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The Black Sea

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WHAT'S NEXT FOR THE BLACK SEA: PERSPECTIVE FROM REGIONAL PLAYERS

Yar Batoh

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In the aftermath of Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014, the Black Sea region has changed dramatically. Primarily due to changes in Russian, American, and NATO's policies, the region has become much more militarised, and the level of tensions has significantly risen. The analysis of regional players' positions proves that economic, energy, and infrastructure cooperation in the Black Sea is possible, but on crucial issues, the region remains deeply divided. The lack of a uniform approach among the Black Sea NATO members adds even more uncertainty to the puzzle.

Introduction

Importance of words in determining policy rationale is often underestimated. Official statements by high-level officials are a valuable source of information. This study analyses statements of the key policy-makers of the regional players (Russia, Turkey, Romania, Bulgaria, Georgia, and Moldova, as well as the US, the EU, and NATO)¹ in order to examine their interests. Drawing on this analysis and taking into account actions of these players over the last years, I will present a wider view on the situation and perspectives in the Black Sea that can be helpful for the development of a reasonable policy towards the region by the Ukrainian government.

Views from the Capitals

Russia can justly be called the main rule-breaker in the region. After breaking old rules, the Kremlin seemingly wants to establish new ones. Moscow dismisses any discussions about the status of Crimea and would like everybody to ignore the fact of illegal annexation and treat the peninsula as Russian territory. While understanding that this is not going to happen anytime soon, the Russian government prepared the ground for taking the maximum advantage of the resources and geographic location of the peninsula. Russian President Putin claims that Moscow is free to increase military capabilities in Crimea to a sufficient level² and the

1 All relevant statements that have been analysed can be found under the following link:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/11OKzCaQqT0aKx_YnNE1F6e_kePZNoSWC_XMGLM3Yi1U/edit

2 *Большая пресс-конференция Владимира Путина (Vladimir Putin's Big Press-conference)*, Kremlin, 2018 [<http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/59455>, access: 2 March 2020].

Russian parliament adopted legislation to facilitate the extraction of resources from what it considers to be Russia's exclusive economic zone. Similarly, Moscow strives for maintaining its dominance in the Azov Sea. It reiterates that its status should be determined by the Treaty on Cooperation in the Use of the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Strait³, signed in 2003, which excludes the navigation in the Azov Sea from the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea to the disadvantage of Ukraine.



Although Romania does not devote as much attention to BSEC as Russia or Turkey, it still supports economic and infrastructure regional projects

One of the cornerstones of the Russian approach to the region is the idea that only littoral states should guarantee stability and security in the Black Sea. Therefore, Russia strongly opposes both NATO and the US presence in the region – in all domains, from training and patrolling of their navies to the location of a ballistic missile defence system in Romania. Along these lines, Moscow argues that already established formats of cooperation are sufficient for the development of the region and promotes the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) as a counterweight to possible new projects, especially those initiated by the European Union.

In the Kremlin's view, BSEC should serve as a platform for implementation of joint

economic and infrastructure projects. Russia also encourages BSEC to improve ties with non-Western international organisations, e.g. the Silk Road Fund, Asian Bank for Reconstruction and Development. Apart from this, in bilateral meetings Moscow tries to convince leaders of the countries from the region that anti-Russian sanctions should be lifted and, instead, economic cooperation should be boosted. The main Russian offer to these countries is energy projects – not only well-known ones like TurkStream, but also the construction of nuclear plants (Rosatom is already building one in Turkey, while Russia's former Head of Government Medvedev received the assurance from the Bulgarian prime minister that Russia “will have a role in construction of the nuclear power plant”⁴). Last, but not least, Russia actively promotes infrastructure projects, including the Black Sea Ring Highway around the coast of the Black Sea that would connect all countries of the region.

Turkey has lost its military dominance in the region over the past years. Besides, the main focus of its foreign policy is on the Middle East. Nevertheless, Ankara cannot afford to ignore a region where it plays such an important role.

In 2016, Turkish President Erdogan famously stated that due to NATO's inaction the Black Sea had nearly become a Russian lake and called for enhanced Allies' presence⁵, including in the form of a permanent NATO's Black Sea Fleet, proposed by Romania. Since then the situation has changed drastically – Turkey now finds itself in conflict with all major Western players, while drifting closer to Russia, trying to shape post-war

3 Ibid

4 *Медведев към Борисов: Изтребители винаги ще има, важно е да дойде газ и да има електроцентрали (Medvedev to Borisov: There Will Always Be Fighter Jets, It Is Important to Have Gas and Power Plants), “Свободна Европа”, 4 March 2019.*

5 S. Jones, K. Hille, *Russia's Military Ambitions Make Waves in the Black Sea*, “Financial Times”, 13 May 2016.

arrangement in Syria in its favour. In the security domain, Ankara wants to keep its dominance over the Turkish Straits and reiterates the inviolability of the Montreux Convention, even though it is an obstacle for naval presence of their NATO Allies. Turkey does not recognise the annexation of Crimea and presents itself as a protector of the Crimean Tatars, but not at the expense of its cooperation with Russia.

In general, Turkey emphasises the need to boost economic cooperation in the region. It supports all energy projects that could help the country to become a gas hub for the region – including TurkStream and Southern Gas Corridor. Ankara also wants to boost exports to the littoral Black Sea states and build new infrastructure to this end. As well as Russia, Turkey is keen on empowering BSEC and is using it as a platform for joint infrastructure projects (such as the Black Sea Ring Highway).

Volatility of Turkish foreign policy over the recent years should be taken into account. Although there are some long-term reasons for Ankara's drift from the West towards Russia, one cannot exclude the possibility of a 180-degree reversal of Erdogan's position in the future. One of the pretexts for this can be the conflict over Syria, which is already apparent in 2020 with Russia and Turkey accusing each other of violating the agreements and with the fighting between pro-Turkish forces and Syrian government forces backed by Russia.

Romania is a staunch supporter of NATO's enhanced presence in the region. Bucharest perceives Russian threat very seriously and therefore sees powerful Western states

as guarantors of its security. As a result, Romania hosts an American ballistic missile defence system, proposes the establishment of a permanent NATO's Black Sea Fleet, and advocates for a more active involvement of NATO, the US, and the EU in the region. Holding the presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2019, Romanian officials emphasised the need for a better coordination of the European Union and NATO efforts⁶.

Bucharest advocates for a strong deterrent approach towards Russia – in their view, sanctions must be kept in place, while the West should force Russia to withdraw from Crimea and Donbas and should counter Russian militarisation of the Black Sea. One of the important points is the support of NATO's open-door policy towards the Balkan countries, Ukraine, and Georgia. Romania also advocates more Western support for Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia as targets of Russian coercion. Bucharest actively develops cyber security cooperation with Kyiv.

Although Romania does not devote as much attention to BSEC as Russia or Turkey, it still supports economic and infrastructure regional projects. Bucharest promotes better maritime connectivity with Georgia, backs the Black Sea Ring Highway, and together with Turkmenistan has initiated the Caspian Sea–Black Sea Freight Corridor. Akin to many other countries of the region, Romania has plans to develop nuclear energy. However, the Romanian approach is different from that of other countries, as Romanian officials have never mentioned Russia as a potential partner in this sphere; instead, President Klaus Iohannis promotes

6 Address by the President of Romania, Mr. Klaus Iohannis, at the Munich Security Conference, President of Romania, 2019 [<https://www.presidency.ro/en/media/speeches/address-by-the-president-of-romania-mr-klaus-iohannis-at-the-munich-security-conference>, access: 2 March 2020].

cooperation in the peaceful atom with the US – Russia’s main competitor⁷.

Bulgaria also participates in NATO’s Tailored Forward Presence programme and implements the NATO Black Sea Package. In particular, it contributes to the multinational brigade stationed in Romania, conducts exercises together with American soldiers on its territory, and even hosts NATO’s Naval Force Coordination Center. At the same time, unlike Bucharest, Sofia is not an ardent supporter of NATO’s and American naval presence in the region. In December 2018, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Georg Georgiev declared that the Black Sea should remain the sea of peace⁸. Although this call was not addressed directly to either NATO or Russia, Bulgaria’s actions tell us that Sofia would prefer not to provoke Russia with more Allies’ combat ships coming to the Black Sea. Bulgaria blocked the creation of the NATO Black Sea Fleet at the time when even Turkey supported the idea. Besides, Bulgaria maintains a much more friendly approach towards Russia than Romania, NATO, or the US.

Bulgaria promotes economic cooperation with all, but emphasises strongly the need to cooperate with Russia and Turkey, primarily in the energy sphere. It supports both TurkStream and Southern Gas Corridor in hopes to have the extension of both pipelines going through its territory. Also, it welcomes Russian interest in building a nuclear plant and would probably support

the revival of the Southern Stream project if the EU wouldn’t block it. Bulgaria deems Georgia to be another vital partner; it supports its integration to NATO and transport connectivity projects between the two countries and in the region at large.

Sofia has a pragmatic approach towards BSEC and believes that it has to concentrate on fewer priorities, but achieve tangible results. However, it does not want to limit multilateral cooperation in the region solely to BSEC and supports the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative as well as the revival of the Black Sea Synergy programme.

Deepening cooperation with NATO and the US is the main focus of Georgian policy in the region, aimed at greater naval presence of the Allies, more exercises, more military aid, and more political support⁹. Despite having 20% of the territory occupied, Georgia constantly reiterates its commitment to European and Euro-Atlantic integration. For example, during a meeting with Mrs. Rose Gottemoeller, Deputy Secretary General of NATO, in April 2019, President Zourabishvili stated, “There is no alternative to nation’s commitment to join NATO and the EU”.¹⁰

In line with all other Black Sea countries, Georgia supports enhanced economic and infrastructure cooperation in the region but puts more emphasis on EU member states, Romania and Bulgaria. At the 13th Annual Georgia Defence and Security Conference in Batumi, President Zourabichvili mentioned

7 *Press Statement by the President of Romania, Mr. Klaus Iohannis, Following His Visit to Washington, D.C., United States of America*, President of Romania, 2019 [https://www.presidency.ro/en/media/press-statements/press-statement-by-the-president-of-romania-mr-klaus-iohannis-following-his-visit-to-washington-d-c-united-states-of-america, access: 2 March 2020].

8 *Bulgaria and the USA Are Strategic Partners on a Number of Regional and Global Matters*, Bulgarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018 [https://www.mfa.bg/en/news/20237, access: 2 March 2020].

9 *Georgia’s President Aims to Deepen NATO Ties on Black Sea Security*, President of Georgia, 2019 [https://www.president.gov.ge/eng/pressamsakhuri/intervieubi/%E2%80%8Bsaqartvelos-prezidenti-miznad-isakhavs-nato-stan.aspx, access: 2 March 2020].

10 *President Zourabichvili: “No Alternative to Nation’s Commitment to join NATO, EU”*, President of Georgia, 2019 [https://www.president.gov.ge/eng/pressamsakhuri/siakhleebi/%E2%80%8Bsalome-zurabishvili-natosa-davetrokvashirshi-gace.aspx, access: 2 March 2020].

the role of the Black Sea as a hub between the EU and Asia and highlighted the need for “new projects of infrastructure, transport and connectivity linking Georgia more and more directly to its EU partners on the other shore”¹¹. Georgia is eager to take advantage of its status of a transit route from the Caspian Sea to the Black Sea and therefore supports all projects that fall within this framework, e.g. Baku–Tbilisi–Kars (inaugurated in 2017), Southern Gas Corridor, and the Black Sea–Caspian Sea Freight Corridor.

One of the key external players of the region is **NATO**. In the aftermath of Russian aggression against Ukraine in 2014, the organisation reconsidered its role in the Black Sea region. The Alliance has put much effort into strengthening the Eastern Flank through various initiatives, Tailored Forward Presence in the Black Sea being probably the most important one. NATO officials in their speeches have advocated for more involvement of both NATO and the US in the region¹². At the same time, the Allies want to allocate their resources smartly, which is proven by the fact that NATO for some time has ignored Bulgaria’s request for stationing the Naval Force Coordination Center in this country.

NATO defines deterrence of Russia and support of Allies (Turkey, Romania, and Bulgaria) and partners (Ukraine and Georgia) as its main goals in the region. During the meeting with Ukraine’s President Zelenskyy, Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg made it clear that “NATO

has increased its presence in the Black Sea in response to Russia’s illegal actions” and that the “Allies will continue to make clear to Russia that it has to comply with international obligations and its international commitments”.¹³ Despite apparent deterioration of relations with Turkey, the Alliance promotes deeper military cooperation with Ankara. Respecting Turkey’s interests in the region, NATO leadership does not raise the issue of revising the Montreux Convention, even though the treaty is rather an obstacle for the Alliance’s presence in the region. NATO also supports energy cooperation in the region, primarily as a means to reduce dependence of the Allies and partners on Russia.


The **United States’** position regarding the security arrangement in the region mostly coincides with the one of NATO. The US promotes enhanced presence of their and NATO’s navy in the region, invests resources in deterring Russian aggression, and advocates for the support of Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine, and Georgia, first of all in military and energy domains. The relations with Turkey are at their low due to a number of reasons, with divergence of interests in Syria, Ankara’s purchase of Russian S-400 anti-missile system, and the construction of TurkStream being probably the most important ones. Back in 2018, Wess Mitchell from the Department of State said that the US opposed the TurkStream pipeline, as that would give Russia the means to continue its monopoly on gas

11 *President Zourabichvili’s Address at the 13th Annual Georgia Defence and Security Conference in Batumi*, President of Georgia, 2019 [https://www.president.gov.ge/eng/pressamsakhuri/siakhleebi/saqartvelos-presidentis,-salome-zurabishvilis-gamo.aspx, access: 2 March 2020].

12 *NATO Deputy Secretary General: Stability in the Black Sea Is an Important Component of Euro-Atlantic Security*, NATO, 2016 [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_130342.htm?selectedLocale=en, access: 2 March 2020].

13 *Joint Press Conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy*, NATO, 2019 [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_166602.htm?selectedLocale=en, access: 2 March 2020].

imports to Southeastern Europe¹⁴. This statement was followed the next year by President Trump threatening to “obliterate Turkish economy”¹⁵ and bipartisan congressional bill to punish Ankara for S-400 purchase¹⁶.

 ***Moscow has not converted the Black Sea into their own lake and is unlikely to do so, but it strives for establishing dominance in the areas adjacent to their territory, including occupied Crimea and the Azov Sea***

So far, the **European Union** does not break with the position of other major Western powers regarding Russian aggression in Ukraine and Georgia, militarisation of the Black Sea, and other crucial issues. However, when speaking about the Black Sea region, Brussels mostly emphasises the need for cooperation with all countries, including Russia. To this end, they suggest reviving the Black Sea Synergy and promote cooperation with BSEC. Besides, in 2019, the European Union facilitated the signing of the Common Maritime Agenda, which envisages sustainable economic development of the region and especially of the coastal regions¹⁷.

Future of the Black Sea Region

The analysis of the statements and actions of the important Black Sea powers shows that the region is deeply divided and the

situation is not likely to alter in the years to come. Any major changes are not looming ahead; therefore, the security arrangements in the region will probably remain the same. The regime of the Turkish Straits and of the naval presence in the Black Sea will be defined by the Montreux Convention, as no major power raises the issue of its overhaul, not even NATO or the US, the most disadvantaged players in the peacetime by the treaty.

The conflict between NATO and Russia will continue. Moscow has not converted the Black Sea into their own lake and is unlikely to do so, but it strives for establishing dominance in the areas adjacent to their territory, including occupied Crimea and the Azov Sea. To this end, the Kremlin will continue to invest in the Black Sea fleet, militarise Crimea, and extract all possible resources from the sea, including the zone surrounding the occupied territories. In its turn, the Alliance will carry on with its military build-up in the region and enhanced naval presence. We should expect NATO's continuing support not only for the members but for Ukraine and Georgia as well, through joint exercises, military aid, and political support.

However, the degree of NATO's presence also has its limits – because of the Montreux convention, but even more so due to different approaches within the Alliance. On the one hand, Romania and the US are keen on deterring Russia and think that the more NATO in the Black Sea, the better. On the other hand, Bulgaria wants to deepen cooperation with Russia in a number of

14 *Remarks at Bucharest University by A. Wess Mitchell, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, Department of State, 2018* [<https://www.state.gov/remarks-at-bucharest-university/>, access: 2 March 2020].

15 *Turkey-Syria Border: Trump Threatens to 'Obliterate' Turkish Economy*, “BBC”, 8 October 2019.

16 *Congress to Launch Sanctions on Turkey As Trump Measures Deemed Ineffective*, “The Guardian”, 15 October 2019.

17 *Black Sea Ministers to Endorse Common Maritime Agenda*, European Union, 2019 [https://eeas.europa.eu/diplomatic-network/black-sea-synergy/62871/black-sea-ministers-endorse-common-maritime-agenda_en, access: 2 March 2020].

spheres, despite the row between Moscow and the West, and Turkey's volatile foreign policy jumps between the ardent support of NATO presence and deterrence of Russia to a clear shift from the West towards Moscow. Since all decisions in NATO are a matter of consensus, the NATO Black Sea Fleet is unlikely in the nearest future.

Quite warm relations with Bulgaria and, partly, Turkey do not help the Kremlin with what it perceives as the biggest threat to its security in the region – NATO's open-door policy, which has support in both Sofia and Ankara, let alone the capitals of other regional powers-members of NATO. Similarly, the annexation of Crimea is not likely to disappear from the agendas of the regional powers, although they assign to this issue a different level of importance.

Intense competition in the energy sphere will remain. In the first place, it concerns gas transit routes. Romania, the US, and Georgia will push for initiatives that reduce energy dependence of the region on Russia (Southern Gas Corridor, liquefied natural gas from the US). Russia will advocate for projects that bypass Ukraine and increase its share on the European market. Bulgaria and Turkey will support the construction of all pipelines, regardless of the owner, if they run through their territory or the extension of these pipelines can be built on their territory. Of at least the same importance is the development of nuclear facilities in these countries. Turkey, Bulgaria, and Romania are going to build new nuclear plants or reactors. Rosatom is already building one for Turkey and will participate in constructing another one in Bulgaria. However, in Bulgarian case, they are likely to face competition from many, and they will certainly not be allowed

to operate in Romania. Another side of the issue will be the competition between Russian and American suppliers of nuclear fuel to the new and existing plants.

BSEC is unlikely to gain more prominence in the region, as its members have too diverse visions for this organisation, while only Russia and Turkey declare high interest in its development. Nevertheless, numerous declarations regarding the cooperation within BSEC, as well as in the implementation of the Common Maritime Agenda and revival of the Black Sea Synergy are likely. However, it will be a surprise if these frameworks will bring something more tangible than statements and communiqués.

At the same time, economic, transport, and infrastructure cooperation in the region will be boosted. There are plenty of projects supported by many countries that are likely to be implemented – better ferry connectivity of Georgia with Romania and Bulgaria, the Black Sea Ring Highway, the Caspian Sea–Black Sea Freight Corridor. However, the implementation of these projects can be delayed due to the political tensions. Primarily, projects that involve many countries are at risk – such as the Ring Highway and the Freight Corridor.

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WARGAMING OF THE BLACK SEA SECURITY: EXPLORATORY STUDY INTO THE STRATEGIES FOR THE REGION

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The Black Sea is of strategic importance not only to regional but also increasingly to the global security. Despite the increasing importance of the region, the strategies enumerated by key state players remain unchanged, with patrolling, posturing, and exercises being the main pillars of security. NATO based its strategy on forward presence and readiness, presented as means for deterrence against threats. The annexation of Crimea has proven Russian strategy of territorial pursuit as more successful than Euro-Atlantic partnership programmes. This gap could be addressed with strategy generation in hypothetical scenarios, leading to more representative discussion over security in the Black Sea. To provide the testbed for strategies, a wargaming concept is proposed, which can simulate the dynamic environment and key players.

Introduction

Since the times of Demosthenes, the Black Sea has been viewed as a competitive region, spinning in a constellation of traders, states, and values¹. Ciociltan referred to the Black Sea as the “crossroads and bypass of Eurasian commerce”². Despite being the world’s largest inland sea, the Black Sea holds key to interests of both border states (Ukraine, Romania, Russia, Georgia, Turkey, and Bulgaria) as well as international players (NATO, US). Not only the history but also the present places the Black Sea as a focal point for strategic developments, such as energy policy, migration routes, and

escalation of conflicts that were previously deemed as frozen ones.

The Black Sea currently lies at the intersection of security alliances, with NATO members (Turkey, Romania, and Bulgaria) on one side, and the Russian Federation on the other. Georgia and Ukraine both applied for membership in NATO and remain in complicated relations with Russia, making this intersection an active region of competition. Sergiy Glebov compared the Black Sea to a “Water Curtain” that replaced the Iron Curtain of the previous bipolar world³. The “Water Curtain” symbolises the competition between Euro-Atlanticist and Eurasianist

1 Demosthenes, *Selected Speeches*, see: *Against Lactritus*, [in:] Oxford World’s Classics, Oxford University Press: Oxford 2014.

2 V. Ciociltan, *The Mongols and the Black Sea Trade in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, Koninklijke Brill: Leiden 2012, p. 281.

3 S. Glebov, *From “Europe of the Regions” to “the Regions of Europe”: Does Fragmentation in the Black Sea Region Make the EU Safer?*, “Ukraine Analytica” 2(16), 2019, p. 27.


visions for the future⁴. As recognised by Demosthenes, the traders, states, and values continue to both cross paths and create tension. Those tensions lead to constant re-adjustments in the policies of states and organisations. Giray Saynur Bozkurt analysed the situation of the Black Sea, reaching the conclusion of structural “hierarchy within anarchy” and high unpredictability of the system⁵. This unpredictability causes both difficulties to create a lasting strategy as well as the advantage of players with faster decision-making processes.

The security of the Black Sea has been previously wargamed throughout national militaries as well as NATO institutions, with the most prominent example of “Our Sea” matrix game designed by Major Tom Mouat from the British Armed Forces⁶. This form of wargame establishes an argumentation process for possible actions and counteractions played out by six players in the timeframe of one turn representing 2-4 weeks. The purpose of this game is creation of probable narratives, which deepen the understanding of situation. This particular example can serve as a manifestation of the concept, one version of a testbed, which can be compared to other solutions focusing on strategic level.

The following article outlines the parameters that can be used to simulate the security of the Black Sea in light of a particular event and to identify strategies that could be successful for responding to this event by different actors.

This article presents a concept of wargaming the Black Sea security and an exploration of

stimulus to the system using three different scenarios. Specific conditions can test the existing strategy as well as stimulating new ones, with relevance to an energy crisis, a migration crisis, and an escalation of conflict in eastern Ukraine. Given these scenarios, the strategies of key players can be formulated in the participatory wargaming iterations, tested in terms of their effects, and compared to other sessions. This exploratory study provides a sample of strategies for the security of the Black Sea with the use of wargaming as a research methodology. The outcomes can be recognised as stimuli to broaden the number of strategies related to the Black Sea security.



Specific conditions can test the existing strategy as well as stimulating new ones, with relevance to an energy crisis, a migration crisis, and an escalation of conflict in eastern Ukraine

Methodology

The Black Sea is undisputedly shaping regional security. Strategies, which are tested in this area, could have global consequences. Due to the impact of events occurring in the Black Sea, this article is attempting to answer the question: How does one generate strategies for the Black Sea security using wargaming? And following this inquiry, which scenarios and players could be included in such experimentation?

4 T. Aybak, *Russia, the Black Sea Region and Security*, [in:] P. Hough, A. Moran, B. Pilbeam, W. Stokes (eds.), *International Security Studies: Theory and Practice*, Routledge: Oxon 2015, p. 356.

5 G. Bozkurt (ed.), *Blue Black Sea: New Dimensions of History, Security, Strategy, Energy and Economy*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing: Newcastle upon Tyne 2013, p. 155.

