constantly challenged and tested through a series of diplomatic clashes and daily military encounters between belligerents in the Donbas region. Even with the clearly defined and mutually recognized red lines in place, the situation might not automatically change due to the multiple actors involved, each projecting its version of what the unbreachable red lines constitute. By its very nature, the red line diplomacy involves periodic testing of the red lines that carry the accompanying risks of miscalculation and unexpected escalation. More so, the drawing of red lines may encourage an adversary from acting below the line or "below the threshold". An actor might consider that all actions are permitted, providing that the red line is not crossed.

Hence, the analysts argue that the diplomats should extremely carefully draw the red lines to avoid exacerbating the situations that might lead to regional military conflicts or a war on a global scale. They should include either the clearly defined, mutually recognizable circumstances and the consequences while projecting a clear sense of determination on the red lines' defender. So far, by amassing troops along the Ukrainian borders, Russia has demonstrated a "casus belli" that is an occasion for war if the red lines as drawn by Russia are crossed. The determination of the US and the allies to take military action if their drawn red lines are crossed are yet to be demonstrated. Yet there are indications the possibility of the increased NATO presence in the Black Sea could act as a balancing act to keep both the red lines drawn by Russia and the US in place until the next turn. Thus, Lithuania's call to enforce the red lines is, in fact, a call for the status quo.

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