6 The wargame is available to test at the following link: [<https://paxsims.wordpress.com/2016/12/17/our-sea-an-eastern-mediterranean-matrix-game/> access: 10 January 2020].

The following study is conducted according to the concept of wargaming analysis of a strategic security environment, using the relevant parameters: players, board (space), units, and winning conditions. The concept is useful for an experimental study, which tracks the decision-making patterns within the given parameters. To simulate the environment and generate strategies, two more elements are necessary: scenarios, which act as a stimulus to decisions, and mechanics, which support playing those into the given space. The conceptualisation of the wargame as an experimental study is based on principles that ensure scientific validity of the results and its applicability to real-life problems.

Ivanka Barzashka realised that wargaming is increasingly chosen as a method of inquiry employed by both governmental and academic institutions to deepen their understanding of a given problem⁷. A proliferation of the method translated into multiple protocols. The following study is designed with these principles as leading:

1. Simplicity in design: physical fidelity secondary to psychological fidelity⁸;
2. Primacy of providing the needed information to make the decision, focusing not on the knowledge reception but on creation;
3. Maximum value in terms of recognising the existing strategies as well as ways of increasing their number by adding

new dimensions (economic, diplomatic, information, social) to the wargames;

4. Purpose of this wargaming as a proof-of-concept promoting strategy generation;
5. Publication of the concept to enable peer-review⁹;
6. Connecting mechanics of the wargame with real-life events and possible projections of strategic choices.

In the light of the first principle, the space of this study needs to reflect a geographical location as well as the states bordering the sea, the main harbours, and potentially other dimensions of the competition: diplomatic relations, social mobilisation level, energy and economic resources, and military forces. Next to the chosen variables, one must also include the context determining what parts comprise the space, as it creates a need to display the political or environmental situation¹⁰. Those can be used to evaluate the consequences of the strategies chosen by the players when moves are played on the board.

State of Affairs

Board

The base of the board can be produced from the geographical or political view. Depending on the choice, there can be scales representing the dimensions of competitions and winning conditions. This design has to be guided by the question:

7 I. Barzashka, *Wargaming: How to Turn Vogue into Science*, "Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists", 15 March 2019 [https://thebulletin.org/2019/03/wargaming-how-to-turn-vogue-into-science/ access: 17 February 2020].

8 S. Granberg, P. Hulterström, *Ecological Psychology: A Framework for Wargame Design*, [in:] T. Kaneda, H. Kanegae, Y. Toyoda, P. Rizzi (eds.), *Simulation and Gaming in the Network Society*, "Translational Systems Sciences", vol. 9, Springer: Singapore 2016.

9 I. Barzashka, *Wargaming: How to Turn Vogue into Science*, "Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists", 15 March 2019 [https://thebulletin.org/2019/03/wargaming-how-to-turn-vogue-into-science/ access: 17 February 2020].

10 D. Sanders, *Maritime Power in the Back Sea*, Ashgate: Farnham 2014, p. 16.

how to achieve security and how security is defined in the Black Sea area. An example of such abstraction of regional security can be identified as a mix of given goals, such as states trying to achieve development, security, and high level of support from the population¹¹.

There is a possibility of a focused wargame, which isolates one element, such as energy policy and therefore limits the available information to actionable points (infrastructure, reserves, ownership, and transactions).

The choice of the information on the board will also be correlated with the security environment – the threat level, active conflicts, number of states in the area, and sources of instability. In the case of the Black Sea, the following risks have to be taken into account:

- internal instability in the states that reinstated independence after the dissolution of the former USSR;
- organised crime, corruption, arms, and nuclear materials' trade;
- increased pollution and environmental threats;
- economic competition triggered by exploitation and transportation of hydrocarbons from the Caspian Sea area;
- an emphasis on ethnic-separatist conflicts and the disintegration and promotion of independent state entities (Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia);

- exportation of instability: non-state groups promoting radical ideologies and religious regimes;
- use of the space as a drug transit area, from Central Asian suppliers to consumers in Europe¹².

Those risks shape the determination of key players, which react to the emerging events and propose strategies for the Black Sea security. The initial sampling of players consists mostly of states and international organisations.

Players

The players in the first two categories are paired with their main points of interest, translatable to objectives in wargames played out in an asymmetrical system (different resources and goals), as presented below:

- The Russian Federation. Main points of interest: Crimea, port of Sevastopol (headquarters of the Russian Black Sea Fleet); position of the dominant power¹³;
- Turkey. Main points of interest: Keeping the Black Sea as an “internal” one – minimising influence of other states¹⁴;
- Romania. Main points of interest: Prioritising Black Sea security within NATO and EU; promoting multilateral forums for cooperation;
- Bulgaria. Main points of interest: Cooperating with both NATO and Russia;

11 N. Wojtowicz, *Technical Report: NATO Trilemma, Strategic Direction South*, Civil-Military Cooperation Centre of Excellence, July 2018

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326328179_Natalia_Wojtowicz_Subject_Matter_Expert_Modelling_and_Simulation_Simulation_NATO_Trilemma_Strategic_Direction_South access: 17 February 2020].

12 S. Țuțuianu, *A Case Study in Cooperative Security: The Greater Black Sea Area*, [in:] *Towards Global Justice: Sovereignty in an Interdependent World*, T.M.C. Asser Press: The Hague 2013.

13 D. Sanders, *Between Rhetoric and Reality: The Decline of Russian Maritime Power in the Black Sea?*, “Mediterranean Quarterly” 23(4), 2012, pp. 43–68. doi:10.1215/10474552-1895387.


14 I. Joja, *Black Sea Strategic Volatility: Players and Patterns*, Foreign Policy Research Institute: Washington 2019.

- Georgia. Main points of interest: Prioritising relations with NATO and the US;
- Ukraine. Main points of interest: Restoring peace and territorial integrity; further integration into NATO and the EU;
- NATO. Main points of interest: Reassurance to members over cooperative security and collective defence;
- European Union. Main points of interest: strategy based on idealism, drawing on political, economic, social, and environmental issues, with the end goal of sustainable peace and human security¹⁵;
- Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. Main points of interest: conflict prevention, risk reduction, and early warning; observation of military exercises.

This initial sample can be used to generate strategies in a competitive or cooperative setting, depending on the choice of the players to achieve the goals together or separately. NATO and the Russian Federation can be seen as dominant players due to the highest number of forces in the area as well as the number of dependent states¹⁶. Next to the military dimension and international organisations active in the area, further investigation could be devoted to the identification of key civilian players, such as non-governmental organisations, civil society actors¹⁷, forums for partnerships, and social groups. At the opposite side of the spectrum, groups that employ destabilising

tactics could be mapped, including violent groups enumerated in the Risks section.

Although not traditionally included in the wargame formula, commercial entities could also be raised to the level of a player. Within the Black Sea area, that could be identified as tourism and culture sector, education, transport, and energy¹⁸. The distinction of the categories, which are represented, can guide the determination of units in the wargame – in terms of expendable resources and those that direct their use.

 **Although not traditionally included in the wargame formula, commercial entities could also be raised to the level of a player. Within the Black Sea area, that could be identified as tourism and culture sector, education, transport, and energy**

Units

Following the determination of the players, it is useful to identify units, which they control within the wargame. To achieve the purpose of strategy generation, it is beneficial to experiment with a number of variables representing instruments of power. These variables can be grouped according to pre-existing models, such as DIME (Diplomacy, Intelligence, Military, and Economy) or PMESII (Political,

15 K. Henderson, C. Weaver, *The Black Sea Region and EU Policy: The Challenge of Divergent Agendas*, Ashgate: Farnham 2010, p. 90.

16 D. Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations*, Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press 2009.

17 S. Țuțuianu, *A Case Study in Cooperative Security: The Greater Black Sea Area*, [in:] *Towards Global Justice: Sovereignty in an Interdependent World*, T.M.C. Asser Press: The Hague 2013.

18 A. Afanasyev, G. Chantzi, S. Hajiyev, S. Kalognomos, L. Sdoukopoulos, *Black Sea Synergy: The Way Forward*, International Centre for Black Sea Studies: Athens 2020.

Military, Economic, Social, Infrastructure, and Information)¹⁹.

Next to the variables and models used to represent the security in the Black Sea region, additional analysis can be drawn to: recording mental models of the designers and experts; providing feedback between “micro” and “macro” representations; and capturing organisational performance, cultures, and institutions, as well as all types of operations and situational awareness of all parties²⁰. This de-biasing and specification of reasoning is crucial to represent the realistic units from the area instead of individual focus points.

The mechanical use of units – their movement, function, and power – regulates the ways of winning the wargame. There is a strong dependence on the winning conditions, due to natural motivation to adjust strategy to win. As the purpose is strategy generation, the winning conditions should be broad enough to encourage different approaches.

Strategy Generation

Strategy can be defined as a planning approach, adaptation to conditions, optimisation of resources, or positioning in

terms of stakeholders and competition²¹. Security strategies identify the goals, which they serve, and the values ranked as priority to protect²². There are a number of strategies previously described within the Black Sea region, among them:

- Russia using the Black Sea as a platform for exerting influence on neighbouring regions, including the Balkans, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean countries²³;
- The United States proposing the “Reset” policy, aiming at rebuilding confidence and constructive relations with Russia²⁴;
- Turkey choosing to build a bipolar system of allies, with both NATO and Russia²⁵;
- The European Union fostering cooperation based on “blue economy”: aquaculture, coastal tourism, biotechnology, ocean energy, and seabed mining²⁶;
- NATO’s “dual-track approach” based on Enhanced Forward Presence (positioning of forces in the member states) and projecting stability by engaging with partners²⁷.

Complementary strategies have been proposed around key issues such as energy

19 P. Fellman, Y. Bar-Yam, A. Minai (eds.), *Conflict and Complexity: Countering Terrorism, Insurgency, Ethnic and Regional Violence*, Springer: New York 2015.

20 D.S. Hartley, *Modeling Research*, [in:] *Unconventional Conflict: Understanding Complex Systems*, Springer: Cham 2017.

21 S.P. Mishra, B. Mohanty, *Approaches to Strategy Formulations: A Content Analysis of Definitions of Strategy*, “Journal of Management & Organization”, 2020.

22 B. Stackpole, E. Oksendahl, *Security Strategy: From Requirements to Reality*, CRC Press: Boca Raton 2010.

23 G. Kuczynski, *Mare Nostrum Strategy: Russian Military Activity in the Black Sea*, Warsaw Institute: Warsaw 2019.

24 S. Acikmese, D. Triantaphyllou, *The European Union and the Black Sea: The State of Play*, Routledge: New York 2016, p. 84.

25 G. Kuczynski, *Mare Nostrum Strategy: Russian Military Activity in the Black Sea*, Warsaw Institute: Warsaw 2019.

26 *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions Initiative for the Sustainable Development of the Blue Economy in the Western Mediterranean*, Brussels, 2017.

27 P. Anastasov, *The Black Sea Region: A Critical Intersection*, “NATO Review”, May 2018.

infrastructure and defence industry²⁸. Maritime power influences the scope of the strategy, which can be linked with an overarching political goal or a limited effect (such as securing access for the fishing industry).²⁹ Strategies can be further identified as reactionary³⁰ (announced as a response to a given circumstance), visionary (based on a desired end-state), or periodic (linked to a point in time, such as annual reviews). The evolution of the strategies can follow a step-by-step path or a “big bang option” associated with highest impact scenarios³¹.

Conditions determined by the scenario can vary in the level of disruption, impact on security of the region, and ability to return to a previous state. Looking towards 2020, Iulia-Sabina Joja³² recognised three scenarios that could change the security situation in the Black Sea:

1) Accidental destruction of an offshore gas well operated by a Western company in Romania by a Russian military vessel, with international staff on board, leading to a stand-off over responsibility for the casualties;

2) Failure of a new round of negotiations between the EU and Turkey over the housing for asylum seekers from Syria, leading to a massive migration movement followed by escalation on the borders with European countries;

3) Further Russian aggression in Ukraine, spreading towards one of the key ports – Odessa; repeating the pattern of protests, proclamation of a separatist republic, and eventual annexation.

Those can be recognised as highlighting different aspects of the strategies and stimulating new strategy generation.

Conclusions

Using wargaming as a tool for analysing security can lead from asking representative questions, through socialisation of the results, to turning insights into models of reality. The introduction of human players supplies a significant part of the logic in the decision-making process³³. In the case of the Black Sea security, the generation of strategies can be induced by wargaming through different combinations of players, objectives, and units controlled by humans.

There are certain limitations that need to be accounted for to separate the mental model of the wargame designers and the reality of the situation. As a counterpoint, the suspension of disbelief and the experimental environment can foster innovative ways of thinking, which would not arise without hypothetical scenarios. For example, there is a tendency to act against instead of acting for, due to the absence of a security umbrella for the region and competitive policies of dominant powers, which created

28 J. Peterson, R. Dannreuther, *Security Strategy and Transatlantic Relations*, Routledge: London 2006.

29 D. Sanders, *Between Rhetoric and Reality: The Decline of Russian Maritime Power in the Black Sea?*, “Mediterranean Quarterly” 23(4), 2012, pp. 43–68. doi:10.1215/10474552-1895387.

30 E. Weber, *Pluralism by the Rules: Conflict and Cooperation in Environmental Regulation*, Georgetown University Press: Washington, D.C. 1998, p. 57.

31 S. Țuțuianu, *A Case Study in Cooperative Security: The Greater Black Sea Area*, [in:] *Towards Global Justice: Sovereignty in an Interdependent World*, T.M.C. Asser Press: The Hague 2013.

32 I-S. Joja, *Three Conflict Scenarios for the Black Sea in 2020*, Foreign Policy Research Institute, January 2020 [<https://www.fpri.org/article/2020/01/three-conflict-scenarios-for-the-black-sea-in-2020/> access: 01 February 2020].

33 D.S. Hartley, *Modeling Research*, [in:] *Unconventional Conflict. Understanding Complex Systems*, Springer: Cham 2017.

unfavourable conditions for development of cooperative structures³⁴. The constellation of traders, states, and values observed by Demosthenes is in constant movement and revolves around the Black Sea, which could be better understood with a broader view.

The concept of the experimental study of the Black Sea security provides an overview of parameters and examples representative of the current environment. This exploration marks the initial steps towards wargaming of this topic in an iteration-based study, leading to generation

of new strategies as well as testing the old ones against scenarios challenging the Black Sea security.

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34 P. Manoli, *The Dynamics of Black Sea Subregionalism*, Routledge: London 2019, p. 21.

BLACK SEA SECURITY DEADLOCKS: NATO-RUSSIA CONFRONTATION

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NATO's eastern flank in the Black Sea is a fractured security space that requires a special tailored approach. It is the Black Sea where Russia has chosen to test NATO's resolve by the open use of force. The article argues that the transactionalist mode that Russia offers as a strategic basis for interaction with the West is not meeting the latter's goals and interests. Recognised limitations of NATO's "Tailored Forward Presence" in the Black Sea as compared to its "Enhanced Forward Presence", diverging interests and policies of the allies, and Russia's readiness to capitalise on these internal divisions are the critical problems interfering with NATO's posture in the Black Sea.

The analyses of the security complex in the Black Sea typically feature the terms "volatile", "fragmented", or "fractured". The security constellations in the region are complex, with many overlapping and divergent interests in play, as well as dormant and active conflicts. Notwithstanding the fact that after 2004 NATO became a full-fledged Black Sea actor with two new allies, Bulgaria and Romania, in addition to Turkey, present here, the Black Sea remained a strategically overlooked blind spot.

The year 2014 was a watershed for NATO's activities in the region as strategic realities have dramatically changed after Russia annexed Crimea and proved that it is ready to resort to the use of force to change the internationally recognised borders. An important dimension was added to the Black Sea security conundrum when Russia detained Ukrainian ships in the Sea of Azov in November 2018, after an extended

blockade of the navigation through the Kerch Strait. Thus, the Azov theatre became an additional arena where Russia asserts its unilateral domination.

The Black Sea Dimension of Russia-West Confrontation

It is the Black Sea where Russia has chosen to test NATO's resolve in the eastern flank by the open use of force. A comparison of NATO's and Russia's conventional forces uncovers a significant asymmetry in favour of the former. In the Black Sea area, however, Russia has achieved certain comparative advantages.

The Kremlin has pursued a strategy of denial in the region, which meant that the states of the region were denied their moves towards Western institutions, while the West was denied the opportunity to set the agenda in the Black Sea.¹ Thus, Russia is inclined to

1 N. K. Gvosdev, *Russia's Southern Strategy*, Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2019, p. 5 [https://www.fpri.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/bssp4-gvosdev.pdf access: 12 March 2020.]

exercise security in the region unilaterally by keeping its neighbours in insecurity and having a veto on their defence upgrades.

There is a general recognition that Russia's ambitions to single-handedly rule in the region initially did not match its political, economic, and military clout. The Russian strategy to exercise unilateralism in the Black Sea region was successful though, in the face of even weaker positions of its former satellites in the region, the respectful self-withdrawal of Turkey from what it believed to be a Russia-dominated space, and the general disinterest of the West.

Russia's approach is based on the desire to compartmentalise the agenda with the West into separate dossiers. This would allow trading over concessions and reducing all interactions to profit-seeking transactions. The Russian strategy seemingly rests on the assumption that the more "dossiers" it keeps open with the West, the greater leverage it has. Multiplying the conflicts and hotspots, it claims the right to be a part of the solution to those conflicts and gets bargaining advantages.

It stands to logic to suppose that the Russian strategy is to make the West prone to the transactional mode of interaction. Transactionalism is an approach based on short-term gains as opposed to long-term calculus and tends to neglect any references to values and norms, preferring ad hoc issue-specific transactions without long-term commitments. As exemplified by Russia's desire to speak directly to powers within Europe, trying to sideline European institutions, the transactional approach towards security is offered by Russia as the only viable one in the era of their competition. It is camouflaged as a prudent approach in a situation where Russia is still recognised as

an indispensable partner for many security issues (some of which it helped to conceive).

The West's transactional approach to the Black Sea security cannot succeed because whatever reconciliatory moves are deemed pacifying and reassuring, they are not reciprocating what Russia is and what Russia wants. Transactionalism threatens NATO's core principles and values. Not only does it jeopardise the security of NATO's partners, but it also makes the Alliance extremely vulnerable.

The logic that NATO's attempt to be cautious with Russia prevents a major confrontation may have a serious flaw. The asymmetry of engagement can embolden the Kremlin and invite it to even more assertive actions, which eventually makes the conflict even more plausible. Russia has used military force because it has found the absence of sufficient deterrence and no costs associated with these actions.



The West's transactional approach to the Black Sea security cannot succeed because whatever reconciliatory moves are deemed pacifying and reassuring, they are not reciprocating what Russia is and what Russia wants

A considerable number of papers analyse the strategic advantages that Russia gained after the occupation of Crimea. A common reference is that by building an A2/AD "bubble" (Anti-Access/Area-Denial) over Crimea, the Russian military got control over the complete northern part of the region.² Due to this, NATO reportedly is effectively

² B. Hodges, S. Gvineria, *New Iron Curtain*, CEPA, August 2019 [https://www.cepa.org/the-new-iron-curatin access: 18 March 2020].

constrained from military involvement and NATO's partners in the region are indefensible. At the same time, there is an opinion that A2/AD is not an unchallengeable system since alongside the evolution of the A2/AD systems, the systems that challenge them evolve too. Rather, it can be also portrayed as a form of psychological warfare where Russia hopes to benefit from the common belief that this system is invincible.³

The Black Sea has proved to be a crucial outpost for the Russian power projection to the wider Mediterranean, where Russia resorted to a massive operation together with the Assad regime, causing suffering and losses among civilians. Some would claim that the war in Syria has considerably weakened the credibility of NATO. They would generally support the idea of creating an internationally controlled security zone in northern Syria to protect displaced civilians, as suggested by Germany's defence minister, Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, in October 2019.⁴ The Syrian front, the argument goes, is an additional dossier Russia tries to instrumentalise vis-à-vis the West.

Besides military intimidation and probing, Russia might use its energy infrastructure as a pretext for maintaining greater control over the maritime routes in the Black Sea allegedly for its protection.⁵ It also employs all kinds of other hybrid techniques to complement the military intimidation. There is a general understanding that disinformation warfare or export of corruption that Russia extensively uses in

its power toolkit to incapacitate its targets can be of no less harm to the societies in question. The development of an adequate strategy that takes into account the array of Russian coercive influences is the only option to insulate the Alliance from their detrimental effects.

NATO's Response in the Black Sea

At the 2016 Summit in Wales, the allies took the decision to develop a "Tailored Forward Presence" in the Black Sea region. As a result, NATO's reinforcement strategy in the region concentrated on an air-policing mission in Romania and Bulgaria, multinational brigade in Craiova (Romania), and a maritime component, a rotational presence of allied ships in the Black Sea. NATO's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force, the broader NATO Response Force, additional high readiness forces of the allies, and NATO's heavier follow-on forces, if necessary, will reinforce the forward presence forces. Tailored measures include more multinational land training, combined joint enhanced training, more maritime activity, and increased coordination to enhance NATO presence in three domains.⁶

However, there is a recognised gap between NATO's "Enhanced Forward Presence" (devised for Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland) and "Tailored Forward Presence" in the Black Sea. As a CEPA report notes, the fact that Western responses are compartmentalised, with a separate focus on the Nordic-Baltic theatre and the Black Sea,

- 3 S. J. Flanagan, I. A. Chindea, *Russia, NATO, and Black Sea Security Strategy: Regional Perspectives from a 2019 Workshop*, RAND Corporation, 2019, p. 7 [https://www.rand.org/pubs/conf_proceedings/CF405.html access: 12 March 2020].
- 4 J. Dempsey, *Europe and NATO's Shame over Syria and Turkey*, Carnegie Europe, 03 March 2020 [https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/81191 access: 14 March 2020].
- 5 B. Hodges, J. Bugajski, P. B. Doran, *Strengthening NATO's Eastern Flank: A Strategy for Baltic-Black Sea Coherence*, CEPA, November 2019, p. 22 [https://1f3d3593-8810-425c-bc7f-8988c808b72b.filesusr.com/ugd/644196_8754c3428d9d4da0adb29bef6df2f5b4.pdf access: 12 March 2020].
- 6 *Boosting NATO's Presence in the East and Southeast*, NATO, 21 January 2019 [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_136388.htm access: 13 March 2020].

is a problem. This makes NATO's deterrence posture uneven while a cross-regional deterrence strategy is wanted.⁷ All in all, NATO's force structure and the command and control system in the Black Sea are not adequate to meet the existing threats.⁸

It is the limitations of the Montreux Convention (1936) that define the scope and mode of the presence of the ships of non-littoral states in the Black Sea. It limits the tonnage and number of days (21 in peacetime) that ships (submarines and aircraft carriers are banned entirely) of non-littoral states can spend in the Black Sea. This obviously puts serious constraints on how NATO can respond to the Russian aggressive posture, especially with Turkey's willingness to modify the convention being highly improbable.

The recipes to buttress NATO's deterrence strategy in the region usually include expansion of NATO exercises in the region, deployment of advanced air and coastal defence systems in Romania and Bulgaria, and help to Ukraine and Georgia to strengthen their defence capabilities.⁹ Also, the argument goes, NATO needs to create its own A2/AD "bubble" to cover the western part of the Black Sea, with capabilities including maritime systems, ground-based systems in Romania, more solid air and naval engagement.¹⁰

Three Allies in the Black Sea – Three Diverging Policies in Place

The lack of coherence and cohesion in NATO is well documented. Individual allies seemingly have differing readings

of NATO's desirable level of ambition. Concerns have been in place for some time about the long-term US commitment to NATO or the French inclination to reassess NATO's relevancy in general. Also, a sense of urgency in dealing with the region varies from state to state; many governments are occupied with other priorities to the south of the continent.

The Black Sea is an embodiment of this dilemma in miniature: Three littoral allies – Turkey, Bulgaria, and Romania – have divergent threat perceptions and policies in place. Romania has been a staunch advocate of enhanced NATO's military presence, which paradoxically resonated much better with Russia-alert Ukraine or Georgia, rather than with Bulgaria or Turkey. The latter often tolerated or turned a blind eye to Russian actions in the region, and undermined some steps aimed at NATO's military enhancement. Turkey, which has a long-standing strategic tradition to oppose the involvement of any external power, be it the US or any other NATO ally, has been against strong NATO naval presence in the Black Sea. Bulgaria has also proved to be an opposing voice for the creation of the Black Sea Fleet. The idea of becoming a hub for the transportation of Russian hydrocarbons has tempted both Ankara and Sofia to conduct policies with controversial repercussions.

There is a generally accepted assessment that Turkish Black Sea strategy is not an independent coherent policy but rather a derivative of Ankara's policies with regard to Syria, Russia, and the United States, which means that oftentimes its approach to the

7 Hodges, Bugajski, Doran, n5, p. 23.

8 J. Bugajski, P. B. Doran, *Black Sea Defended: NATO Responses to Russia's Black Sea Offensive*, "CEPA Strategic Report" 2, p. 7 [https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/644196_41e1047ce39e422d926ce6985604de31.pdf access: 13 March 2020].

9 Flanagan, Chindea, n3, p. 2.

10 Hodges, Bugajski, Doran, n5, pp. 9–10.

region is erratic and reactive.¹¹ There was no considerable strategic shift in the way Turkey treats Russia's presence in the region after the occupation of Crimea. If there is any serious apprehension in the Turkish establishment about Russia eroding an unwritten accord to maintain the balance of powers in this theatre, then apart from some cosmetic readjustment of its naval priorities, it does not manifest itself through any other measures.



NATO's eastern flank in the Black Sea is a fractured security space that requires a special tailored approach

Undoubtedly, Turkey will never formally recognise the changed status quo and will always refer to this as an unacceptable breach of international law. At the same time, this does not preclude the preservation of the Russian-Turkish condominium in the Black Sea. Ankara has not displayed any readiness to try to counterbalance Russian expansion with a more solid Western posture in the region and continued to insist on regional security ownership, which means that it is up to regional powers to co-manage the situation here. For instance, the Turkish government has never considered joining anti-Russian sanctions imposed after the annexation of Crimea. Moreover, it even advocates that its policy on Russia is beneficial for the relations between Russia and the West, resorting to the oft-

abused concept of the civilisational bridge. Turkey's position of de-facto tolerating Russian actions in the region elevates it to the position of the most influential Russian "enabler" in the region.

Despite the assurances of solidarity that NATO expressed to Turkey after the latter lost 33 of its soldiers in an operation of Russia-backed Syrian forces in Idlib at the end of February 2020, the rift is there and seems to be constantly deepening.¹² NATO's discomfort with Turkey buying the Russian S-400 defence systems did not dissuade Ankara from this strategic shift. Notwithstanding such a purchase entails the vulnerability such a purchase entails for NATO, as well as facing the risk to have the deliveries of US F-35s cancelled, Turkish plans remained unchanged.

Concerning Bulgaria and Romania, they found themselves unprepared for the Russian expansionist actions; their armed forces are underequipped and underfinanced, and territorial defence capabilities neglected.¹³ But the Romanian position proved to be consistent irrespective of the composition of the government, whereas Bulgarian officials even belonging to the same government were often voicing contradictory statements.

Bulgaria has always tended to display certain duality in its foreign policy, oscillating between the commitments within the Alliance and the desire to maintain close relations with Russia. It was due to the rejection by Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov that the Romanian idea of creating a Black Sea Fleet – a joint fleet of Romania,

11 Flanagan, Chindea, n3, p. 5.

12 *Nato Expresses 'Full Solidarity' with Turkey over Syria Airstrikes*, "Guardian", 28 February 2020 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/28/nato-turkey-syria-airstrikes-russia-un-jens-stoltenberg> access: 18 March 2020].

13 J. Bugajski, P. B. Doran, n8, p. 4.

Bulgaria, and Turkey – never materialised.¹⁴ This obstructionist stance is often explained as a derivative of the country's dependence on Russia in terms of energy, business, and tourism.

Romania is a highly motivated NATO member in terms of military expenditures (fulfilling the commitment of 2 per cent of national GDP for defence) and participation in missions and operations, which, as some experts would claim, has shown some resistance to Russian malign influence and proved to be comparatively “Russia-proof”.¹⁵ It advocated for the creation of the Bucharest Nine as a grouping of the Alliance's eastern flank countries sharing the same destiny of being exposed to Russia geographically. As a US strategic partner in the region and a NATO promoter, Romania has secured the image of a “Westerniser” and stabiliser in the region.¹⁶

NATO's eastern flank in the Black Sea is a fractured security space that requires a special tailored approach. Naturally, the apprehensions exist as to which strategy could be the one that guarantees the allies' security, represents their values, and

keeps the existing hotspots from major conflagration. The importance of devising and implementing a coherent common strategy for NATO in the region, trying to bridge the gap among the sometimes diverging interests of allies as well as all other littoral states, is commonly supported by experts. Although this idea is unassailable in logic, the result has proved to be hard to attain so far.

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14 Y. Bozhilov, *The Brief Life of the Idea for the Creation of NATO Black Sea Fleet*, “New Europe”, 08 January 2017 [https://www.neweurope.eu/article/brief-life-idea-creation-nato-black-sea-fleet/ access: 18 March 2020].

15 V. Socor, *Romania Sees Need to Overhaul Its Policy Toward Moldova (Part One)*, “Eurasia Daily Monitor”, 16(98), 10 July 2019 [https://jamestown.org/program/romania-sees-need-to-overhaul-its-policy-toward-moldova-part-one/ access: 12 March 2020].

16 J. Joja, *Black Sea Strategic Volatility: Players and Patterns*, “Black Sea Strategy Papers”, Foreign Policy Research Institute, October 2019, p. 9 [https://www.fpri.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/jojobssp2.pdf access: 13 March 2020].

NAVAL WARFARE SCENARIOS FOR 2020

Andrii Klymenko

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Russian activities during the last few years aimed to control and limit navigation in the Black Sea as well as the Kerch incident of 2018 provide researchers with substantial data to predict possible developments for 2020. In this article, the author analyses the worst-case scenario and proposes a set of preventive actions. In 2020, obstacles to the freedom of navigation in the Azov and the Black seas posed by Russia will be a continuation of strategy to deploy military capabilities in Crimea beyond the peninsula. The freedom of navigation is the one of the guiding principles of the civilised world, which is why engaging the world community in countering these threats gives hope for positive results in 2020.

The security situation in the Black Sea has been rapidly changing, systemically transforming it into a “Russian lake”. Over the last months of 2019 and during January–February of 2020, such trends were ongoing and deteriorating, namely:

- further enhancement of Russian military grouping in occupied Crimea, which is used as geostrategic, military, military-industrial, service, and logistic base for projecting Russian expansion on the Black Sea, in Syria, and the Middle East, as well as North Africa;
- occupation and militarisation of the Ukrainian shelf in the southwestern part of the Black Sea between the occupied Crimean peninsula and the coast of Odesa region;
- increased blocking of large areas of the Black Sea under a pretext of naval exercises;

- transformation of the Black Sea into a “no-rules area” by the spread of practice of shipping in the direction of occupied Crimea by unregistered vessels with intentionally disabled AIS transmitters¹;
- further artificial impediment to freedom of navigation in the Kerch Strait in the direction of Ukrainian Azov Sea ports – Mariupol and Berdyansk.

The aim of the article is to predict the worst-case scenario of developments in the Black Sea in 2020 and to propose a set of preventive actions. Prediction of the situation regarding maritime risks in the Azov and the Black seas connected with possible Russian actions is based on the experience of 2014–2019 not only in the Ukrainian–Russian but also in the macro-regional context – the Black Sea–Mediterranean. The facts that the Russian aggression against Georgia in 2008 destabilised a long-preserved geopolitical

1 AIS Automatic Identification System serving to identify vessels, according to the Convention SOLAS 74/88, it is binding.

fault line from Gibraltar to Mariupil, and the occupation of Crimea in 2014 shifted this fault line are taken as a premise.

Such tectonic shifts do not come to a halt by themselves. Moreover, as it is thought in Russia, “Putin’s political machine has been barely gaining momentum and setting itself up for a long, difficult and interesting work. Reaching its full capacity is far ahead. Thus, Russia will remain Putin’s state years later”²

In 2020, obstacles to the freedom of navigation in the Azov and the Black seas posed by Russia will be a continuation of strategy to deploy military capabilities in Crimea beyond the peninsula. In short, it can be described as the projection of military threat and imperial expansion not only towards Ukraine but also towards Southeastern Europe, South Caucasus, Turkey, the “Syrian knot” in the Middle East, and North Africa.

The reason of this power projection is to create chaos controlled by Moscow wherever possible, not only in Ukraine, Moldova, and the Caucasus, but also in the EU and NATO states, in the Balkans and the Mediterranean in particular. We observe manifestations and consequences of such processes more often. The problem of freedom of navigation in the Azov Sea and the Kerch Strait that “suddenly” emerged in April–May 2018 is regarded exactly in such context.

Based on this experience, it is possible to simulate scenarios and make predictions for 2020 regarding possible Russian actions that will influence safety of navigation in the Black and the Azov seas and reaction from Ukraine and the world. According to our prediction, in 2020, blocking (under various pretexts) the vessel traffic in the Kerch Strait

will continue and will be used by Russia to provide secrecy for military traffic to Crimea.

However, our main prediction concerns freedom of navigation in the Black Sea rather than the situation in the Azov Sea. We are all but certain that the “Azov crisis” was an “exercise”. In 2020, further actions of Russia to impede navigation in the direction of Ukrainian ports not only in the Azov Sea but also in the Black Sea are expected.

Transferring the “Azov Experience” to the Black Sea

Azov maritime export/import from/to Ukrainian ports is only a small part (5%) compared to export from ports of Odesa, Mykolaiv, and Kherson. The main Ukrainian export-import routes are located in the Black Sea and lead to/from the Bosphorus. It should be noted that recommended shipping routes from the Bosphorus to Ukrainian ports lie through a narrow gap between the Zmiinyi (Snake) Island and the Odesa gas field on the Ukrainian shelf occupied by Russia. This “bottleneck” is only 13.5 miles (25 km) wide.



In 2020, obstacles to the freedom of navigation in the Azov and the Black seas posed by Russia will be a continuation of strategy to deploy military capabilities in Crimea beyond the peninsula

In the Black Sea – near the recommended shipping routes from Odesa to the Bosphorus, from Odesa to Batumi and Turkish Black Sea ports – oil platforms are located on Ukrainian continental shelf, seized by Russia at the time

² В. Сурков, *Долгое государство Путина (V. Surkov, Putin’s Long State)*, «Независимая газета», 11 February 2019, [http://www.ng.ru/ideas/2019-02-11/5_7503_surkov.html].

of Crimea's occupation. While previously auxiliary ships of the Russian Federation patrolled the areas of Odesa, Golitsynskiy, Arkhangel'skiy, and Shtormovoy oil fields, since 1 June 2018 guarding of the seized Ukrainian derricks on the occupied shelf has been officially delegated to the 41st missile ship brigade of the Russian Black Sea Fleet. It should be noted that these are battleships with significant strike capability.

That is why it makes sense to predict a scenario in which Russia starts to detain for inspection ships heading to or from Chornomorsk, Odesa, Mykolaiv, and Kherson ports using the "Azov technique".



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The Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation may report an alleged subversive group being on such a vessel and aiming to bomb, for instance, a drilling platform on the occupied Odesa oil field (which Russia considers to be its own as the whole Ukrainian shelf). If such a situation occurs, it will have a significant impact on marine traffic in this area. It may not happen if the preventive measures are taken, but such a scenario should be "on the table".

Sea Areas Closure under the Pretext of Exercises: Technique of Economic Warfare

Another prediction, which is also based on the monitoring and analysis of the Russian "Black Sea experiments" of the 2019 dynamics, is as follows: One of the methods to impede navigation in the Black Sea by Russia in 2020

will be increasing the practice of closing for navigation western areas of the sea for Russian live-fire exercises (real or fake).

For example, on 1–12 July 2019, during Ukrainian–American naval exercises Sea Breeze 2019, Russia blocked one of the areas for exercises in the Black Sea – from Ukrainian Zmiinyi Island near Odesa coast to the Tarhankut Cape in Crimea – namely the area of the occupied shelf with gas fields. It was done by means of issuing by Russia of an international warning about danger to navigation. Since 24 July 2019, Russia has blocked five areas in the Black Sea, including those in maritime economic zones of Bulgaria and Romania, and almost entire eastern part of the Black Sea from Sochi to Turkey in order to impede the Georgian–American exercises, Agile Spirit 2019.

The total surface of the Black Sea areas blocked by the Russian navy in June 2019 exceeded 120,000 km², which is more than ¼ of the Black Sea surface. The aim of these actions is to create the "normal" perception of the Black Sea as the Russian sphere of influence. Since the first days of 2020, we have observed a similar situation, even with substantial developments.

Thus, on 9 January 2020, Russia conducted unprecedented joint missile-firing exercises of the Black Sea and the Northern fleets with launches from water, air, and coast. The exercises were held in one of the blocked areas, in the south and southwest of occupied Crimea. Around 40 ships, a submarine, more than 40 planes and helicopters of various types took part in the exercises.

On 1 February 2020, Russia disseminated an international maritime warning about danger in the NAVTEX system – NAVAREA III 134/20 – about conducting artillery missile firing in the area of Karkinit Bay of the Black Sea between occupied Crimea and the coast of Kherson region. The Russian military could not help knowing that this area had been

already closed since 1 December 2019 by the same warning from the Ukrainian Naval Forces – NAVAREA III 1374/19 – and thus created an extremely dangerous situation of “overlapping” areas of live fire exercises by the Ukrainian Naval Forces and the Russian Black Sea Fleet. A similar situation of “overlapping” has recurred several times.

When to Wait and How to Prevent Maritime Threats in 2020

The period from May 2020, during or after the celebration of the 75th anniversary of victory over fascism, until October–November 2020, during or after the military exercises “Caucasus-2020”, should be considered as particularly dangerous.

In September–October 2020, the Southern Military District of the Russian Federation will take part in a large-scale strategic Command Post Exercises “Caucasus-2020”. Around 100 battleships and auxiliary ships (as it can be predicted, not only from the Black Sea Fleet and the Caspian Flotilla) will participate. The main aim of the exercises is to improve the joint forces’ large-scale military operation on the southern and southwestern theatre of operations.

It is undoubted that the joint military exercises of the Russian Black Sea and Northern fleets hint to another peculiarity of 2020 – improvement of interaction between various fleets’ headquarters and joint force groupings has started. Such a practice has been actively deployed in the Russian army following the results of Syrian experience.

In the prediction we cannot overlook the possibility of an active operation on the Ukrainian coast of the Black Sea, the Azov

Sea, and Danube (including a landing operation) conducted by Russia, as well as a combined operation from occupied Crimea in the direction of Kakhovka, where the main North Crimean Canal gateway is located (for unblocking water supply to Crimean peninsula).



It is undoubted that the joint military exercises of the Russian Black Sea and Northern fleets hint to another peculiarity of 2020 – improvement of interaction between various fleets’ headquarters and joint force groupings has started.

Regarding the amphibious assault trainings, they are constantly conducted mainly in the military training area of Opuk in occupied Crimea. According to results of the research, it was found that during 2014–2019 no less than 99 military exercises, manoeuvres, and trainings were conducted in this military training area³.

Ukrainian authorities will have to address the USA and NATO to continue and enhance patrolling the Black Sea by the permanent groups of the NATO Naval Command and the US 6th Fleet until Ukraine manages to significantly strengthen its naval forces. As will be recalled, since March 2014 ships of non-Black Sea NATO states have been patrolling the Black Sea.

In 2014–2019, NATO not only realised the Black Sea threat but also found the sources to significantly increase its presence in the region in 2019. However, NATO naval

3 *Дикі тюльпани під російськими бомбами. Як знищують Опукський заповідник в Криму (Wild Tulips under Russian Bombs: How Opuk Nature Reserve Is Being Destroyed in Crimea)*, “Black Sea News”, 25 January 2020 [<https://www.blackseanews.net/read/159924>].

presence in the Black Sea will depend on the situation in the neighbouring regions – in Syria, Iraq, Iran, and North Africa.

If developments in the Black Sea follow the scenario outlined above, the use of experience, which has worked in the Azov Sea since October 2018, may be needed on the main maritime routes in the Black Sea. Detention of merchant vessels on the move in the sea ceased when Ukrainian naval forces launched the practice of escorting merchant vessels on the way from Mariupol to Kerch⁴.

In 2020, Ukraine may have to escort merchant shipping or patrol international maritime routes in the Black Sea and invite NATO states' ships. It will be relevant to launch a special naval format, "freedom of navigation maintenance operations" in the Black Sea.

In 2020, Ukraine will continue to strengthen its naval capabilities. Amid the real threats to the freedom of navigation in the Azov and the Black seas that were finally comprehended in 2018–2019 abroad as well, Ukraine is likely to work out its naval policy.

An encouraging sign that Russian strategists have seemed to ignore is the fact that the freedom of navigation is one of the guiding principles of the civilised world. It stands alongside the freedom of trade and human rights. That is why engaging the world community in countering these threats gives hope for positive results in 2020.

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⁴ *Економічна війна в Азовському морі. Статистика та наслідки блокування українських портів з травня 2018 по січень 2020 (Economic War in the Azov Sea. Statistics and Consequences of Ukrainian Ports' Blocking since May 2018 to January 2020), "Black Sea News", 10 February 2020 [<https://www.blackseanews.net/read/160567>].*

ENERGY CRACKS OF THE BLACK SEA SECURITY

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The energy picture of the Black Sea region is being changed with new energy infrastructure and ongoing attempts of the Russian Federation to enhance its energy influence on other countries. The article focuses on analysing these transformations, their consequences, the current energy problems, and possible threats produced by Russia using energy facilities for military purposes. The authors propose recommendations to counter Russia's energy expansion and balance its dominance in the Black Sea region.

While militarising the Black Sea region, the Russian Federation continues its policy of energy expansion in the region. This has intensified after Russia started to wage war against Ukraine, which began with Russia's occupation of Crimea. In some cases, the Russian Federation physically captures the energy infrastructure of another country, and in other cases, new gas transportation infrastructure is being built, destined both to strengthen the energy levers of the Russian Federation's influence on some countries of the region (Ukraine, Turkey, Bulgaria, and Serbia) and to be used for military purposes. First of all, this concerns the supply of natural gas, as diversification of routes and sources of gas supplies is a complex and expensive process.

Transformation of Energy Supplies in the Black Sea Region

The idea of constructing new gas pipelines through the Black Sea region did not die after the fiasco of two grand projects to

build new routes for gas supplies to the EU – the European project of the Nabucco pipeline (2013) and the Russian project of the South Stream (2014). Russia continued to look for opportunities to stop gas transit through the Ukrainian gas transmission system (GTS) by constructing bypass routes transporting Russian gas to Turkey and countries of Southeastern Europe. In its turn, Azerbaijan made efforts to build a direct route of transportation of its own gas produced at Shah Deniz 2. As a result, the TANAP (Trans-Anatolian Gas Pipeline) project was launched in 2011 and the TurkStream project started in 2015. In addition, several projects to build gas interconnectors between the countries of the region – Romania and Moldova, Bulgaria and Greece, Turkey and Bulgaria, Bulgaria and Serbia, etc. – are underway. At the same time, no LNG terminals are being built on the Black Sea coast.

The TANAP gas pipeline, able to supply up to 16 bcm a year, was successfully built from the Georgian-Turkish border to the Turkish-

Greek border, where it was connected to the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP)¹. After the completion of the TAP project, Azeri natural gas should enter the EU market in 2020. Turkey, Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, Albania, and North Macedonia rely on gas from Shah Deniz 2. In the future, the TANAP Consortium plans to increase the capacity of the pipeline to up to 24 bcm². Unlike TurkStream, this pipeline is a real diversification of gas supply routes and also sources of gas production. This, on the one hand, does not reduce the volume of Russian gas transported through Ukrainian territory, but on the other hand, allows European consumers to reduce volumes of their gas import.

In its essence, the TurkStream gas pipeline is a cut-off version of the South Stream project, with the only difference that it goes not to the Bulgarian coast but to the Turkish one, which allows it to avoid the rules of the EU's Third Energy Package, which "killed" the South Stream project at that time. Following this logic, Russia reached an agreement with Turkey, according to which the first line of TurkStream to carry 15.75 bcm of gas was completed at the beginning of January 2020 and should supply gas to the Turkish market. However, due to a 40% drop in total Russian gas imports by Turkey (up to 14.5 bcm) in 2019³, since January 1, 2020, Russia decided to start using this first line for supplying gas to Bulgaria, Greece, and North Macedonia, which practically stopped the transit of the corresponding volumes of gas through Ukraine, Moldova, and Romania by the Trans-Balkan Pipeline. This direction of the Ukrainian GTS is currently used only to supply Russian gas to Moldova and Romania.

The second line of TurkStream, with the same capacity of 15.75 bcm, is under construction on land and should bring gas through the Balkan Stream pipeline to Bulgaria and further to Serbia, Hungary, and Austria. Gazprom plans to complete this branch by the end of 2020. The Serbian part of the Balkan Stream has already been physically built, but the Bulgarian part has just started. In case of completion of this route, as well as completion of Nord Stream 2 through the Baltic Sea, the transport of Russian gas for the needs of Serbia, Hungary, and partly Austria through the Ukrainian GTS will be stopped. Therefore, the question is how long OGTSU, which is now a separate operator of the Ukrainian GTS after the EU-led unbundling process, will be able to keep the GTS operational without receiving necessary funds for transportation services. The second question is what the European consumers will do if Russia stops supplying gas through its "streams".

In addition to the gas flow from Azerbaijan, which Russia is trying to use for demonstration of so-called diversification of gas supplies through the Balkan Stream, other projects are being worked out outside Russia's influence. First of all, it is necessary to pay attention to Romania, which plans to increase gas production on the Black Sea shelf. The project, called Neptun Deep, is being implemented by OMV and ExxonMobil. The new gas field, with confirmed gas reserves of up to 84 bcm⁴, should fully meet Romania's needs and allow it to export certain volumes of gas to other countries, including Hungary. However, at the end of 2018, the Romanian

1 *Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline Project*, TANAP Official Information, 2018
[https://www.tanap.com/content/file/TANAP_WEB_201812.pdf].

2 Ibid

3 M. Nechyporenko, *Turkey Halves Consumption of Russian Gas*, "The Page", 5 February 2020
[<https://thepage.ua/ua/news/turechchina-skorotila-spozhyvannya-rosijskogo-gazu-majzhe-v-dva-razi>].

4 *Neptun Deep Gas Field Project, Black Sea*, "Offshore Technology", 2019
[<https://www.offshore-technology.com/projects/neptun-deep-gas-field-project-black-sea/>].

parliament approved a new law requiring companies to sell at least half of the produced gas in the Romanian market and reducing from 60% to 30% the amount of investments in gas production that is subject to tax benefits. As a result, the mentioned companies declared that the law threatened their investment decisions to support offshore gas projects in Romania. In December 2019, ExxonMobil decided to sell its stake in Neptun Deep and submitted proposals to the state-owned company of Romgaz and other energy companies⁵. In the state of uncertainty, Romania continues to import gas from Russia, which is about 1 bcm annually⁶, through the Ukrainian GTS under the current contract with Gazpromexport.

Meanwhile Bulgaria is implementing the Balkan Gas Hub project, a gas-trading centre in Turkey, which receives gas through pipelines from Russia, Azerbaijan, and Iran, and liquefied gas from a number of countries (Algeria, Nigeria, USA, and Qatar)⁷. According to the Turkish Energy Market Regulatory Authority (EPDK)⁸, Turkey imported 50.36 bcm of natural gas in 2018, which was 8.85% less than in 2017, and 45.21 bcm in 2019, which was 10.2% less than the previous year.

The situation changed dramatically in 2019. In 2018, the share of gas import from the Russian Federation to Turkey

was 46.95%, the share of LNG – 22.49% (supplied from spot market and under long-term BOTAS contracts with Algeria and Nigeria). In 2019, Russia's share was only 34%, but the LNG import increased to 28.3%, while imports from Azerbaijan increased to 21% and those from Iran – to 17%.⁹ Turkey has become the second largest importer of LNG in Europe, after Spain. In particular, it increased LNG imports from the US. The changes are largely due to the recent expansion of the LNG terminals capacity in Aliaga on the Aegean Sea and Marmara Island in the Sea of Marmara¹⁰.



Among all the countries in the western part of the Black Sea region, Bulgaria is in the worst condition because it lacks its own gas storage facilities and remains dependent on one source – Russia

While having its LNG terminal in Revithoussa, Greece plans to deploy a new mobile terminal (Floating Storage Regasification Unit, FSRU) near *Alexandroupolis* to receive liquefied gas from the United States, and counts on gas from the new EastMed pipeline, which will supply up to 10 bcm of gas from the Eastern Mediterranean.¹¹

5 ExxonMobil to Exit from Neptun Deep Project, "Energy Industry Review", 13 January 2020 [https://energyindustryreview.com/oil-gas/exxonmobil-to-exit-from-neptun-deep-project/].

6 Dynamics of Gas Sales to Europe, Gazprom Export, 2019 [http://www.gazpromexport.ru/statistics/].

7 Turkey Reduces Gas Import from Russia to Benefit LNG Supplies from the U.S., "Kosatka Media", 3 September 2019 [https://kosatka.media/uk/category/gaz/news/turciya-sokrashchaet-import-gaza-iz-rf-v-polzu-postavok-ing-iz-ssha].

8 Report: Turkish Natural Gas Market, EPDK, 2019 [https://www.epdk.org.tr/Detay/Icerik/3-0-95/dogal-gazaylik-sektor-raporu].

9 Ibid

10 A. Sabadus, Rare Opportunity Opens for US LNG to Reach Greece-Turkey-Ukraine Gas Corridor, "Atlantic Council", 22 August 2019 [https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/energysource/rare-opportunity-opens-for-us-lng-to-reach-greece-turkey-ukraine-gas-corridor/].

11 P. Tugwell, Leaders from Israel, Cyprus, Greece Sign EastMed Gas Pipe Deal, "Bloomberg", 2 January 2020 [https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-01-02/leaders-from-israel-to-greece-set-to-sign-eastmed-gas-pipe-deal].

Among all the countries in the western part of the Black Sea region, Bulgaria is in the worst condition because it lacks its own gas storage facilities and remains dependent on one source – Russia, which has supplied it with gas through TurkStream to bypass Ukraine since January 1, 2020. This has not improved energy security of Bulgaria. Furthermore, Sofia also counts on the US gas to be supplied through the above-mentioned mobile LNG terminal near Alexandroupolis and the IGB gas interconnector to the Bulgarian GTS¹².

It is worthwhile to look at projects of diversification of gas sources in the Black Sea region, which are under way due to construction of the new US-supported LNG terminals, including those within the Three Seas Initiative. In particular, speaking at the 2020 Munich Security Conference, US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo declared an intention to “provide up to 1 billion USD in financing to Central and Eastern European countries of the Three Seas Initiative” to support energy projects¹³. They include increasing capacity of the LNG terminal in Swinoujscie (Poland) and installation of FSRU on Krk Island (Croatia) with appropriate gas transport infrastructure. In addition, the US plans to support the construction of a new LNG terminal near Alexandroupolis, which should receive American gas. Turkey also does not stop and plans to increase its capacity of receiving LNG.

All these planned, completed, and ongoing projects demonstrate a significant change in the map of gas supply and distribution

in the Black Sea region. The changes are aimed at diversifying sources of gas imports and avoiding dependency on one supplier, which enhances security of supply and reduces Russian gas dominance. However, the mentioned Russian projects increase gas dependence of several countries (Bulgaria and Serbia) on the Russian Federation and damage the existing gas transport infrastructure, which is de facto an integral part of the EU gas network.

Energy Problems and Related Threats

Occupied Ukrainian Crimea, its gas infrastructure, and projects initiated by Russia to build new gas pipelines in the Black Sea region pose security and economic threats not only to Ukraine but also to the EU gas market, undermining its principles of solidarity, competitiveness, and energy security. These projects pose an additional threat to the Black Sea security.

After the occupation of Crimea, Russia captured Ukrainian assets in the Black Sea – extraction platforms and drilling rigs of the Ukrainian state-owned company Chornomornaftogaz (a subsidiary of Naftogaz of Ukraine), which supplied gas directly to the peninsula. The platforms, where the Russian military is permanently present, have become proper sites for installation of means of maritime and airspace control, as well as radio-intelligence services for the Black Sea Fleet with the use of civilian maritime infrastructure capabilities in the northwestern part of the Black Sea¹⁴.

12 S. Todorov, *Bulgaria Buys Share of Greek Gas Terminal*, “BalkanInsight”, 10 January 2020 [<https://balkaninsight.com/10-January-2020/bulgaria-takes-role-in-greek-gas-terminal/>].

13 M. Pompeo, *The West Is Winning*, Speech at the Munich Security Conference, State Department, 15 February 2020 [<https://www.state.gov/the-west-is-winning/>].

14 *Offshore Gas Infrastructure in the Russian Counteraction to NATO on the East Flank: Potential for a Hybrid Use in the Black and Baltic Seas*, Centre for Global Studies “Strategy XXI”, October 2018 [https://geostrategy.org.ua/images/NSTS_HybridTechWar.pdf].

A comprehensive system of monitoring surface and underwater environment, aimed at detection of surface, underwater, and low-flying air targets, was deployed at artificial structures of the so-called State Unitary Enterprise of the Crimean Republic 'Chernomorneftegaz' (hereinafter SUE ChNG)¹⁵. Such artificial structures in gas and gas-condensate fields (GF and GCF) in the Ukrainian sector of the Black Sea are the captured fixed offshore platforms (FOPs), jack-up drilling rigs (JDR), wellhead platforms (WP), and central processing platforms (CPPs).

A surveillance system for surface environment – the NEVA-BS centimetre-wave radar¹⁶ – was deployed on TAVRIDA jack-up drilling rig, FOP-17 (MCII-17) on Shtormove gas-condensate field, and FOP-4 (MCII-4) on Holitsynske gas-condensate field in three sets¹⁷. The NEVA-BS radar provides automated detection and tracking of up to 200 targets simultaneously with the range from 8 miles (15 km) to 30 sea miles (55.5 kilometres). In addition, the NEVA-B millimetre-wave radar and imagery system set were installed on JDR TAVRIDA. The mentioned radar has the range of target detection from 0.5 miles (~1 km) to 24.3 miles (45 km).

The real-time data are transmitted to the Border Service of the Federal Security Service (FSB) of the Russian Federation in Crimea and passes to the intelligence chain of the Black Sea Fleet of the Southern Military District of the RF. Thus, deployment

of surface surveillance systems on the Chornomornaftogaz's objects, captured in the exclusive maritime economic zone of Ukraine, provides Russia with almost complete control over the traffic of commercial ships and warships that head to the ports of Ukraine and in the opposite direction in the northwestern part of the Black Sea.

In addition to installation of radars for surface surveillance, the sonar system for underwater environment surveillance was installed on the following SUE ChNG objects¹⁸:

- FOP-4 (MCII-4) on Holitsynske GCF, located 61 km to the northwest from the Crimean Cape Tarkhankut;
- FOP-17 (MCII-17) Shtormove GCF, located 72 km to the west from Cape Tarkhankut;
- WP-2 (БК-2) on Odeske GCF, located 66 km to the northeast from Snake Island.

Cooperation between the FSB RF in Crimea and the Russian Black Sea Fleet has been established within the framework of information exchange on surface and in the underwater environment in the northwestern part of the Black Sea, with the use of technical capabilities of SUE ChNG. All these allow the leadership of the Coastal Guard of the FSB RF in Crimea and the Command of the Black Sea Fleet to accomplish the following tasks in real time¹⁹:

15 Ibid

16 *NEVA-B Is a Coastal Millimeter-wave Radar*, TETIS Integrated Systems Ltd. [<http://www.tetis-ks.ru/catalog/256/1400>].

17 *Notice to Mariners No. 1402-1541*, C-П6. (9956.12), 19 March 2016, pp. 15-17; *Notice to Mariners No. 2105-2258*, C-П6. (9956.17), 23 April 2016, p. 19; *Notice to Mariners No. 3924-4074*, C-П6. (9956.30), 23 July 2016, pp. 18-19. *Notice to Mariners No. 6878-7005*, C-П6. (9956.51), 17 December 2016, pp. 18-19.

18 Ibid

19 A. Ramm, *Russia Deploys a Global System of the Naval Surveillance*, "Izvestia", 25 November 2016 [<https://iz.ru/news/647107>].


- comprehensive monitoring of the surface and air space on the Cape Tarkhankut-Snake Island line (up to 170 km);
- control over international navigation;
- reconnaissance support of operational decisions to conduct warfare under supreme military command.

Russia permanently monitors international navigation and operations of naval vessels of other countries in the northwestern part of the Black Sea and provides critical information to the Russian Black Sea Fleet to hold navy operations in case of combat missions.

Maritime gas transport infrastructure, first of all TurkStream, fulfils a geopolitical function for Russia to establish its military-political domination under the guise of protecting economic interests from foreign encroachments. Therefore, the issues of ensuring the security of marine gas transportation systems, including countering possible sabotage, will automatically lead to their military affiliations under the pretext of a threat from NATO. All this serves as the basis for defining security zones, as a guarantee of uninterrupted exploitation of the objects of the marine gas transportation infrastructure, aimed at further deployment of dual-purpose security systems, including simultaneous activities of acoustic intelligence.

Prospective tools for acoustic intelligence can be artificial intelligence mini submarines of Russian production, which are capable to submerge to depths as low as 300 metres and operate without human intervention for up to three months, providing from an underwater position a “vision” of the movement of underwater and surface objects that depends on their size, noise level, and

type of hydrology at a distance that can reach tens of kilometres²⁰. Such an apparatus may be installed in the corridor of the TurkStream gas pipeline, where it extends to the appropriate depths. Passive hydroacoustic reconnaissance stations that emit nothing but listen to the sea space from under the water – for example, robotic autonomous bottom stations (UDF) of the Harmony system, which has been developed by the Russian Ministry of Defense since 2016 – may also be installed. Russian civilian vessels designed to survey or service TurkStream can conceal such stations at sea bottom, creating a network of underwater and surface controls on the routes of warships from the Bosphorus to the Black Sea ports in an area of hundreds of square kilometres.

 ***Maritime gas transport infrastructure, first of all TurkStream, fulfils a geopolitical function for Russia to establish its military-political domination under the guise of protecting economic interests from foreign encroachments***

First of all, the targets of permanent control are the naval ships of Ukraine and NATO member states, in particular those from the NATO Naval Group, as well as those that participate in international exercises in the Black Sea region.

Russia has begun to use another tactic to strengthen its control over the Black Sea, which is to restrict the freedom of navigation attached to its energy projects. For example, in July–August 2019, starting with the US–Ukraine 2019 Sea Breeze exercise, Russia

²⁰ Ibid

closed five areas in the Black Sea, including the exclusive maritime economic zone of Ukraine, Bulgaria, and Romania.²¹ It also closed the eastern part of the Black Sea from Sochi to Turkey precisely during the period of the Georgian–American 2019 Agile Spirit exercises. However, in some of these areas, training or shooting were not conducted.

When you overlay a map of the denied-access areas, shut off by Russia, on the map of routes of the underwater gas pipelines Blue Stream and TurkStream, to a large extent, they coincide.

All this means that, under the guise of ensuring the security of gas infrastructure and uninterrupted supply of Russian gas to European consumers, Russia is preparing to transform the Black Sea on D-Day into a zone of its own total control. In addition, it seeks to impose on the Black Sea, the EU, and NATO countries a perception that the entire Black Sea is an area of Russian influence. Further actions of the Russian Federation will be aimed at continuing the occupation of Ukraine's exclusive maritime economic zone, displacing NATO from the Black Sea, and transforming the sea into a Russian restricted area.

Are There Any Options to Counteract This?

Despite the aggressiveness, arrogance, and “creativity” of Russia's actions in the Black Sea region, it is possible and important to create effective levers to counteract and curb Russia's creeping occupation of the Black Sea. This requires consolidation of the efforts of all Black Sea countries as well as their allies and partners in the EU and NATO.

First of all, it is necessary to stop the policy of appeasement of the Russian Federation,

which is considered by the Kremlin as a permit for further aggression. All countries and international organisations should clearly define the responsibility of the Russian Federation for violation of international law and take all possible measures to punish it and return to the legal field, which requires establishing systems of international monitoring of the situation in the region.



Successful implementation of projects to diversify routes and, most importantly, sources of gas supply to the countries of Southeastern Europe counterbalances Russia's ability to use energy as a hybrid weapon

Russia should be stopped in all regions – the Black Sea region, the Baltic region, the Mediterranean. The US sanctions against North Stream 2 and TurkStream contractors have already yielded positive results – offshore pipelines have been suspended and Russia has become more compliant during the gas talks with Ukraine and other countries-consumers of Russian gas. These sanctions should be backed by the EU and NATO member states, and the Black Sea countries should refrain from implementing joint infrastructure projects with the Russian Federation; this would only increase energy security and prevent a negative scenario of transforming the Black Sea into a Russian-dominated area.

Successful implementation of projects to diversify routes and, most importantly, sources of gas supply to the countries of Southeastern Europe counterbalances Russia's ability to use energy as a hybrid

21 A. Klymenko, A “Russian Lake”: The Nine Aspects of the Current Situation in the Black Sea, “Black Sea News”, 4 August 2019 [https://www.blackseanews.net/en/read/153503].

weapon and strikes Russia's economy, which is dependent mainly on export of energy resources and suffering losses in conditions of competitiveness and low prices. The US policy to increase LNG export to countries of the region by building appropriate infrastructure not only will restrain Russia's energy expansion but will also be accompanied by fully justified US actions to strengthen its presence in the region, including its military component.

The US permanent presence in the Eastern Mediterranean will create a security umbrella for the Balkans. Missile systems from the northeast Aegean sector are capable of controlling the Black Sea. If the location of the US Navy is Greek Alexandroupolis, Russia will find it more difficult to block Ukrainian ports in the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov, as its maritime trade and the "Syrian express" from the Black Sea ports risk to be blocked in return.

In general, NATO should enhance its naval presence in the Black Sea region, including through the formation of a permanent naval group in the Black Sea and the creation of its command structures, the deployment of air defence/missile defence systems, strike complexes, training exercises, the establishment of its own regional A2/AD areas. It is advisable to create such a zone in the northwestern part of the Black Sea so that it protects the maritime and air space in the region of the Black Sea coast of Ukraine, Bulgaria, and Romania. It is a region with proven reserves of natural gas, the production of which is extremely undesirable for Russia.

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BLACK SEA POLICY OF UKRAINE

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For the last few years, the Black Sea region has become a top priority of the Ukrainian foreign policy. However, due to the years of ignorance and absence of a strategic vision, Ukraine has not used all opportunities, while many projects, such as BLACKSEAFOR, cannot be used anymore due to the Russian aggression. In this article, the authors look at the main elements of the Ukrainian bilateral and multilateral relations in the Black Sea region, what risks can prevent increased cooperation and guaranteeing national interests, and which countries can be potential partners.

Strategic Appraisal

The Black Sea region has become one of the top priorities of the Ukrainian foreign policy in recent years, considering both guaranteeing national interests and national security. To analyse Ukraine's foreign policy in this domain, it is important to focus on relations with seven countries (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova, Romania, and Turkey), as well as some regional initiatives and projects. While the Russian factor is of an extreme importance for the Black Sea developments, it is however not the main driving force behind the development of the Ukrainian Black Sea policy. Considering the current state of the Russian-Ukrainian relations, despite the Black Sea littoral status of the Russian Federation, this dimension is separated into a distinct track that should be considered beyond the Black Sea region.

From Ukraine's foreign policy point of view, the Black Sea and the Azov Sea basins are impartible. While 10 years ago

we were speaking about the Black Sea-Caspian region, with the current trends this approach makes sense only for an analysis of some topics, such as transport of energy. The Danube River aspect belongs to both the Eastern European and the Black Sea direction of the policy, as its economic and security significance as an additional entry point to the Black Sea will be rising.

For most of the time, Ukraine's Black Sea politics have been predominantly concentrated on bilateral relations, with a limited strategic vision of the regional processes. However, now is the time to formulate a coherent vision and additional multilateral regional initiatives, which would not be limited to BSEC or GUAM formats.

Ukraine's vision of the Black Sea policy has been evolving for the past 10 years from the idea to become a regional leader to a narrow, first of all economic cooperation with the individual states. Security issues, except for the so-called "frozen conflicts" management and cooperation within

navy initiatives BLACKSEAFOR and Black Sea Harmony, had been mostly ignored. Meanwhile, the development of the “grey zones”, which are not controlled by the legitimate governments, is growing. These “grey zones” pose risks and challenges of both military and non-military character for the states where they exist and touch the interests of all regional countries.

In the past few years, Ukraine’s policy towards the Black Sea region has predominantly concentrated on the Crimean issue, on overcoming and preventing consequences of the peninsula’s illegal annexation. This limits the development potential of Ukraine’s Black Sea policy, as well as the elaboration of a strategic vision of its own role in the region, the return to the status of a sea power, and the use of the full potential of the bilateral relations.

Bilateral Relations

Azerbaijan and Armenia. Relations of Ukraine with these two Caucasus republics for the last decade had sporadic and weak character. Among the factors that influenced this situation, one can name the aggravation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, so the improvement of relations with one side could be seen as biased by the other party to the conflict; another reason is the absence of European and Euroatlantic integration among the priorities for these states, so it limits cooperation within the Eastern Partnership and security interactions. The third factor to be named is Armenia’s close alliance with the Russian Federation.

Bulgaria, which has been demonstrating for years a greater interest in the Balkans rather than in the Black Sea affairs, also was not among the top partners in the region. Multiplied by the confused position of sharing the EU stance but supporting lifting sanctions against Russia and having “more pragmatic” relations with Moscow,

the Bulgarian position is still tricky for Ukraine. Sofia itself is explaining such a position by serious Russian involvement in the Bulgarian economic and energy sphere and the losses it bears due to the Russian cancellation of the South Stream 2 project due to the European sanctions.

As a result, the agenda of the Ukrainian–Bulgarian relations is not going beyond a traditional set of issues: cooperating in economic, legal, and cultural spheres. Protection of Bulgarian minority rights in Ukraine is among top priorities of the bilateral relations, however without conflicting elements as in the relations of Ukraine with Hungary.

Georgia for a long time was considered as a junior partner. This created a foundation for unused potential in bilateral cooperation. De facto relations between Ukraine and Georgia passed stages from strategic, politically emotional ones at the end of the first decade of the 2000s to almost a decline in 2010–2014. Just for the last two years, the bilateral relations have returned to the priority level. This is mostly connected with the aspirations of both states to achieve European and NATO membership. The Declaration on Strategic Partnership signed in 2017 laid a foundation for the new level of strategic relations.

At the same time, for quite a time, Ukraine has been ignoring the possibility to present the Ukrainian and Georgian cases of the Russian aggression jointly and to synchronise activities at the international arena. Some time has been lost, and only recently some coordination in this matter can be seen.

Moldova. One of the main issues of the Ukrainian–Moldovan relations remains the resolution of the Transnistrian conflict based on the principle of territorial integrity of Moldova, demilitarisation of

the Transnistrian region, and guaranteeing of human rights. Ukraine continues to participate as an official mediator in the “5+2” talks, where it has the status of a guarantor of peace. However, for the past few years, one can see a decrease in Ukrainian activities and attention in this question.

Ukraine continues to cooperate with Moldova in questions of sustainable use and protection of the Dniester River, transborder cooperation, as well as within EU technical programmes. At the same time, the bilateral relations have been under the influence of two factors: accumulated mutual distrust and internal political situation in Moldova.

Creation of the “Ukraine–Georgia–Moldova” Interparliamentary Assembly can give a new impetus to the political dialogue among the three states and facilitate coordination of joint cases within international organisations. However, with the political changes in all three countries, this instrument of cooperation is currently on pause.

Romania. Questions of security and intensification of military cooperation remain among the top priorities of Ukrainian–Romanian relations. Among the three Black Sea states–NATO members, Romania is the most consistent supporter of the idea to increase NATO presence in the region. Romania was the first EU country to ratify Ukraine’s Association Agreement and was the leading nation in the NATO Trust Fund on cyber security for Ukraine. For the last two years, one can see intensification of the bilateral relations, including in the security sphere and joint military exercises. After years of distrust, it is a big step forward. Definitely, Ukrainian Law on Education that concerned many neighbouring countries is a difficult point in relations; however, this issue is in the working process of resolution. Competition between Ukrainian and Romanian ship owners in the market

of Danube transportation is also among the difficulties of bilateral relations.

Turkey holds a special place in Ukraine’s foreign policy. Since 2011, it has been defined as a strategic partner, and during the years of the Russian aggression has played a key role in the sphere of regional security. Comparing to the previous periods when relations between Ukraine and Turkey had been less profound and, thus, mostly focused on economic cooperation, since 2014 Kyiv’s dialogue with Ankara has intensified in political and defence spheres, paving the way to diversification of the bilateral agenda. On the other hand, Turkey’s fast rapprochement with Russia, including cooperation on Syria, procurement of Russian S-400 missile systems, building a nuclear power plant Akkuyu, and TurkStream pipeline bypassing Ukraine, has had considerable negative impact on bilateral Ukrainian–Turkish relations.

Turkey has not recognised the illegal annexation of Crimea and has consistently supported the territorial integrity of Ukraine. Defending the rights of the Crimean Tatars has been another important track, resulting in adoption of several UN resolutions on the situation with human rights on the occupied peninsula, co-sponsored by Ukraine and Turkey. At the same time, Ankara has not joined Crimea-related economic sanctions against Russia and has supported the return of the Russian delegation to PACE, which was very negatively perceived in the Ukrainian society.

International organisations – GUAM and BSEC. Ukraine is a member of all regional organisations in the Black Sea region. However, its diplomatic efforts have been concentrated mostly on the institutional participation, especially regarding BSEC. Since December 2019, a more active stance was seen concerning revitalisation of GUAM. Ukraine has been lacking both economic and

political resources to use these organisations for promotion of own ambitions as a regional leader. The idea to transform GUAM into the community of democracies back in 2004 did not receive any development.

Russian membership in BSEC and a number of unresolved conflicts between the member states are de facto blocking BSEC and make it ineffective for realisation of the Ukrainian foreign policy tasks at the current stage. The neutral position of BSEC regarding the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and the Russian attempt to influence financially the future development of the organisation, accompanied by the limited possibilities for influence, makes this organisation secondary for realisation of the Ukrainian policy in the Black Sea region.

NATO and Navy initiatives. Despite the fact that three Black Sea states are NATO member states and two are aspirants, NATO still does not have a clear strategy towards the Black Sea region. Only recently, despite restrained positions of Turkey and Bulgaria, the Alliance has made practical steps to increase its presence in the region. This topic became one of the priorities at the end of 2019 for Ukraine-NATO cooperation, including planning the first joint exercises on protecting critical infrastructure in the Black Sea region, Coherent Resilience 2020, which will be held in Odessa in October 2020.

For a long time, Turkey took on the role of the communicator on the Black Sea security in Brussels, which led to the lack of understanding of the challenges, threats, and needs of the region. Gradual increase in the number of the NATO member states' ships in the Black Sea region speaks about readiness to take greater responsibility – exactly what Ukraine is calling NATO to do, considering the difficulties with navigation caused by the Russian actions and possibilities of annexation of considerable sea zones.

Necessity to increase NATO presence in the region is also connected with the de facto freezing of two other navy initiatives – BLACKSEAFOR and the Black Sea Harmony. Russian participation in both does not leave a possibility for Ukraine to continue its participation as neither joint activities, nor sharing of information is possible at the current stage. That is why for Ukraine it is a necessity to search for new formats of navy cooperation, both bilateral and multilateral. Presentation of the Navy Strategy of Ukraine 2035 at the end of 2018 (first time in its history) should facilitate a more clear vision of the Ukrainian navy presence in the Black Sea region.

Black Sea Commission. Ukraine continues to participate in the Commission on the Protection of the Black Sea against Pollution (Black Sea Commission), which is an intergovernmental agency to implement the 1992 Convention on the Protection of the Black Sea against Pollution (Bucharest Convention). However, the Russian annexation of Crimea influenced this work as well, as Ukraine cannot fulfil all its obligations under this Convention regarding control over pollution in a 12-mile zone around the Crimean peninsula. Serious increase in military equipment, illegal hydrocarbon extraction offshore, which belongs to Ukraine, the Kerch bridge construction, uncontrolled use of recreational and biological resources lead to the Black Sea pollution.

EU and the EU Danube Strategy. Participation of Ukraine in the EU Danube Strategy 2011 should become an important instrument to improve Ukrainian performance in the Black Sea. As of now, Ukrainian level of participation remains low. Development of cooperation in the Danube Strategy framework will allow Ukraine to improve its transport potential and to cooperate with other countries of the Danube macroregion, so as to improve

its economic competitiveness, tourism potential, cultural development, and transborder cooperation that can result in sustainable regional development.

At the same time, there is de facto no EU Black Sea strategy, as it is based on an outdated document of 2007 – the Black Sea Synergy. The EU prefers bilateral relations or the Eastern Partnership framework. In reality, the only programme especially designed for the Black Sea region is the “Black Sea Basin Operation Programme 2014–2020” with a small operational budget of 39 million euro. As Ukraine also concentrates its attention on the work within the Association Agreement or EaP A3, there is no Black Sea focus in the EU–Ukraine cooperation.

Main Risks

To formulate pragmatic and proactive foreign policy in the Black Sea region as well as to increase cooperation with the individual states, it is necessary to have a clear understanding of risks and conflicts that can have direct or indirect influence. Among the most immediate risks that can influence Ukraine’s Black Sea policy are the following:

- Militarisation of the Black Sea region, predominantly due to the Russian military build-up in Crimea and Caucasus;
- Retaining of the sizable Russian forces in the Azov and the Black Sea that lead to the violation of the international law of the sea and restrictions to the navigation through the Kerch Strait, as well as possible blocking of the Black Sea ports and possible violation of the state sea border, possible provocations on the sea;
- Increase of pro-Russian sentiments in Turkey and Moldova, as well as controversial political situation in the Black Sea states, including financing of pro-Russian political parties and media, conducting information campaigns;

- Protracted conflicts in Transnistria, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Nagorno-Karabakh;
- Blocking of the security initiatives in the region, including resistance to a more active presence of NATO;
- Formation of new transport corridors in the Black Sea region bypassing Ukraine that will lead to the losses of the transit potential;
- Increase in illegal migration, arms and drugs trafficking, including through “grey zones”;
- Significant pollution of the Black Sea due to the illegal Russian activities in and around Crimea.

Conclusions

For a long time, Ukrainian foreign policy in the Black Sea region has been predominantly focusing on bilateral relations with limited strategic vision of the regional processes. At the same time, it is a necessity to elaborate additional targeted regional initiatives, which would not be confined to GUAM or BSEC.

Considering the ongoing Russian aggression against Ukraine, it is necessary to concentrate on development of relations with Romania, Turkey, and Georgia for the purpose of restricting Russian influence and increasing NATO presence; as well as with Georgia and Azerbaijan considering development of the regional transit potential and realisation of the energy and transport projects. At the same time, it is necessary to increase Ukrainian information presence in all Black Sea states and to promote Ukrainian national interests in the economic sphere.

Ukraine still needs a coherent Black Sea strategy that should be developed as a separate document with a comprehensive

view on security, political, economic, environmental, humanitarian, and transborder priorities. Enhancement of cooperation with individual countries to build regional resilience, to protect critical infrastructure, to prepare for emergencies, and to increase cyber security can be new prospective topics of cooperation. New multilateral projects of cooperation can go along such configurations: Ukraine–Romania–Moldova, Ukraine–Turkey–Georgia–Azerbaijan, Ukraine–Georgia–Moldova, etc. It is also in the Ukrainian interest to promote an idea of the NATO Black Sea strategy elaboration.

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TURKEY'S BLACK SEA POLICY: BETWEEN “RUSSIAN LAKE” AND “NATO'S BACKYARD”

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After the illegal annexation of Crimea, as well as Russia's military campaigns in Georgia, eastern Ukraine, and most recently Syria and Libya, Turkey's role in the Black Sea basin has considerably increased both for the regional countries and for the NATO allies. This article will focus on Turkey's evolving stance in the region, starting with a short overview of historical preconditions, looking at the recent developments, and ending with a brief analysis of the newly emerging trends that will most likely shape Ankara's regional policy in the mid-term future.

Introduction

The Black Sea region presents a good example of a regional system in the epicentre of global politics. While for many years the United States has lacked a clear regional vision and well-elaborated security strategy to deter the resurgent Russia and to manage regional threats, Russian leadership has used this lack of political will, military capacity, and diplomatic unity among the NATO countries to fill this gap with its growing military build-up in Eastern Europe, Crimea, Syria, and Libya.

Turkey holds a special place in this new geopolitical landscape. Both as NATO's second biggest army involved in close military and defence cooperation with Russia, and as an influential regional actor in the Black Sea, the Mediterranean, and the Middle East, Ankara has enjoyed significant benefits from this unique strategic position. However, in many cases this geography appeared to be “a curse” rather than a blessing, in disguise, creating difficult dilemmas for Turkish foreign and

security policies, and revealing considerable vulnerabilities in domestic affairs.

Highly personalised decision-making process under the presidency system, lack of professional and unbiased discussions on foreign policy issues in the expert community, side-lining of political opponents questioning the effectiveness of governmental policies on the international arena, unresolved Kurdish question, and an important role of significant diasporas in Turkey, who represent one or another side in the “frozen” or hot conflicts in the region (Abkhazians, Ossetians, Circassians, Crimean Tatars, Meskhetian Turks, Gagauz, etc.), limit Ankara's space for manoeuvring on the international arena and give other countries additional leverages to influence its foreign policy choices.

As a result, Turkey has historically found itself in a dangerous balancing between the United States and/or NATO allies and the Russian Federation, throwing its weight behind one or another in line with its traditional security reflex – to move close to

the West when faced with an assertive and resurgent Russia, and to use an increased cooperation with Russia as a bargaining chip to get the desired in times of crises with the West.

Historical Roots of Turkey's Black Sea Policy

Turkey's strategic thinking regarding the Black Sea region has been shaped by two major historical traumas:

1) The Russo-Ottoman wars of the 18th–19th centuries, which proved Russian dominance in the region. They also created a myth of “great Russia”, whose interests “have to be taken into account” in this part of the world and whose overwhelming power “does not allow the luxury of not cooperating with Russia” for any regional country.

2) The so-called “Sèvres syndrome”, meaning Turkey's deeply rooted distrust of the Western countries, which is embedded in collective memory as a threat of “being betrayed and weakened by the West”¹. This lack of trust is still defining political rhetoric of the nationalist and conservative parties, including those in the government coalition. In many cases, these sentiments are reinforced with strong anti-American, anti-Western, and nationalist feelings dominating the Turkish society or find support in the Kremlin-instigated Eurasianism concepts. Advocates of a closer cooperation with Russia have reportedly gained more bureaucratic influence as they have assumed some positions in the Turkish

foreign ministry and armed forces vacated by “Atlanticists” in the wake of the 2016 coup attempt².

This psychological and geopolitical trap of being stuck between the two major powers resulted in Turkey regarding the Black Sea as either a “Russian lake” or “NATO's backyard”. As a result, multilateral regional diplomacy became instrumental for reaching Ankara's goals of a status-quo stability and regional leadership.

Turkey has been the main driving force behind the regional integration processes since the early 1990s, when it initiated the first regional organisation based on ideas of economic cooperation. Extending the “Black Sea area” to include six littoral states, as well as Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Greece, Albania (and later – Serbia), the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) initiative emerged in 1992 giving a rare opportunity to bring 12 countries under the umbrella of the Ankara-led multilateral regional organisation. By bringing together countries from different geographies – from the Caucasus to the Balkans – Turkey prioritised a more inclusive approach, which allowed it to claim a leading role in a much broader and complex regional architecture.

Many experts believe that “such grouping of those states clearly indicates the absence of a conception of the Black Sea region, as a single entity of littoral states, in Turkey's foreign policy thinking and strategic planning”.³ To quote D. Lynch, every time “when the focus of the regional

1 The Sèvres Syndrome is a popular belief in Turkey that some outside forces, especially the Western countries, have a hidden agenda to weaken or divide the country. The term originates from the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres, which was signed after WWI between the Ottoman Empire and the Allied Powers. The treaty marked the partitioning of the Ottoman Empire and led to the occupation of considerable territories by Britain, France, Italy, and Greece.

2 S. Flanagan, S. Larrabee, et al., *Turkey's Nationalist Course: Implications for the U.S.-Turkish Strategic Partnership* and the U.S. Army, RAND Corporation, 2020, p. xix


3 S. Petriashvili, *Where Is the Black Sea Region in Turkey's Foreign Policy?* “Turkish Policy Quarterly”, December 2015 [http://turkishpolicy.com/article/777/where-is-the-black-sea-region-in-turkeys-foreign-policy#_ftn16 access: 03 May 2017].

heavyweights, such as Russia and Turkey, has been toward the region, their objective has been traditionally how this region could potentially become part of their respective spheres of influence⁴ rather than how to create a strong sense of regionalism or to promote the spirit of regional cooperation. Hence, BSEC has become the first step on the way to mapping an autonomous regional system under Turkey's leadership.

At the same time, the "regional solutions for regional problems" approach, adopted by Ankara and very much welcomed by Moscow, was called to prevent the militarisation and "internationalisation" of the Black Sea basin in case of a wider presence of the NATO navy or military bases in the region. Historically, one of the major concerns for Turkey has been to prevent the Black Sea from becoming "a new focal point of global rivalry and conflict"⁵, and in this regard any extension of naval power beyond the existing measures has been regarded by Ankara as a dangerous move to change the status quo and, thus, destabilise the so far "neutral" region. As B. Devlen puts it,

*Turkey's position in the Black Sea is based on defending the status quo, and the country opposes interference by outside powers, creating a de facto Turko-Russian condominium in the Black Sea. Very strict adherence to the Montreux Convention of 1936, which regulates the passage of naval warships from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea via the Turkish Straits, forms the basis of Turkish policy.*⁶

That is why, for instance, in 2006 Turkey and Russia opposed the extension of NATO's Operation Active Endeavour from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea. Both countries considered a more active US involvement as a destabilising factor in the region. Officially, Turkey claimed that the presence of NATO warships in the Black Sea might threaten Article 18 of the Montreux Convention, which put restrictions on the number, type, and length of stay of non-littoral states' warships in the "Straits". Besides, Turkish officials argued that NATO was already active in the Black Sea through the presence of the Turkish, Bulgarian, and Romanian navies⁷. However, this raised accusations in the West that Turkey and Russia were striving to establish a "naval condominium" in the Black Sea⁸.

 ***At the same time, the "regional solutions for regional problems" approach, adopted by Ankara and very much welcomed by Moscow, was called to prevent the militarisation and "internationalisation" of the Black Sea basin in case of a wider presence of the NATO navy***

From Turkey's point of view, NATO's Operation Active Endeavour would be redundant to the Black Sea Harmony, a Turkish national operation to patrol the Black Sea basin, which was later expanded

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- 4 D. Lynch, *A Regional Insecurity Dynamic*, [in:] D. Lynch (ed.), *The South Caucasus: A Challenge for the EU*, EUISS: Paris 2003, p. 10.
- 5 M. Celikpala, *Escalating Rivalries and Diverging Interests: Prospects for Stability and Security in the Black Sea Region*, "Southeast European and Black Sea Studies", 10(3), 2010, p. 289.
- 6 B. Devlen, *Don't Poke the Russian Bear: Turkish Policy in the Ukrainian Crisis*, "Norwegian Peace-Building Resource Center Policy Brief", May 2014, p. 2.
- 7 G. Winrow, *Turkey and the Greater Black Sea Region*, [in:] N. A. Guney (ed.), *Contentious Issues of Security and the Future of Turkey*, Ashgate Publishing: Farnham 2007, pp. 130-131.
- 8 V. Socor, *Black Sea Watch*, "Eurasian Daily Monitor", 2(34), 17 February 2005 [<https://jamestown.org/program/black-sea-watch/> access: 21 February 2020].

to littoral states, and to BLACKSEAFOR, another regional initiative led by Turkey⁹. As Turkish analyst S. Koru said, “With most of these initiatives, Turkey was careful to work with regional countries only... [since] Ankara wanted to create an institutional framework that would facilitate its leadership in the region. Initiatives by its Western allies would not only undermine the regional legitimacy of this kind of diplomacy, but also overshadow Turkey’s role”.¹⁰

The tendency to keep outsiders off the region became even more evident during the Russo-Georgian War of 2008, when Ankara denied passage for two American vessels carrying humanitarian aid to Georgia, in a fear of provoking Russia’s response and further militarisation of the Black Sea¹¹. At the same time, Turkey’s then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan proposed the idea of creating the “Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform”, a regional organisation bringing together five regional states (Turkey, Russia, Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan) to work on the settlement of the conflict. Turkish then-Foreign Minister Ali Babacan explained it by saying that these “countries need to develop a functional method of finding solutions to their problems from within”¹², instead of waiting for help to come from outside.

Since 2008, Turkey’s regional policy has been defined to a considerable extent by this concept of creating “regional solutions for regional problems”, contributing to Ankara’s image of an independent security actor playing a leading role in regional processes while minimising the military and even at times the diplomatic presence of its traditional Western partners. Washington, well aware of Turkey’s concerns about losing its dominant position in the Black Sea basin to the growing US presence, has actively supported trilateral formats of Bulgaria–Romania–Turkey military exchanges and consultations, in an effort to assuage Ankara’s fears of violation of the Montreux Convention¹³.

The idea got initial support from Ankara during the 2015–2016 “jet crisis” with Russia, when President Erdogan reversed his traditional reluctance about NATO presence in the Black Sea, acknowledging that NATO was “absent from the Black Sea”: “The Black Sea has almost become a Russian lake. If we don’t act now, history will not forgive us”.¹⁴ So, when NATO allies agreed at the 2016 Warsaw Summit to initiate the Tailored Forward Presence for the Black Sea region, Ankara pledged to participate in Romania’s multinational brigade under a NATO flag, aimed at responding to Russia’s assertive posture in the region. However, later it

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- 9 G. Tol, *Balance in the Black Sea: Complex Dynamic Between Turkey, Russia and NATO*, “Middle East Institute Policy Analysis”, 18 November 2019 [<https://www.mei.edu/publications/balance-black-sea-complex-dynamic-between-turkey-russia-and-nato> access: 01 March 2019].
 - 10 S. Koru, *Turkey’s Black Sea Policy: Navigating Between Russia and the West*, “Black Sea Strategy Papers”, July 2017 [<https://www.fpri.org/article/2017/07/turkeys-black-sea-policy-navigating-russia-west/> access: 24 September 2017].
 - 11 *ABD gemisine geçit yok (No Passage to the US Vessel)*, “Hürriyet”, 16 August 2008 [<https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/dunya/abd-gemisine-gecit-yok-9674154>].
 - 12 A. Babacan, *Calming the Caucasus*, “The New York Times”, 23 September 2008 [<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/23/opinion/23iht-edbabacan.1.16407371.html> access: 2 October 2010].
 - 13 A. Cohen, I. Conway, *U.S. Strategy in the Black Sea Region*, “Backgrounder”, No. 1990, Heritage Foundation: Washington, DC, December 2006.
 - 14 Cited in: A. Binnendijk, *The Russian-Turkish Bilateral Relationship: Managing Differences in an Uneasy Partnership*, [in:] S. Flanagan, S. Larrabee, et al., *Turkey’s Nationalist Course: Implications for the U.S.-Turkish Strategic Partnership and the U.S. Army*, RAND Corporation, 2020, p. 126.

“dragged its feet at the creation of a limited maritime coordination function in the Black Sea that the same country promoted”.¹⁵

As the crisis with Russia was soothed and relations with Moscow quickly improved after the failed coup attempt, the idea was criticised by Ankara for bringing unnecessary tensions to the region, provoking further escalation with Russia and replicating the already existing NATO formats of naval cooperation.

Turkey's Threat Perceptions in the Black Sea Region after 2014

Despite some expectations that after the occupation of Crimea Turkey would become an important security provider in the region as a NATO member and a major naval force, able to deter Russian growing military build-up, this did not happen.

While Turkey has not recognised the illegal annexation of Crimea and has been quite vocal in its support for Ukraine's territorial integrity and condemnation of the human rights violations against Crimean Tatars, it has always been cautious to avoid strong wording on Russian aggression in the region. Ankara has always paid attention to prevent a negative spillover effect from contradictions around the Crimean issue to the generally positive dynamics in its dialogue with Russia. Except for a short crisis in Turkish–Russian relations after the downing of a Russian Su-24 in 2015, the “post-coup” period has witnessed an unprecedented rapprochement between Moscow and Ankara. It was marked with

burgeoning cooperation on a number of key issues, including de-conflicting efforts in Syria, supply of S-400 air defence systems to Turkey, energy cooperation on TurkStream gas pipeline, construction of NPP Akkuyu, etc. This made Ankara's Black Sea policy largely determined by the desire to resume full-speed cooperation with Russia and to avoid any moves that could potentially threaten the implementation of these plans.



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Regardless of all the important processes unfolding in the Black Sea, the region did not take place among the country's top security priorities, a recent poll by Kadir Khas University has shown¹⁶. What did raise concerns among Turkish public were economic problems, the war on terror, and heightening tensions in the Middle East: escalation in Syria, Libya, and Eastern Mediterranean, refugee crisis, terror threats (mainly, PKK, YPG, and FETO¹⁷). In this regard, statements made by the Turkish President Erdogan at the 2019 NATO London Summit were quite telling. His initial promises to block the Alliance's defence

15 B. Toucas, *Turkey Has No Allies in the Black Sea, Only Interests*, “CSIS Commentary”, 13 February 2018 [https://www.csis.org/analysis/turkey-has-no-allies-black-sea-only-interests access: 20 February 2020].

16 *Türkiye Eğilimleri – 2019 (Turkish Trends 2019)*, “Public Opinion Survey”, Kadir Has University, 15 January 2020 [https://www.khas.edu.tr/sites/khas.edu.tr/files/inline-files/TE2019_TUR_BASIN_15.01.20%20WEB%20versiyon%20powerpoint_0.pdf access: 16 January 2020].

17 FETO – “Fethullah Gulen's Terror Organisation”, recognised by the Turkish government as a terror organisation for plotting the 2016 coup attempt.

plans for Poland and the Baltic States in case of Brussels' failure to recognise Kurdish YPG groups as a terrorist organisation¹⁸ have clearly demonstrated that for Turkey "NATO's eastern flank problem" extends not along the Baltic Sea but across its border with Syria. The disregard by the Western partners of Turkey's sensitivities in the Middle Eastern stalemate has not only deepened the existing crisis in the transatlantic relations but also made Ankara's successful cooperation with Russia instrumental in dealing with its main security concerns in the region.

In Turkey, "having Russia on board" is seen as a key to maintaining stability in both the Black Sea and the wider Middle East. This vision is only gaining ground as Ankara is closely following Russia's growing military build-up on its borders to the north and south. Besides, given the overall dynamics in the dialogue with Brussels and Washington, strengthening of NATO's presence on the eastern borders of Europe is often seen in Turkey not as a guarantee but rather as a threat to its national security. The issue would get even more sensitive if the warships were to come to Istanbul "under the flag of the US", a country viewed as the number one security threat by 81.9% of the Turkish population (leaving far behind Russia, Syria, Armenia, and Cyprus)¹⁹.

At the same time, many Turkish analysts and policy-makers still share naïf beliefs that under the current circumstances "not triggering Russian retaliation", or to put it simply,

"appeasement of resurgent Russia", would be the best policy option to ensure lasting peace in the unstable region. Therefore, there are serious concerns in Ankara that further building of NATO's military capabilities near Russian borders could provoke an unwanted escalation on the part of Moscow, which could be otherwise avoided. The same desire "not to poke the Russian bear" explains Turkey's weak reaction to the 2018 "Kerch incident". After Russia seized three Ukrainian vessels and took hostage 24 sailors, Turkey's Foreign Ministry issued a statement "emphasiz[ing] [the importance of] freedom of passage at the Kerch Strait" and "urg[ing] all parties to refrain from steps endangering regional peace and stability".²⁰

Some pro-government Turkish experts go as far as to suggest that Ukraine should also become a part of this "inclusive dialogue": "As Turkey's partnerships deepen with both Ukraine and Russia, Ankara can also mediate the soothing of the tension between two former brotherly countries... Under these circumstances, the parties, including Ukraine, need to sit together to augment security cooperation in a wide region".²¹ On the political level, among other things, this approach includes calls to send back Ukrainian liaison officers and resume participation in the Operation Black Sea Harmony and BLACKSEAFOR, which have been suspended after 2014.

Jamestown analyst V. Socor calls such policy "a reality-denying position", saying

18 *Turkey Threatens to Block NATO's Baltic Defence Plan over YPG*, "Aljazeera", 03 December 2019 [<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/12/turkey-threatens-block-nato-baltic-defence-plan-ypg-191203083651527.html> access: 03 December 2019].

19 *Turkish Foreign Policy*, "Research on Public Perceptions", Kadir Has University, July 2019 [<https://www.khas.edu.tr/en/haberler/research-public-perceptions-turkish-foreign-policy-2019> access: 15 August 2019].

20 *Press Release Regarding the Tension in the Azov Sea and Kerch Strait*, Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, no. 321, 26 November 2018 [http://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-321_-azak-denizi-ve-kerk-bogazindaki-gerginlik-hk_en.en.mfa access: 01 March 2020].

21 E. Yalınkılıç, *Turkey's "Near Abroad" in the Black Sea: Ankara's Predicament between Kiev and Moscow*, "Daily Sabah", 16 October 2017 [<https://www.dailysabah.com/op-ed/2017/10/16/turkeys-near-abroad-in-the-black-sea-ankaras-predicament-between-kiev-and-moscow> access: 18 October 2017].

that Ankara is “clinging to a status quo that no longer existed”: “Turkey does not, and cannot on its own any longer, counterbalance Russia’s threatening power, but neither does it work proactively with its NATO riparian and non-riparian allies to deal with this mounting challenge”.²²

With this being said, one should not overestimate the level of trust in the Turkish-Russian relations. While Turkey opposes NATO presence in the Black Sea basin on a permanent basis, it takes active part in joint maritime exercises and training drills, such as PASSEX or Sea Breeze, designed to increase interoperability of the participating countries on sea, land, and air.

Politically, Turkey has always paid attention to maintaining close cooperation with Ukraine and Georgia, both within the NATO framework and on a bilateral level. Ankara remains a strategic partner and important political-military ally of Ukraine and has significantly intensified defence and security cooperation with Kyiv in recent years, including supply of Turkish professional communication systems and combat UAV’s to the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Last year both sides declared the creation of a joint Ukrainian-Turkish venture “Black Sea Shield” aimed at combining technological and industrial potential of the two countries in the aviation, security, and defence spheres²³. As Turkey’s disagreements with Russia on Crimea, Libya, and Syria leave fewer and fewer shared interests holding the two countries together, Ankara sees Ukraine as a feasible alternative in the region to ease its dependence on military and defence cooperation with Russia.

Current State of Play and Prospects for the Future

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and illegal annexation of Crimea have led to a dramatic change in the security situation in the Black Sea, detrimental to Turkey’s interests. Militarisation and nuclearisation of the occupied Crimean peninsula, enhanced military modernisation of the Russian armed forces, including deployment of new types of strategic weapons in Crimea, development of a modern submarine fleet, and widespread use of the electronic warfare tools have strengthened Russian ability to project its maritime and military power far beyond the Black Sea basin. In fact, together with the occupied territories of Crimea and critical infrastructure in the territorial waters of Ukraine, the Russian Federation has got a unique opportunity to maintain control over a vast area reaching out to Turkey’s national borders. This can be done by using seized drilling platforms on the Ukrainian shelf, as well as underwater pipelines, for military intelligence purposes, installation of radar systems and acoustic stations; blocking free navigation in the western Black Sea under the pretext of critical infrastructure protection; carrying out large-scale military exercises and manoeuvres with provocative moves; denying access to large areas on sea for the ships of third countries, including Turkish vessels. As Stephen Blank sums it up, as a result Moscow has built a combined arms force of land, sea, air, and electronic forces fully capable of denying access to NATO forces seeking to enter the Black Sea during a potential conflict. Now it is building a similar network of anti-access area denial (A2/AD) capabilities against NATO

22 V. Socor, *Turkey Stalls NATO, Clings to Defunct Status Quo in the Black Sea*, “Eurasia Daily Monitor”, 15(116), 02 August 2018 [<https://jamestown.org/program/turkey-stalls-nato-clings-to-defunct-status-quo-in-the-black-sea/> access: 15 March 2020].

23 *Ukraine And Turkey Set up a Joint Venture in Precision Weapons and Aerospace Technologies*, “National Security and Defence Council of Ukraine”, 09 August 2019 [<https://www.rnbo.gov.ua/en/Diialnist/3345.html> access: 15 March 2020].

in both the Eastern Mediterranean and the Caucasus, in fact surrounding Turkey to the north, south, and east by Russian troops and enhanced military presence in Crimea, eastern Ukraine, Syria, Armenia, and Georgian breakaway province of Abkhazia.²⁴

The fact that the “Russian bear builds a new lair in the Black Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean”²⁵ had already been obvious when Moscow supplied its S-300 and S-400 air defence systems to Syria to defend the Assad regime from NATO aviation. Turkish experts warned back then that Russian Black Sea and Syrian “A2/AD bubbles” should raise concerns in Turkey because “they spell an end to the relative naval superiority that Ankara had established in the Black Sea, the Aegean Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean after the Cold War”. One of the critical articles dated back to 2017 suggested that “while Russian-Turkish relations appear better in recent months, the future is uncertain – if a crisis erupts similar to the November 2015 shooting down of a Russian Su-24 by a Turkish F-16, Ankara would face fearful odds against Moscow”.²⁶

This is exactly what happened in early 2020, when 59 Turkish soldiers were killed by the Russian (-backed) forces in several airstrikes amid a mounting Syrian government offensive to capture Idlib²⁷. The

tensions grew so heightened that several media outlets reported that Erdogan was “considering closure of the Bosphorus for the passage Russian vessels” as one of the possible options “on the table”²⁸. According to the Montreux Convention, the passage of warships through the Straits “shall be left entirely to the discretion of the Turkish government” “in time of war, Turkey being belligerent” (Article 20) or “should Turkey consider herself to be threatened with imminent danger of war” (Article 21)²⁹. Though this is highly unlikely to happen in the case of Idlib, taking into account possible repercussions of such decision, this would have created an important precedent of Ankara’s using the Montreux Convention to restrict Russia’s access to the Mediterranean.

In this regard, it would be not least interesting to see the geopolitical implications of the construction of a new “Canal Istanbul”. The provisions of the Montreux Convention regulate passage through the “Straits of the Dardanelles, the Sea of Marmara and the Bosphorus comprised under the general term ‘Straits’”.³⁰ However, it rests uncertain about any other artificial waterways. While the project has raised heated debate among maritime law experts, President Erdogan recently said that the convention was only “binding” for the Turkish Straits, and Canal Istanbul would be “totally outside

24 S. Blank, *Putin’s Dream of the Black Sea as a Russian Lake*, “Newsweek”, 07 March 2016 [<http://www.newsweek.com/putin-dream-black-sea-russian-lake-476321> access: 15 March 2020].

25 B. Kurtarcan, B. Kayaoglu, *Russia, Turkey and the Black Sea A2/AD Arms Race*, “National Interest”, March 2017 [<http://nationalinterest.org/feature/russia-turkey-the-black-sea-a2-ad-arms-race-19673> access: 10 October 2017].

26 Ibid

27 *Dozens of Turkish Soldiers Killed in Strike in Idlib in Syria*, “The Guardian”, 28 February 2020 [<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/feb/27/dozens-of-turkish-soldiers-killed-in-strike-in-idlib-in-syria-reports-say> access: 28 February 2020]; Joint Coordination Centers Will Be Established with Russia for Idlib, “Hurriyet Daily News”, 13 March 2020 [<https://www.hurriyettailynews.com/joint-coordination-centers-will-be-established-with-russia-for-idlib-minister-152953> access: 15 March 2020].

28 *Turkey May Close the Bosphorus to Russia Warships*, “Middle East Monitor”, 24 February 2020 [<https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200224-turkey-may-close-the-bosphorus-to-russia-warships/>].

29 *Convention Regarding the Regime of the Straits, Preamble*, Montreux 1936, p. 215 [<https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/LON/Volume%20173/v173.pdf>].

30 Ibid, pp. 225–227.

Montreux”³¹. If so, this would mean a drastic change in Turkey’s almost century-long tradition of seeing the Montreux Convention as the alpha and omega of its Black Sea policy that had to be respected no matter what.

All attempts to suggest any amendments to upgrade the 1936 convention in line with the technical characteristics of modern warships have been met in Ankara with a strict rejection. Now, if the Montreux provisions will not be valid for the new channel, apart from being a new trade route, Canal Istanbul might create a completely different geopolitical landscape in the Black Sea. This would give Ankara much more flexibility in foreign policy decision-making and would considerably strengthen its hand at the negotiation table with both Moscow and Washington.

As Turkish Ambassador Tuygan noticed, “For centuries, Russia’s dream was to have Istanbul, the Marmara region and the Straits. This can no longer be the case. ... Russia would prefer the continuation of the Montreux order to avoid new uncertainties and challenges, particularly after the annexation of Crimea with Sevastopol home to its Black Sea Fleet”³². While for Russia this change signals new uncertainties in a formerly “safe Russian harbour”, for Ukraine it might open a new window of opportunity. Some of the advantages might include extending the duration of stay for the navy of non-littoral countries or giving a chance to start liquid gas supplies, which have been impossible so far³³. Now, as the NATO warships and LNG-tankers have to

cross the Bosphorus on their way to the Black Sea, they fall under the provisions of the Montreux Convention and the norms of maritime safety in the overloaded strait. However, these vessels might be exempt from such restrictions if they come via Canal Istanbul, which is not mentioned in the convention. The official launch of the project was declared for 2020 and the construction works are due to be done by 2027. Until then, all parties will have time to practice navigating the turbulent waters of the Bosphorus and big politics.



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Conclusions

After the end of the Cold War, Turkey tried to improve its relations with the neighbouring countries, diminish its dependence on traditional Western allies, and backed the idea that regional stability should be the responsibility of the regional states. This concept worked rather well in times of concerted efforts with Russia to counterbalance US/NATO influence. While it often made Ankara and Moscow tactical allies, it did not do much to strengthen mutual trust or contribute to their strategic

31 A. Tuygan, *The Montreux Convention: Russia’s Perspective*, “EDAM”, 28 January 2020 [<https://edam.org.tr/en/the-montreux-convention-russias-perspective/> access: 15 March 2020].

32 Ibid

33 *Ukraine’s Plans for LNG Imports Face Turkish Resistance*, “Reuters”, 06 February 2013, [<https://www.reuters.com/article/ukraine-turkey-lng/ukraines-plans-for-lng-imports-face-turkish-resistance-idUSL5N0B65Y320130206> access: 15 March 2020]; *Turkey Says No to LNG-Tankers in the Bosphorus Strait, Cuts off Black Sea Shipping*, “Oil and Gas 360”, 24 March 2015 [<https://www.oilandgas360.com/turkey-says-no-to-lng-tankers-in-the-bosphorus-strait-cuts-off-black-sea-shipping/> access: 15 March 2020].

partnership in the long run. However successful the cooperation between the two countries might have been, historically, strategically, and even psychologically, Ankara and Moscow have always remained rivals for dominance in the Black Sea, control over the Straits, and, ironically, seeking better positions in their dialogue with the West.

Today, with changing dynamics in the regional security environment, the main interest of, and the main challenge for, the pragmatic Turkish leadership is still maintaining a smooth balance between the two extremes: “opening” the region to the growing NATO presence (often seen as a threat to the regional or Turkey’s own national security) or letting Moscow convert the Black Sea into a “Russian lake”. In the mid-term perspective, despite Turkey’s growing divergences with Russia on Syria, Libya, and other issues, Ankara is still highly unlikely to go down the path of escalating tensions with Moscow.

In times of crisis with Russia, Turkey might show more willingness in developing naval

cooperation with the non-littoral NATO states. However, it will most probably use this flexibility as a bargaining chip in its dialogue with partners both to the east and to the west, rather than actually support the enhanced presence of the Allied forces in the Black Sea. The Turkish formula “keep the Americans out, regional states in, and the Russians down”³⁴ has proved its efficiency over the years and Ankara is very unlikely to change it in the foreseeable future – unless it decides to reinforce its last element.

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34 The original phrase “NATO was created to keep the Soviet Union out, the Americans in, and the Germans down” belongs to Lord Ismay, NATO’s first secretary general (1952–1957).

BLACK SEA INSECURITIES AND ANKARA'S DILEMMAS

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The perseverance of transactionalism in the global arena has deep implications for the security governance of the Black Sea region. In particular, for Turkey, the linkage between the Syria crisis with the Black Sea region due to Russia's increasing presence in the Middle East has augmented its sense of insecurity. This paper thus attempts to explain and assess the factors driving Turkish strategic thinking as its carefully constructed strategy of being one of the two primus inter pares powers has failed to redress the current imbalance in favour of Russia.

The Black Sea Security in Flux

If I were writing about the security governance of the Black Sea region in the immediate post-Cold War era, I would claim that it is in flux.¹ It had the potential to be rearranged, in that some sort of security community could potentially emerge. In fact, in 2010, albeit in the aftermath of the Russian–Georgian War of August 2008, or maybe as a consequence of it, an effort was launched to assess the situation in the Black Sea region, culminating in policy recommendations aimed at enhancing regional synergies. The Commission on the Black Sea issued a report titled “A 2020 Vision for the Black Sea Region” which was clear regarding its motivations to study the region:

The rationale behind the preparation of this report has been the increased geopolitical volatility of the region, which has proven, time and again, that unresolved issues can ignite into open warfare. Its festering conflicts retard economic development and have the potential to flare up into wider conflagrations. They impact regional stability and security and, unless tackled, threaten far greater international ramifications. But it need not be like this. It is the Commission's conviction that it is realistic to envisage a cohesive, developed, integrated and stable region...²

Writing today, close to three decades after the end of the Cold War, the most succinct assessment is that the region continues to be in a state of flux, but unlike the belief 10 years

1 D. Triantaphyllou, *The 'Security Paradoxes' of the Black Sea Region*, “Southeast European and Black Sea Studies”, 9(3), 2009, pp. 225–241.

2 M. Aydin, D. Triantaphyllou (eds.), *A 2020 Vision for the Black Sea Region: A Report by the Commission on the Black Sea*, Bertelsmann Stiftung: Germany 2010.

ago by the authors of the aforementioned report, the potential, or dynamic, or aspiration for some sort of regional “positive sum” approach promoting regional solutions for regional problems is hard to envisage. In other words, the region has remained in flux, while at the same time relations among the countries comprising it have become increasingly frayed and conflictual. Domestic tensions have also affected their governance potential and their ability to move beyond zero-sum foreign policies.



the Black Sea region's dynamics, or lack thereof, have been fundamentally altered by the Syrian conflict. Russia's direct involvement in Syria has severely limited Turkey's ability to compartmentalise or limit its relations with Russia to the Black Sea region

A number of factors account for this grim outlook. Some reflect the extended nature of transactionalism in the international order and the patterns that have emerged as a result. Others have to do with domestic dynamics in key stakeholders. With transactionalism having become the norm in the international arena,³ it not only affects interstate relations and, by extension, regional dynamics; it also has an impact on the nature of regimes and states and their ability to generate societal transformation. This, in turn, negatively contributes to heightened tensions between countries in the region.

This is evident in the evolving relationship between the Black Sea region's two powerhouses – Turkey and the Russian

Federation – where their regional agenda has become part of a wider extraregional contest. In other words, the Black Sea region's dynamics, or lack thereof, have been fundamentally altered by the Syrian conflict. Russia's direct involvement in Syria has severely limited Turkey's ability to compartmentalise or limit its relations with Russia to the Black Sea region. This is due to the fact that Russia has expanded its presence in the Middle East, especially in Syria, which Turkey has long regarded as its privileged backyard.

The dynamics between Turkey and the Russian Federation are particularly telling of the aforementioned state of play. The Syrian civil war has fundamentally affected the foreign policy-making ability of Turkey in the Black Sea region. While news reports are dominated by a perceived strategic shift on the part of Ankara, away from the West and NATO, towards Moscow and even Teheran, what needs to be assessed are the motivations behind this shift as well as its limitations. Are they driven by a desire to primarily rethink Turkey's strategic and ideological orientation or by the necessity to recalibrate the ever-growing omnipresence of the Russian influence along Turkey's borders to the north (the wider Black Sea region), the south (the Middle East), and even the west (the Aegean and Mediterranean seas)? Russian activism, which has widened its political, diplomatic, and military presence beyond this immediate neighbourhood, or what is otherwise known as its near abroad, has sent Turkey scrambling to recalibrate its policy vis à vis Russia.

Turkish Foreign Policy Thinking

Two important factors influence the Turkish thinking. The first is the *Sèvres Syndrome*; the second is “balancing” between the West

3 See, for example, D. Triantaphyllou, *The Empty Shell of Black Sea Regionalism*, “UA: Ukraine Analytica”, 4(6), 2016, pp. 5–11.

and the non-Western world. Yet both of these are defined under the prism of Turkey, as a member of the West, be it in the traditional Kemalist secular mould, or under the current Muslim/Islamic/nationalist orientation.


The difficult balancing act in terms of how to pigeonhole relations and allow for Turkey to have a certain room for manoeuvre along its borders is at the crux of Ankara's strategic thinking. This particularly applies to the Black Sea region, where Turkey has always considered itself to have a *primus inter pares* role and influence together with Russia over all other regional states. The same can be said of the Middle East, where Turkey, as a regional actor, has cultivated the role of an "insider", as it views the region as "a springboard of power and influence projection", and where Russia as "a self-aware 'outsider,' both geographically and culturally" has treated "Syria as a beachhead".⁴

While the divergences of the conflicting foreign policies of Turkey and Russia in the Middle East, and the Syrian war, came to a head with the downing of a Russian bomber on 24 November 2015, relations since the incident between the two countries have been both on the rebound in the sense that there is extensive communication between the two sides as well as tenuous given divergences regarding the future of Syria proper.

In part, this is owed to the compartmentalisation of their differences, "including over the divided island of Cyprus and Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea" as well as the end game in Syria.

As Mitat Celikpala affirms, "If you set aside all those issues, they are good partners for the resolution of immediate interests."⁵ This implies that Ankara's cooperation with Russia stems from necessity rather than from a grand strategic rethink, as the perceived consensus over the division of labour in Syria allows for the former to be an actor on the ground with considerable sway over the future of Syria.

In fact, the April 2018 and the September 2019 meetings of the leaders of Turkey, Russia, and Iran in Ankara were meant to project a sense of unity of purpose as the "leaders have come to believe the real shots regarding Syria are being called in the meetings among themselves. And while [the] Geneva [process] is stalled, if not comatose, conditions on the ground are fast-changing. These three stakeholders in the Syria conflict feel they'd be better positioned to drive change themselves rather than waiting until it starts."⁶



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On the other hand, as Amberin Zaman, a veteran Turkey observer, notes in reference to the April 2018 meeting, "the picture of unity displayed by the leaders, however, belied the extent to which they also differ

4 A. K. Han, "Pride and Pragmatism: Turkish-Russian Relations after the Su-24M Incident", *On Turkey*, German Marshall Fund of the United State, January 2016, p. 2.

5 Associated Press, *Turkey, Russia Ties Grow Stronger as U.S. Gets Elbowed out of the Middle East*, "Haaretz", 03 April 2018 (access: 22 March 2018).

6 M. A. Suchkov, *Ankara Summit Focuses on Syria's Fate Once War Ends*, "Al-Monitor", 06 April 2018 (access: 05 March 2020).

in their respective priorities in Syria. For Turkey, it is to dismantle PYD [Democratic Union Party] rule. For Iran, it is to ensure the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad remains intact. For Russia, it is to consolidate its strategic foothold in the eastern Mediterranean through a mix of diplomatic dexterity and military muscle.”⁷

The Russian consolidation effort to gain a strategic foothold in the Mediterranean and beyond its immediate neighbourhood is the main consideration behind Turkey’s concerns now that the compartmentalisation or the separation from the Black Sea region and the Middle East is becoming an increasingly difficult venture. Ben Steil in an article in *Foreign Policy* correctly reminds us that Russia’s geography orientates its foreign policy actions.⁸ In other words, environmental determinism driven by geopolitics is at the core of Russia’s perceptions of itself.

Geopolitics popularised by H. J. Mackinder, F. Ratzel, and A. T. Mahan stressed the correlation between a land power and a sea power.⁹ Hence, geography rather than ideology has been the key driver of Russian foreign policy predicated on the fact that its “eternal fear of invasion drove its foreign policy then and continues to do so now.”¹⁰ George Kennan’s *Long Telegram* of 1946 basically suggests the same thing when he refers to the “traditional and instinctive Russian sense of insecurity”.¹¹ The policy

of containment was thus predicated on the fact that the perception of insecurity in the heartland by successive Russian regimes drives them towards aggressive behaviour abroad.¹² This is very much in tune with Mackinder’s Heartland or Geographic Pivot of History Theory summarised by Mackinder himself is 1942 as: “Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland; who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island; who rules the World-Island commands the world”.¹³

The effort to address the perennial sense of insecurity logically drives Moscow to foreign policy adventurism such as the creation and maintenance of protracted conflicts in Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine, as well as gaining a say in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. All these actions, including the annexation of Crimea, are very much reminiscent of Soviet action to annex Ukraine and Belarus in 1922 and the Baltic states in 1940 as well as the creation of East Germany in 1949 in order to countenance what Vladimir Putin described in his 2005 State of the Union address as the collapse of the Soviet Union being the “greatest geopolitical catastrophe” of the 20th century.

For Turkey, insecurity also drives its foreign policy. According to Mustafa Aydin, “Turkey lives with a perennial ‘insecurity complex’, or a ‘national security syndrome’... The evolution of Turkish society has been defined by a particular ‘security culture’

7 A. Zaman, *Erdogan, Putin, Rouhani Tout Alliance, Eye US for Next Move*, “Al-Monitor”, 04 April 2018 (access: 08 March 2020).

8 B. Steil, *Russia’s Clash with the West Is about Geography, Not Ideology*, “Foreign Policy”, 12 February 2018 (access: 20 March 2020).

9 L. M. Ashworth, *Realism and the Spirit of 1919: Halford Mackinder, Geopolitics and the Reality of the League of Nations*, “European Journal of International Relations”, 12(2), 2011, pp. 279–301.

10 Steil, n8.

11 G. Kennan, *The Long Telegram*, 22 February 1946, [https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu//coldwar/documents/episode-1/kennan.htm access: 10 March 2020].

12 Apart from the *Long Telegram*, see also G. F. Kennan, *The Sources of Soviet Conduct*, “Foreign Affairs”, July 1947.

13 H. J. Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Security: A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction*, National Defense University Press: Washington 1942, p. 106.

that overrides most other considerations.”¹⁴ As a result, geography and history are the principal determinants of its strategic outlook. This implies that its membership in NATO and by extension the Western world since 1952 is “owed a great deal to the country’s geographical position.”¹⁵

The end of the Cold War reaffirmed these fears as Turkey sought to create its own strategic space with a spate of initiatives aimed at addressing its “fear” or insecurity. Thus, Turkey like all other states in Europe scrambled to reconsider its security priorities. The end of bipolarity threatened Turkey’s status as a key flank state for the West and NATO and left it even more exposed to the potential insecurity the post-Cold War environment brought with it.

The insecurity is driven by a deep feeling of not belonging to either West or East and a deep mistrust of great or greater powers historically attempting to carve up the country or at least to interfere in its domestic affairs.

The basic *problematique* for Ankara has always been how to deal with the twin challenges of great power – the United States and Russia in the post-Cold War era – revisionism. In the case of the United States, the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the response to the Arab Spring uprisings of late 2010 as well as the involvement in Syria and Libya fundamentally challenged Turkey’s focus on the stability of the regimes surrounding it rather than embracing democracy

promotion. In the case of Russia, the desire since Peter the Great’s rule for a warm water port in the Mediterranean, gaining a foothold in Syria, and the annexation of Crimea have all been contributing factors enhancing Ankara’s sense of insecurity.

The annexation of Crimea has created an additional problem as it fundamentally reshapes the balance of power in the Black Sea primarily to the detriment of Turkey. On the other hand, the “Turkish–Russian partnership is inherently based on defensive motivations on the part of both sides. It is defensive against the potential for further instability in its immediate neighbourhood. It is also defensive regarding the shaping of a new Europe that appears to exclude the two regional powers.”¹⁶ This has led to the fact that for Turkey, “Russia has always been as a counterweight to the West,” and as a result it has “played the Russia card in [its] negotiations with Washington and Brussels on different occasions.”¹⁷

This has been particularly enhanced during the years in power of the AKP, which has led to the emergence of a new foreign policy orientation that is both discursive and ideological as well as applied. It has given rise to a new nationalism – “build a conception of the nation that challenges the premises of Kemalist nationalism.”¹⁸ This new concept implies that Sunni Muslim values have become the core that defines the nation, rejecting the “Westernisation” paradigm of successive Turkish governments. It also implies the confirmation and perpetuation of

14 M. Aydin, *Securitization of History and Geography: Understanding of Security in Turkey*, “Southeast European and Black Sea Studies”, 3(2), 2003, p. 164.

15 S. Güvenç, S. Özel, *NATO and Turkey in the Post-Cold War World: Between Abandonment and Entrapment*, “Southeast European and Black Sea Studies”, 12(4), 2012, p. 538.


16 S. Kiniklioğlu, V. Morkva, *An Anatomy of Turkish–Russian Relations*, “Southeast European and Black Sea Studies”, 7(4), 2007, p. 548.

17 M. Çelikpala, *Russia’s Policies in the Middle East and the Pendulum of Turkish-Russian Relations*, Jamestown Foundation, 05 October 2017.

18 C. Saraçoğlu, Ö. Demirkol, *Nationalism and Foreign Policy Discourse in Turkey under the AKP Rule: Geography, History and National Identity*, “British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies”, 42(3), 2015, p. 306.

“the lone wolf syndrome”, which was brought about by the twin fears of abandonment and entrapment due the reliance on the US nuclear umbrella during the Cold War.¹⁹

The Sèvres Syndrome has also re-emerged as a motivating factor in Turkey’s security strategy. As Emre Erdoğan suggested, “This syndrome, so named in the 1990s, describes a common anxiety that Turkey is targeted by foreign powers aiming to divide the country as provisioned in the Treaty of Sèvres, which the Ottoman Empire was forced to sign after World War I. It was never ratified and implemented but is still taught in the Turkish education system.”²⁰

 ***In the Black Sea region, the carefully constructed strategy of two primus inter pares powers has failed to redress the current imbalance in favour of Russia, leading Recep Tayyip Erdogan to express his fear on the eve of the Alliance’s Warsaw Summit in July 2016 that the Black Sea was becoming a Russian lake***

As a consequence, the end of the Cold War also allowed for activism to strengthen Turkey’s position as a key actor in the Black Sea region. First of all, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, with the creation of 15 independent states, granted Turkey a physical buffer from Russia’s long reach with the presence of both Georgia and Armenia along Turkey’s borders. The

presence of Azerbaijan also gave Turkey a potential ally in the region not only due to ethnic Turkic kinship but also due to Baku’s emergence as a strong natural resource producer, which has allowed it to resist Moscow’s overreach.

Regional Player or Regional Leader?

Turkey also used the opportunity to launch regional initiatives stressing regional cooperation in a multilevel strategy that included and continues to be predicated upon the country’s positioning as a major regional stakeholder. As a result, in the great energy game, Turkey positioned itself as a vital transit state. It also took the lead in the creation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organization in 1992. It initiated a number of maritime security frameworks such as BLACKSEAFOR and Black Sea Harmony with the other littoral states in an attempt to keep non-regional actors out of the region. In the immediate aftermath of the August 2008 Russo-Georgian War, it promoted a plan to increase its “soft power” role in the Caucasus with the launch of the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform.²¹ Turkey has also been leading the process of trilateral cooperation with Georgia and Azerbaijan.²² Finally, it has been attempting to achieve a gradual rapprochement with Russia. All the while, Turkey tied its fortunes to the grand design of Ahmet Davutoglu’s Zero Problems with the Neighbours policy, which could not cope with the fast pace of the reshaping of the post-Cold War order. Hence, it has resulted in today’s Cold Peace between Russia and the West, and the redrawing of the map of the Middle East.

19 Güvenç and Özel, p. 534.

20 E. Erdoğan, “The Unbearable Heaviness of Being a Turkish Citizen”, *On Turkey*, German Marshall Fund, 21 February 2014.

21 See E. Fotiou, *Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform: What Is at Stake for Regional Cooperation*, “ICBSS Policy Brief” 16, International Centre for Black Sea Studies (ICBSS): Athens, June 2009.

22 See M. Celikpala, *Turkey and the New Energy Politic of the Black Sea Region*, “CIES Neighbourhood Policy Paper” 5, Center for International and European Studies: Istanbul, January 2013.

Consequently, Turkey has had to address both the revisionism of the West in Iraq and now Syria as well as Russia's opportunism and activism in both the Black Sea region and the Middle East. In the Black Sea region, the carefully constructed strategy of two *primus inter pares* powers has failed to redress the current imbalance in favour of Russia, leading Recep Tayyip Erdogan to express his fear on the eve of the Alliance's Warsaw Summit in July 2016 that the Black Sea was becoming a Russian lake.

The domestic context is also a vital contributing factor or determinant in Turkey's foreign policy orientation. The increasingly polarised political and social context is defined by two issues. The first is a desire to reformulate the country's identity. The second is a major resistance and the need for the ruling party and the country's president to stay in power in successive legislative or presidential elections as well as the upholding of referenda they have engineered.²³

Nevertheless, the government's actions are principally predicated upon the traditional or perennial reflexes of insecurity stemming from the Sèvres Syndrome as well as balancing irrespective of the discourse expounded by its governing elite *du jour*. Consequently, the country's involvement in the Atlantic Alliance is non-negotiable as it is the only Western institution in which Turkey enjoys the fruits of full membership. Membership in NATO serves to counterbalance Russia's ability to fully project itself and dominate the course of developments in the Black Sea region as well as the Middle East.

Conversely, the Turco-Russian rapprochement operates as a policy instrument to countenance perceived foreign policy decisions by the United States and other Western powers that could be detrimental to Turkish interests. On the other hand, the reality of the ongoing Syrian civil war, the endeavoured internationalisation of the Kurdish issue, Iran's emergence or attempted re-emergence, and Russia's efforts to use every opportunity to strengthen its hand and project its power regionally and globally leave little room for Turkey to engineer a new, more autonomous course for the country at this stage.

The casting aside of the Davutoglu doctrine with its "emphasis on the 'civilizational' aspects of Turkey's role [...] diminishing" and the ambition to punch above its weight as a "great power" are telling. "In its place, we can observe a more 'transactional', unplanned, ad hoc type of foreign policy, based on expediency. The ideological preferences of the AKP government are still significant but, as Turkey descends into internal crisis, and the Syrian war continues to take its toll, the interests and survival of the ruling party are increasingly paramount."²⁴

Conclusion

This analysis has been limited to a brief presentation and assessment of the policy challenges for Ankara in the Black Sea region in terms of its relationship with Moscow in the current context. An appraisal of the continued lack of a targeted NATO presence in the region in large part is due to divergences among its member states as to the Alliance's role in the region. It

23 The same applies to Russia and its sovereign democracy model of governance under Vladimir Putin. See V. Surkov, *Suverenitet – Eto Politicheskiy Sinonim Konkurentosposobnosti (Sovereignty Is the Political Synonym of Competitiveness)*, [in:] N. Garadzha (ed.), *Suverenitet*, Evropa: Moscow 2006.

24 K. Dalacoura, *A New Phase in Turkish Foreign Policy: Expediency and AKP Survival*, "Future Notes" 4, MENARA Project, February 2017, p. 2.

is also a result of the growing inherent weakness of the European Union to maintain the dynamism of its enlargement and neighbourhood policies that would also highlight further complex challenges.

The same applies to the energy security equation as well as the maritime security dimension, which has been rapidly rising to the top of the security agenda given the relevance of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits as a major maritime chokepoint. In addition, the frequency with which Russian navy ships cross the straits to reach the Russian naval facility in Tartus as part of its greater engagement in Syria should be considered. Nevertheless, the focus on the Russian–Turkish relationship clearly reflects that Turkey’s ability to shape developments in the Black Sea is limited, thereby increasing the region’s insecurities.

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GEORGIA AND THE BLACK SEA SECURITY: OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER COOPERATION

Tengiz Pkhaladze

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Security of NATO's eastern flank depends a lot on the situation in the Black Sea region. Today the Alliance is trying to develop a common strategy on this issue. In this process, it is highly important to appropriately assess littoral countries' role and capabilities in the common security architecture. Georgia is one of the essential partners for NATO. It makes significant contribution to the Euro-Atlantic security through active engagement in the Alliance's international missions, as well as the intensive development of efficient partnership programmes. Strengthening Georgia's and other coastal countries' defensibility will considerably advance the elaboration of the Alliance's Black Sea strategy and enhance security of the eastern flank of NATO.

The Black Sea has always had a special role for European development and security. From time to time, since the Golden Fleece age to the present days, this role has been changeable: The sea has served as either an interconnector or a border between the West and the East. Consequently, its name has changed several times: the Pontus Sea, Hospitable Sea, Inhospitable Sea. Such political and geopolitical twists and turns always had an enormous impact on coastal countries' prospects and destiny.

In the 20th century, this place served as a separation line between the Warsaw Pact and NATO, preventing cooperation even among littoral states. After the Cold War, when nations freed from the Soviet empire decided to regain their historical place in the European family, the Black Sea once again started its transformation into a "hospitable" place for international cooperation. The West again turned its

attention towards the Black Sea region and a number of partnership initiatives developed.

Today the Black Sea countries are facing another challenging milestone. Russia's growing ambitions, aggressiveness, especially towards neighbours, military invasion and occupation of parts of Georgia, illegal annexation of Crimea, and war in Donbas extremely jeopardised security of the entire region. Since 2014 (Crimea's annexation), NATO has finally started developing a policy towards the Black Sea and the region has gradually become part of the Alliance's agenda. However, a unified strategy for long-lasting security is still a long way off. Differences in the visions and perceptions of member states still require further scrutiny and concessions. Nevertheless, security guarantees of NATO countries are fairly sustainable, but, at the same time,

the real threats for their regional security lie beyond NATO borders, on the east coast of the Black Sea, in Georgia and Ukraine.



Georgia is a stronghold of the Western alliances and NATO's eastern flank in the region, and has demonstrated the best possible performance expected from an aspirant country

Georgia in the Euro-Atlantic Security System

Georgia is the smallest among the Black Sea littoral states. However, this tiny country has strategic importance. Georgia is located at a critical nexus of the South Caucasus region that bridges the west with the east and the north with the south. It provides access to the Black Sea for eight out of the 14 landlocked countries of the Eurasian continent and opens wide opportunities for trans-regional cooperation. A straight virtual line on the map, from the north to the south borders of Georgia forms a gateway to the “Oxygen Corridor” for the East–West cooperation. This safeguards economic opportunities and connection for European markets as well as Asian resources. If the international community accepts shutting down this corridor, it will affect overall prosperity and welfare.

Georgia is a stronghold of the Western alliances and NATO's eastern flank in the region, and has demonstrated the best possible performance expected from an aspirant country. Eighteen years have passed since Georgia officially declared its request to become a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.¹ Twelve years ago, in Bucharest, NATO leaders promised Georgia and Ukraine they would one day join the Alliance.² Over this period, Georgia has established its democratic credentials as a frontrunner in the region. It is an unshakable, committed, reliable, and burden-sharing partner to NATO, firmly standing to protect common welfare and security. Georgia has relatively small defence forces, up to 37,000, and no navy. Subsequently, one can question the country's capability to contribute to the Black Sea security, but such an impression is very superficial and delusive. The Georgian army is well trained and completely interoperable with NATO. Since 1999, Georgia actively participates in NATO-led international missions. The country continues its participation in Resolute Support Mission (RSM) in Afghanistan and remains one of the largest contributors to the mission.³

In 2014, Georgia received the Substantial NATO–Georgia Package (SNGP) as part of the Defence and Related Security Capacity Building Initiative and joined NATO's Partnership Interoperability Initiative, allowing non-NATO partners to contribute to the Alliance's missions and exercises.⁴

- 1 *Statement by President of Georgia Eduard Shevardnadze at the EAPC Summit*, NATO Prague Summit, 21-22 November 2002 [<https://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2002/s021122h.htm>].
- 2 *Bucharest Summit Declaration issued by Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Bucharest*, NATO, 03 April 2008 [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm].
- 3 *Resolute Support Mission (RSM): Key Facts and Figures*, NATO, July 2019 [https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2019_06/20190625_2019-06-RSM-Placemat.pdf].
- 4 *Wales Summit Declaration Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Wales*, NATO, 05 September 2014 [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm].

In 2016, at the Warsaw Summit, NATO confirmed that Georgia's relationship with the Alliance contains all the practical tools to prepare for eventual membership.⁵ Year in and year out Georgia has made valuable contributions to the international missions in Kosovo, Iraq, Central Africa, Mali, and Afghanistan. Nowadays, Georgia remains the largest per capita contributor to the Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan. Currently, Georgia meets NATO member states' standard of allocating 2% of GDP to defence and spending around 20% of the defence budget on major acquisitions.

The Substantial NATO-Georgia Package is aimed at improving Georgia's defence capabilities, increasing its resilience, enhancing interoperability with NATO, and supporting NATO membership preparation process. According to the 2016 Warsaw Summit decision, two priority areas were identified in addition to 13 initiatives under the SNGP.⁶ Currently, the SNGP consists of 14 initiatives: the NATO-Georgia Joint Training and Evaluation Centre (JTEC), Defence Institutional Building School (DIBS), Logistic Capability Development, Intelligence Sharing and Secure Communications, Aviation, Air Defence, Special Operations Forces, Military Police, Acquisition, Maritime Security, Cyber Security, Strategic Communications, Crisis Management, and Counter Mobility. The Strategic and Operational Planning Initiative was successfully concluded in October 2017. Implementation of the SNGP is supervised by the deputy secretary general of NATO, whereas practical execution of each initiative is supported by experts from NATO member and partner

states. Majority of NATO experts reside in Georgia on a rotation basis and a number of experts conduct regular visits.⁷

The NATO-Georgia Joint Training and Evaluation Centre opens up a unique opportunity for international military cooperation. The JTEC is a combined NATO-Georgia project based on Georgian and regional needs and complementary to existing training programmes, policies, and doctrines. It is tasked with strengthening the capabilities of Georgia's defence and security sector in addressing a range of threats, as well as improving the interoperability of Georgian and Allied Forces, and contributing to regional security cooperation. It will achieve these goals through promotion of inter-agency coordination, facilitation of national, bilateral, and multilateral exercises, as well as training, evaluation, and certification activities, supported by the use of modern training technologies – live, virtual, and constructive simulation.


As a result of the Russian military aggression in 2008, Georgian naval forces were destroyed. It was decided to merge the Georgian navy with the Georgian coast guard the following year. This reform was extremely important for Georgia's defensibility. In 2008, in line with foreign partners' recommendations, the coast guard and the Ministry of Defence navy have been integrated into the one maritime force as the Coast Guard under the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) Border Police of Georgia. The MIA Border Police Coast Guard Department was formed as a multifunctional maritime agency, which autonomously or in cooperation with other relevant

5 *Warsaw Summit Communiqué Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Warsaw 8-9 July 2016*, NATO, 09 July 2016 [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm].

6 *Substantial NATO-Georgia Package*, Ministry of Defence of Georgia [<https://mod.gov.ge/en/page/65/substantial-package>].

7 *Ibid*

agencies is involved in control of the legal regime of the territorial waters, carries out maritime defence, border policing, legal and administrative activities, conducts search and rescue operations, and protects the maritime environment. At the time of martial law, the coast guard carries out the navy functions.

 ***As a result of the Russian military aggression in 2008, Georgian naval forces were destroyed. It was decided to merge the Georgian navy with the Georgian coast guard the following year***

In spite of the heavy consequences of the Russian aggression of 2008, the infrastructure of the coast guard has been fully rehabilitated. While the patrol boats are being renovated, some of them are modernised and the others, the older ones, replaced. Permanent training and retraining of the coast guard personnel is an issue of priority. Modern radar stations of the coast guard cover the whole coastline, as well as territorial waters and exclusive economic zone of Georgia. With the assistance of friendly countries, the Joint Maritime Operations Centre has been established. The main task of the centre is to prevent and detect illicit acts and maritime incidents in the maritime space of Georgia and coordinate collaborative responses to those challenges in order to secure regional stability.⁸ The Joint Maritime Operation Centre under the

Ministry of Internal Affairs actively exchanges information with NATO command; risks are identified and prevented.

Georgian ports have often hosted NATO warships; the Alliance has also conducted joint exercises with the coast guard of Georgia. Georgia frequently hosts the Alliance's military drills. In 2019, Georgian General Staff was leading a NATO–Georgia multinational crisis response exercise for the first time. It was also the first exercise that involved NATO planning processes from start to finish.⁹ At the same time, Georgia enjoys developing bilateral military cooperation with NATO member states, especially with the US. The most ambitious US–Georgia project, Georgia Defence Readiness Program (GDRP), has officially launched in 2018. The programme is aimed at increasing the defence capabilities of the Georgian military units for territorial defence. It also provides training, management education, and mentorship to GAF tactical unit commanders and staff. The GDRP training programme contributes to the security of the Black Sea region and, thus, the stability of the greater European security environment.¹⁰

According to the NATO–Georgia Commission Statement from 03 October 2019, the Allies have increased their support for Georgia, including training of the Georgian coast guard boarding teams, enhanced interaction between Georgia's Coast Guard and NATO's Standing Naval Forces, port visits, exercises, and the sharing of information to enhance situational awareness.¹¹

8 MIA Border Police of Georgia, Coast Guard Department [<http://bpg.gov.ge/en/coast-guard>].

9 *Georgian Defence Forces Led NATO-Georgia Exercise*, NATO, 18 March 2019 [<http://www.act.nato.int/articles/georgian-defence-forces-lead-nato-georgia-exercise-2019>].

10 *The Most Ambitious Project in the History of Armed Forces of Georgia*, Ministry of Defence of Georgia, 18 May 2018 [<https://mod.gov.ge/en/news/read/6557/the-most-ambitious-project-in-the-history-of-the-georgian-armed-forces>].

11 *NATO-Georgia Commission Statement*, NATO, 03 October 2019 [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_169323.htm?selectedLocale=en].

Conclusions

All abovementioned indicates Georgia's considerable opportunities for regional defensibility and resilience. This country, as well as other littoral states, has its distinctive niche in the Black Sea security architecture. Unique capabilities of particular countries (both NATO members and aspirants) must aggregate and complement one another. Only through such joint effort will they make conceivable elaboration and development of a unified strategy towards the region.

Today, the Black Sea region faces the real threat of a new Iron Curtain. Realisation of such a scenario will bring gravest consequences not only to Georgia and Ukraine but to the West itself. Agreeing on Russia's policy of privileged interests will not only strip the West of its important partners but also deprive of access to the Caspian Sea

resources, limit the cooperation with Asian markets, and lastly, inflict immense damage to the West–East transport corridor.

The Black Sea region is one of the crucial regions for European security. Just littoral states' efforts cannot protect it from Russia's growing ambitions. Only a firm and unified Euro-Atlantic policy could generate substantial protection of NATO's eastern flank, as well as prevention and combating hybrid threats in Europe.

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US ROLE IN THE BLACK SEA REGION

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The US remains the only true superpower with a global reach. In reaching out to the Black Sea, the US has a variety of tools and levers: diplomatic, political, economic, and military. It acts here unilaterally and also as a team member. Does the Black Sea area belong to the list of priorities for the US? The range of interests in play for the US here is wide: security, geopolitics, energy, values promotion, military projection, and more. It has some eager regional partners to work with, but also an influential and ambivalent partner in Turkey, as well as an adversarial counterpart in Russia. The occupation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 has added some new features and urgency to the US role in the region.

Today the United States of America is the only true superpower remaining. One might refer to the fact that American hegemony has never really existed or that Pax Americana has remained a pipe dream for some and a scarecrow for the others. Also, the world is far from being unipolar. There are various other players continuously contesting the limits of American power. One might suggest that the gap between the US and the others is shrinking. For the time being, though, such a gap remains real and visible.

In addition to the availability of power, resources, and potential, there has always been and is a question of how to pursue them. Should America stay a global power, with its interests and actions reaching out to each and every corner of the world? Should it be the ultimate power broker, an arbitrary authority on a great variety of international disputes? Or should it, instead, engage in the act of "selective commitment", while carefully listing the priorities for itself and discarding some other issues that do not have direct impact on American interests? If that is the case, then the question presents itself: What are those priorities? Finally, perhaps, as many Americans seem to think these days (including its current president), it is time for

America to come home, to retreat from the world affairs. But is this even possible?

These questions might seem purely theoretical, and yet they are very timely and topical. Given the unique character of the US global presence, they are something of interest to the rest of the world. Far too often, we have seen that American presence being withheld creates a vacuum, a niche for a while, but ultimately invites a new player in.

Where does the Black Sea region stand in the dropdown menu of US interests? Is it a priority or an insignificant area? How can we even measure this? How does the US role here correlate with a whole bunch of the adjacent areas, with the immediate vicinity? Can we say that the American role is bigger in some spheres than the others? Is there an evolution of the US regional role? There is a whole set of questions that we face in addressing this theme of the US role in the Black Sea region.

US History of Involvement

It would be fair to say that the Black Sea was hardly in the epicentre of the confrontation in the Cold War times. There were some

elements of containment in the area dating back to the Truman doctrine and G. Kennan's long telegram, while American strategic assets were positioned in Turkey. But that did not make the region a forefront in the competition of the two superpowers and their respective blocs. In the first years after the end of that old Cold War, the relevance of the area to the US and a rationale for its presence here had decreased.

Everything seemed fine and did not call for American intervention. The general euphoria about the end of the Cold War and "end of history" was in the air here too. There was this expectation that somehow the actors in the region would get along just fine. BSEC was formed in 1992 to embody positive expectations. States of the region were either part of the long-standing Euro-Atlantic community (Turkey) or seemed destined to become full-fledged democracies, and as such friends of the US. There were, of course, the early alarm bells, such as the conflicts in Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh. And yet there was little evidence that these conflicts would turn the entire region dangerous and unstable.

As people in Washington took their time and often struggled with elaboration of the US international policies for the post-bipolar world, the wars in former Yugoslavia raged. They ultimately brought the reluctant American power to the Balkans, for the first time in the US history. This happened just around the corner from the Black Sea. It reminded everyone that American political, economic, diplomatic, and, of course, military power remains pretty much indispensable.

With that step closer towards the Black Sea, the appetite for a bigger role here

might have emerged in Washington. The Clinton administration offered its doctrine of the enlargement of the community of democratic and market-economy countries¹. The secretary of state at the time, Madeleine Albright, spoke about some key states in various parts of the world, with Ukraine being one of them. The regional grouping GUAM, which had just emerged in the Black Sea region, enjoyed, for a while, the support and interest of Washington. This clearly unnerved Moscow, so the contours of the potential competition here were drafted.

It was to be seen whether there would be more continuity or change with George W. Bush administration coming into the White House. But 9/11 dramatically altered the landscape of American global policies and shaped it for the years to come. On one hand, it immediately relegated everything not related directly to the wider Middle East to secondary concerns. On the other, the new epicentre of American presence was in close proximity to the Black Sea region. This firmly placed the region in the centre of a bigger arch of instability.

It also led to the establishment of the American military bases in the region. More precisely, in addition to the bases south of the Black Sea, in Turkey, the new ones were established north of the Black Sea, in Romania². It should be noted that they were here exclusively for the purpose of the force projection to Afghanistan and Iraq, and did not have immediate function for the region as such. Over time, however, the need for the force projection to the Middle East has somewhat diminished, but the bases have stayed.

Another strategic development was the creation of the elements of the anti-missile defence in the region. Originally planned

1 C. Krauthammer, *The Clinton Doctrine*, "CNN", 29 March 1999 [https://edition.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/time/1999/03/29/doctrine.html].

2 *US Bases in Romania*, "Global Security" [https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/facility/romania.htm].

for Poland and the Czech Republic³, they ultimately ended down on the shores of the Black Sea. Again, Moscow was unhappy about that. These elements are not directed against Russia, although they can be rearranged to serve a different purpose – a small but noticeable step to increase the US military profile in the region.

The “colour revolutions” in Georgia and Ukraine had a meaning for the American role in the region. Washington had provided support for Tbilisi and Kyiv. Both served as some sort of “poster boys” for everyone else in the region to emulate their experience. Much was riding on their ability to implement decisive reforms and break with sticky post-Soviet experience. The opportunity was pretty much wasted and this led to the disillusionment in Washington, followed by certain distancing. There was this acknowledgement that nothing in the region is predestined, linear, and that backlashes happen. More patience was required, as well as the ability to stay and be engaged in a longer game.



The Black Sea region has suddenly manifested itself as an arena of acute tension. This required an American response

The Russian aggression against Georgia in 2008 was all but ignored by the United States, as well as by other Western powers. It did not become a wake-up call. Instead, in wake of this aggression both the United States and NATO initiated a reset of relations with the

Russian Federation. For Washington to have Russia on board for securing uninterrupted supply to their forces in Afghanistan was apparently a bigger priority. In the meantime, for Russia to get away with that aggression with no repercussions whatsoever was really emboldening. It was a sign that it could plan something even bigger, including in the Black Sea region.

Developments in 2014 and Beyond

The events of 2014 have been cataclysmic for the region. The occupation of Crimea, the start of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, was something that Washington simply could not ignore. The Black Sea region has suddenly manifested itself as an arena of acute tension. This required an American response. The United States had to take a stand and they did. It was clear that a direct US-Russia confrontation was not something that Washington would be looking for. In fact, the avoidance of a new Cold War was probably the top priority for the United States. The “red lines” were drawn in an unambiguous way. This was tricky enough: to support Ukraine in a meaningful way, to step into the region in some form, and yet to not let relations with Moscow deteriorate to a state of direct confrontation.

Unlike some of the regional players, the US has always seen the region as something bigger than a mere water basin. While some states were suggesting that maritime security equals regional security, the US took a much broader view on the issue. It has opted for a concept of a wider/broader Black Sea area⁴. This concept included a number of adjacent areas (most notably the Caspian Sea region) and an intricate

3 *After Long Wait, U.S. to Unveil European Missile Shield*, “Reuters”, 11 May 2016 [<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nato-shield-timeline/after-long-wait-u-s-to-unveil-european-missile-shield>].

4 M. Çelikpala, *Security in the Black Sea Region, Policy Report II*, Commission on the Black Sea, 2010, p. 10 [https://www.bertelsmann-stiftung.de/fileadmin/files/BSt/Publikationen/GrauePublikationen/GP_Security_in_the_Black_Sea_Region.pdf].

patchwork of relations between the players (some of which were not littoral states) in the picture. Ever since that conceptual divide emerged, the players in the region have taken their sides accordingly. Those who, for whatever reasons, were not welcoming American presence here advocated against the broader framework, and those who were interested in the US presence to alleviate the pressure coming from the local powers, embraced the notion of the wider Black Sea region.

From the geostrategic point of view, the US has always been aware of the density in the region. There are many players, and there are two strongest – Russia and Turkey – that might compete for domination or might choose to have a condominium. Either way, they are not interested in having bigger outside players here. This has left a limited opportunity for the US, a tight space for them if they ever decided to enter. This is exactly what distinguishes a true superpower from any other: If it chooses to enter, it might well find a way to do so, mobilising adequate strategy, will, and resources.

What would be the primary reason for the United States to enter, though? Would it be simply to protest the act of aggression and violation of the international order, to uphold that order, to offer support to the aggression's victim? That might be enough for those looking through the idealistic prism, for the adherents of moral, righteous international policies. But that would fall short for those looking for more grounded, pragmatic reasons. In other words, the rationale should be convincing enough even to those who will be wondering, "What is in it for us?" Simply put, there must be an understanding, a broad one and supported by various segments of establishment and public in the US, that American interests are involved and that this is what dictates the attempt for a more active engagement in the region.

An argument should be made that American interests are involved. Let us go back to the Russian aggression being an affront against the international order. There is more to it than just ideational, normative concern, the moral outrage. This is, indeed, a major blow to the international order. It is exactly this liberal international order that the US has constructed, maintained, nourished, and protected for decades. It has done so for a reason. American leadership is encrusted in the concept. American interests are at stake. If Washington lets someone undermine it, lets it slide, that would endanger American global weight, authority, reputation. No wonder that we are already hearing talks about a need for a substitute to this international order. Even President Trump would say that the existing order is tilted against the US. For those who believe otherwise, the Black Sea region becomes one of those arenas to defend that order.



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A need to push back Russian influence in the post-Soviet, post-socialist space has never been fully and openly embraced by any of the post-bipolar presidential administrations. Moreover, a view has often prevailed in Washington calling for the recognition of Russia's special role in this space. There is nothing new in seeing Russia trying to solidify its sphere of privilege in this space. It has used a wide toolkit of measures to do that over the years – ranging from economic to political to information

and more. However, blatant acts of violent aggression are new in its instrumentarium. They call for a different kind of response. It is better to respond in the area where the act of occupation has taken place, the Black Sea region.

New Strategies?

The United States faces a mixed terrain in the region when it comes to ranking the countries by their attitude. There is clearly an adversarial power – Russia. The US and Russia see each other’s moves in the region with anxiety. American vessels here are trailed and met by close and irritating Russian following⁵; US initiatives are met with resistance. There is hardly another region in the world where Washington and Moscow are so pitched against each other as they are here in the Black Sea region.



It is Romania, Ukraine, and Georgia that are most friendly to the US in the region. This friendship is, of course, not of an altruistic nature

There is a highly ambivalent and volatile relationship with another major actor – Turkey, with a myriad of factors shaping it. It is also very dynamic. At the moment, this is a relationship that still has elements of cooperation and partnership, but also, obviously, elements of mistrust and disagreement. Here, perhaps, was the most noticeable change in the post-bipolar times. The end of the Cold War saw the United States and Turkey firmly in one camp, but that was to change in strides and has

come to the current uneasy relationship. Naturally, in planning its regional activities, Washington cannot see a trustworthy and reliable partner in Ankara. That the feeling is reciprocal makes it even more hurtful for the relations between the countries.

There are several countries in the region that either depend on Russia too much (Armenia), are too weak to pursue a consistent course on that matter (Azerbaijan, Moldova), or are simply opting for a delicate balancing (Bulgaria). This is far from making them US opponents, but also far from making them US allies. Bulgaria is probably the most interesting case here, as it is engaged in some manoeuvring while trying not to upset all of those influential international players.

It is interesting to see how being a member of the EU and NATO does not necessarily predetermine a certain state’s position. If Turkey is a somewhat specific case, then Bulgaria and Romania are good subjects for comparison. Whether it comes to the reaction to the Russian aggression against Ukraine or willingness to work with the US in the region, Sofia and Bucharest are clearly in two different baskets, despite having a common history in joining the EU and NATO.

It is Romania, Ukraine, and Georgia that are most friendly to the US in the region. This friendship is, of course, not of an altruistic nature. These countries share the need for American presence in the region. They ask for American assistance and, in return, promise help in advancing US interests. More precisely, American interests match interests of these particular regional actors. While the ongoing US cooperation with these three countries is appreciated, it is hardly enough for Washington to see them as a viable, sufficient anchor for the US

5 E.g. B. Minick, *Russian Warplanes Simulate Attacks on US Navy Ship Steaming in Black Sea*, “International Business Times”, 25 December 2019
[<https://www.ibtimes.com/russian-warplanes-simulate-attacks-us-navy-ship-steaming-black-sea-2892043>].

in the region. The United States probably needs a somewhat broader base for a more successful stance in the region (and here again the role of Turkey is critical).

It is notable how NATO, with its three member states in the region, can hardly be seen as a vehicle for the implementation of the policies of the United States. This is definitely different from the times of the Cold War. Moreover, it is also different from what is happening in the Baltic region. There is a consensus there about a need to secure protection of the NATO member states in that region from ongoing Russian pressure and potential Russian aggression. There is no such consensus on the ground in the Black Sea region. When it comes to the formal position of the Alliance, there is hardly any ambiguity: It speaks in one voice. But as one descends to the level of particular member states in the region, there is a plethora of views and sentiments. They all formally decry occupation of Crimea, but do so in a variety of tonalities. Even more so, they are split with regard to the subject of American presence in the wider Black Sea region.

One powerful tool that the United States has always had at its disposal, and not just here in the Black Sea region but also throughout the world, was leading by example. This has been backed up by resources for everyone to use if deciding to walk along path of reforms, liberalisation, democratisation, and fight against corruption. This remains the realm where the United States can help their counterparts in the region. The track record of the US partners in this respect remains mixed at best, though. Much of American assistance has not been used to produce positive results. Moreover, the United States under President Trump has lost some of its own capacity to lead by example, while sending mixed signals. That being said, this channel of cooperation remains open and promising.

Finally, there is still a playing field for the United States to have a role in the sphere of energy policy. There is an interesting dynamic in terms of the US working to minimise the dependence on Russia on the part of the countries in the Baltic–Black Sea zone – from Poland and the Baltics through, perhaps, Belarus to Ukraine and beyond. American energy corporations remain powerful and competitive enough. Much has changed since the times of the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan pipeline (BTC) inception, when it seemed that America was having an upper hand and Russia was losing out. The picture was rather different from the recent one. Yet, this is a multi-act play, where the United States (as a state and US-based corporations) is one of the main characters.

All in all, the US role in the region has evolved over the years. It remains a powerful and motivated player, even when not everything is going its way. There are certain avenues for the US to extend its role in the region, but also certain limitations for its regional role. American resources remain Washington's asset in the regional play, yet often countered by positions and resources of other actors who are either ambivalent or outright adversarial. One thing is clear is that the United States is not abandoning the Black Sea region and is prepared to stay here.

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THE BLACK SEA AREA IN JAPAN'S EXPANDING STRATEGIC HORIZONS

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This article deals with Japan's relations with the Black Sea region. They are examined through evolution of Japan's foreign policy, including relations with post-Soviet countries. Introduction of the value-oriented diplomacy and the concept of "active pacifism" contributed greatly to Japan's further involvement with the region. It is believed that strengthening bilateral relations between Japan and Ukraine, countries that share the same universal values, can contribute to stabilisation and further development of the Black Sea area.

Significance of the Black Sea Region for Japan

The Black Sea region, though geographically distanced from Japan, has taken due place in the system of Tokyo's foreign policy priorities. Japan is interested in the strategic geographical position of the Black Sea that serves as a crossroads connecting Europe, Central Asia, and the Middle East.

Politically, the Black Sea area provides opportunities for cooperation between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and the United States, which is Japan's main security ally, and Russia – Japan's neighbour. Japan reacted to the occupation of the Crimean Peninsula by Russia by calling for non-recognition of the change of status quo by the use of force as well as for adherence to the norms and principles of international law. As an island state, it has also been

making consistent efforts in order to ensure maritime security and naval freedom at all the seas, including the Black Sea area.

In terms of economy, the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) group represents an attractive market of 333 million consumers and a combined GDP of USD 2.8 trillion, accounting for 14% of Europe's economy and 4% of the world's¹. It has also served as a corridor for energy resources transportation – an important point of interest for Japan, which depends on imports for 94% of its primary energy supply².

Considering that the region is quite heterogeneous, representing nations that are members of the European Union, NATO, GUAM, Eastern Partnership, Commonwealth of Independent States, and other initiatives, Japan had been focusing on development of bilateral relations with BSEC countries and

1 *Market Intelligence*, World Tourism Organization, 2018
[<https://www.unwto.org/es/market-intelligence> access: 02 March 2020].

2 *Japan's Energy Supply Situation and Basic Policy*, Federation of Electric Power Companies in Japan, 2015
[https://www.fepc.or.jp/english/energy_electricity/supply_situation/ access: 02 March 2020].

became engaged with the region as a whole only at the beginning of the 21st century.

Evolution of Japan's Foreign Policy

Japan's strategy in the Black Sea area is closely related to its aspirations to play a more active role as a global power. The basis of Japan's modern foreign policy was laid in the post-WWII period and is reflected in its pacifist constitution as well as three foreign policy principles adopted in Japan's main foreign policy document – the *Diplomatic Bluebook* – in 1957 such as participation in the United Nations, cooperation with the Western world, and promotion of ties with the Asian nations³.

The 1990–1991 Gulf War and international reaction to Japan's financial contribution to the anti-Iraq coalition as non-corresponding to Japan's level of dependence on oil imports urged the government of Japan to adopt the Act on Cooperation with UN Peacekeeping Operations and Other Operations, which allowed Japan's Self-Defence Forces to be dispatched abroad. Japan also provided support for Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and participated in the reconstruction of Iraq.

In 2013, the government of Japan adopted the concept of “Proactive Contribution to Peace” or “active pacifism” as the basic principle for Japan's national security strategy promoting Japan's active contribution to regional and global stability and security in cooperation with the international community while maintaining defence-oriented posture and observing the Three Non-Nuclear Principles⁴. Thus, starting from the 1990s, Japan has commenced its transition to an

“ordinary country”, which possesses control over its military instruments and plays a more active role in international relations.

Post-Soviet Area in Japan's Foreign Policy Strategy

The collapse of the Soviet Union greatly influenced Japan's foreign policy. Firstly, it prompted Japanese government to actively seek resolution of the issue of the Northern Territories⁵ and signing of a peace treaty with Russia. Secondly, it created an opportunity for Japan to establish relations with the newly independent states, including such future BSEC members as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. Thirdly, Japan became involved in international efforts aimed at providing assistance to the post-Soviet countries, consisting of humanitarian, financial, and technical support. Finally, Japan has played an important role in the process of elimination of nuclear weapons in Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan.

As for the political dimension, Japan focused on establishing closer ties with the Central Asian states, rich in natural resources such as oil and gas. The main reasons for this were Japan's growing demand for diversification of the energy supplies as well as the need to stabilise the region for improvement of Eurasia's security environment. In 1992, Japan's Minister for Foreign Affairs Watanabe Michio visited Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and in 1993–1994, the presidents of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan paid their visits to Japan.

The next stage for promoting relations with Central Asia was developed in virtue of

3 2. *The Basis of Japan's Diplomacy (Ni, Wagakuni Gaikou no Kichō)*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1957 [<https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/gaiko/bluebook/1957/s32-1-2.htm> access: 02 March 2020].

4 *Japan's Proactive Contribution to Peace*, Government of Japan, 2014 [https://www.japan.go.jp/tomodachi/2014/spring-summer2014/japans_roactive_contribution_to_peace.html access: 02 March 2020].

5 Four islands located off the northeast coast of Hokkaido in Japan, namely Habomai, Shikotan, Kunashiri, and Etorofu, also known as the Kuril Islands.

an initiative by Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryutaro adopted in 1997, known as “Eurasian Diplomacy” or “Silk Road Diplomacy”, which was aimed at strengthening the ties with the region through multilateral cooperation. In 2004, Japan established Central Asia plus Japan dialogue in order to strengthen collaboration among the Central Asian states under Japan’s leadership. It is believed that this framework has become a sort of alternative to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization led by another regional power – China.



The launch of the “Arc of Freedom and Prosperity” led to the establishment of GUAM plus Japan dialogue in 2007, aimed at promotion of cooperation between such Black Sea area states as Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova, on one side, and Japan, on the other

Such policies were greatly supported by over USD 5 billion⁶ of Japan’s Official Development Assistance provided to Central Asia in order to support development of the region.

The “Arc of Freedom and Prosperity” and a New Phase of Relations with the Black Sea Area

The Black Sea region appeared in Japan’s foreign policy agenda with the introduction of the “Arc of Freedom and Prosperity” by Minister for Foreign Affairs Aso Taro in

2006. In his speech “Arc of Freedom and Prosperity: Japan’s Expanding Diplomatic Horizons”,⁷ Minister Aso stressed the importance of putting emphasis on “universal values” such as democracy, freedom, human rights, the rule of law, and the market economy, while carrying out foreign policies. He proposed an idea of creating an arc of freedom and prosperity at the outer rim of the Eurasian continent, stretching from Northeast Asia to Central Asia and the Caucasus, Turkey, Central and Eastern Europe, and the Baltic states, which would be supported by Japan. As a result, “value-oriented diplomacy” was set as the fourth pillar of Japan’s foreign policy, having become an important instrument of strengthening Japan’s relations with the partners that value freedom and democracy, as well as extending Japan’s diplomatic reach to new regions.

It is important that the Black Sea, Ukraine, GUAM, as well as the Community of Democratic Choice (CDC) were mentioned for the first time in Japan’s foreign policy concept. In detail, Aso Taro mentioned the need to bring stability to the GUAM nations and highlighted the efforts of Ukraine, Georgia, Lithuania, and Romania that formed the CDC, which, in the minister’s opinion, “promotes formation of stronger roots for democracy in the Baltic-Black Sea region as well as in the Caspian Sea area”. He expressed a view that Japan “should foster as many opportunities as possible for contact with the countries of the CDC as well as countries such as those in the GUAM”, stressing that “it is best to pursue cooperation with countries that are capable of partnering with Japan”.⁸

6 V. Udovik, *Зовнішня політика Японії на пострадянському просторі (1991-2016 рр.)* (Japan’s Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Region [1991–2016]), “Skhid”, September–October 2016, p. 58.

7 *Speech by Mr. Taro Aso, Minister for Foreign Affairs on the Occasion of the Japan Institute of International Affairs Seminar “Arc of Freedom and Prosperity: Japan’s Expanding Diplomatic Horizons”*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2006 [https://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/fm/aso/speech0611.html access: 02 March 2020].

8 Ibid

The launch of the “Arc of Freedom and Prosperity” led to the establishment of GUAM plus Japan dialogue in 2007, aimed at promotion of cooperation between such Black Sea area states as Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova, on one side, and Japan, on the other; in such fields as tourism, energy, transit and transportation, environmental protection, trade, and investment. In 2015, the parties adopted the Japan–GUAM Cooperation Programme, in which they outlined main goals of cooperation, including consultations on a “broad range of actual problems of international and regional relations in order to maintain international peace and security on basis of the UN Charter, generally recognized principles and norms of international law, particularly those related to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states”.⁹ This meant that after the occupation of Crimea, the scope of consultations between Japan and GUAM was extended to the security area.

The main instruments of cooperation between GUAM and Japan are meetings at ministerial and national coordinators’ levels, working organs of GUAM with participation of Japanese experts, ad hoc expert groups, workshops, and seminars. GUAM plus Japan meetings have been held six times: twice in 2007, in 2008, 2009, 2013, and 2015; Foreign Ministers’ meetings – seven times: in 2008, 2011, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019. Workshops on energy security, medical field, and water management have been held as a series of GUAM–Japan workshops on a regular basis.

The deepening of relations between Japan and the Black Sea area was greatly backed by Japan’s think tanks and foreign policy experts. The year 2005 saw the first Japan–Wider Black Sea Area Dialogue, “Peace and Prosperity of the Wider Black Sea Area and Japan’s Role”, organised by the Global Forum of Japan¹⁰ under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan and Yomiuri Shimbun, one of Japan’s leading newspapers. The 2nd Japan–Black Sea Area Dialogue “Japan and Black Sea Area in the Rapidly Changing World” (2007), the 3rd Japan–Black Sea Area Dialogue “Prospects of Changing Black Sea Area and Role of Japan” (2010), as well as the 4th Japan–Black Sea Area Dialogue on “How to Develop Japan and Black Sea Area Cooperation” (2013) were supported by BSEC and held with the participation of its representatives.

Following the policy recommendations offered at the above-mentioned forums, in 2010 Japan became a Sectoral Dialogue Partner (SDP) to BSEC. The status of Sectoral Dialogue Partnership is very flexible and it allows dialogue not to be restricted to any specific field. It enables Japan to attend the meetings as well as to observe discussions including working group meetings, which are held at BSEC member states and high-level councils such as foreign ministers’ meetings¹¹.

Besides the Japan–Black Sea Area Dialogue, the opportunities for cooperation between Japan and BSEC were discussed on a number of occasions. In 2012, BSEC Secretary General Victor Tvircun paid a courtesy visit to Parliamentary Vice-Minister for

9 *Japan-GUAM Cooperation Program*, GUAM Organization, 2015

[<https://guam-organization.org/en/guam-japan-cooperation-program/> access: 02 March 2020].

10 *Peace and Prosperity in the Wider Black Sea Area and the Role of Japan*, “Report of the Japan–Wider Black Sea Area Dialogue”, Global Forum of Japan, 27 November 2005 [<http://www.gfj.jp/e/dialogue/20051127.pdf> access: 02 March 2020].

11 *Report of the 4th Japan-Black Sea Area Dialogue*, Global Forum of Japan, 20 February 2013, pp. 41–42 [<http://www.gfj.jp/e/dialogue/20130220.pdf> access: 02 March 2020].

Foreign Affairs Hamada Kazuyuki in Tokyo¹²; in 2013, BSEC and Japan held the Seminar on Disaster Prevention Measures in Japan organised in Istanbul within the framework of the cooperation of BSEC and Japan as BSEC Sectoral Dialogue member¹³; in 2020, BSEC Permanent International Secretariat (PERMIS) Secretary General Michael Christides held meetings with heads of missions of SDPs including Japan in Ankara¹⁴.



Enlisting of value-oriented diplomacy in the National Security Strategy as one of Japan's priorities has long-term implications and provides a positive environment for further strengthening of relations with the Black Sea region

It should be noted that although the name of the fourth pillar of Japan's foreign policy – the “Arc of Freedom and Prosperity” – has not been used frequently in Japan, value-oriented diplomacy is deeply rooted in the foreign policy thinking of Japan's political elites. The National Security Strategy of Japan adopted by Prime Minister Abe in 2013 identified maintaining and protecting the international order based on universal

values and rules as one of Japan's national interests. The above strategy also mentions “strengthening cooperation based on universal values to resolve global issues” – in virtue of supporting democratisation through proactive and strategic use of Official Development Assistance, responding to development challenges and global issues, mainstreaming the concept of human security, strengthening free trade frameworks, further people-to-people exchanges, etc. – as one of the strategic approaches that Japan should take to its national security¹⁵. Enlisting of value-oriented diplomacy in the National Security Strategy as one of Japan's priorities has long-term implications and provides a positive environment for further strengthening of relations with the Black Sea region.

Cooperation between Japan and BSEC States

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Japan has been providing support to post-Soviet countries, aimed at stabilisation, democratisation, and assistance for transition to market economy. In total, Japan granted USD 3 billion including technical assistance such as accepting trainees from and sending experts to the countries of the former Soviet Union, as well as emergency humanitarian assistance and credits to facilitate trade and economy. In

- 12 *Visit of BSEC Secretary General Tvircun to Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Hamada Kazuyuki (Tovirukun Kokkai Keizai Kyōryoku Kikō (BSEC) Jimu Kyokuchō no Hamada Seimukan Hyōkei)*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 15 November 2012 [https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/release/24/11/1115_05.html access: 02 March 2020].
- 13 *Summary Proceedings of the Seminar on Disaster Prevention Measures in Japan*, Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, 2013 [<http://www.bsec-organization.org/UploadedDocuments/AreasOfCooperation/EmergencyAssistance/Reports/Annex%20III%20-%20Summary%20Proceedings%20BSEC-Japan%20Seminar.pdf> access: 02 March 2020].
- 14 *Working Visit to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey and on Consultations with BSEC Observers and Sectoral Dialogue Partners (Ankara, 20-23 January 2020)*, Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, 2020 [[http://www.bsec-organization.org/news/16368working-visit-to-the-ministry-of-foreign-affairs-of-the-republic-of-turkey-and-on-consultations-with-bsec-observers-and-sectoral-dialogue-partners-\(ankara-20-23-january-2020\)](http://www.bsec-organization.org/news/16368working-visit-to-the-ministry-of-foreign-affairs-of-the-republic-of-turkey-and-on-consultations-with-bsec-observers-and-sectoral-dialogue-partners-(ankara-20-23-january-2020)) access: 02 March 2020].
- 15 *Japan's Security Policy*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2016 [https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page1we_000081.html access: 02 March 2020].

addition, Japan has also been participating in multilateral assistance efforts to the states of the former Soviet Union. It hosted the Tokyo Conference on Assistance to the New Independent States in October 1992, provided USD 20 million to the International Science and Technology Centre, contributed to the USD 24 billion support package, and cooperated in rescheduling of debts. Also, Japan has actively provided technical assistance, food aid, and financial support to the reform efforts of Central and Eastern Europe since the collapse of the Berlin Wall in November 1989. Japan's assistance to the region amounts to approximately USD 4.5 billion in total.¹⁶

Today Japan is concentrating its support efforts on providing support for Ukraine and Moldova; sustainable development of these states is indispensable for the stability of the Black Sea region. In response to the situation in Ukraine, since 2014 Japan announced and is steadily implementing assistance of approximately USD 1.85 billion, which is one of the largest-scale on individual country basis, to support Ukrainian reforms. In addition, Japan implemented in Ukraine such projects as the Seminar on Knowledge and Experience-Sharing in order to provide assistance for Ukraine's democratisation (2015); provided Economic Reform Development Policy Loan aimed to support rebuilding the state finances and carrying out a range of institutional reforms (2015–2016),¹⁷ and launched the Project for Capacity Development of the Public Broadcasting of Ukraine (2017)¹⁸.

As for the Caucasus, which includes Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, in 2018, the Japanese government launched Japan's Caucasus Initiative consisting of such pillars as Assistance for Human Resource Development for State-Building (training programmes for self-sustained development) and Assistance for Paving the Way to Appealing Caucasus (infrastructure development and business environment improvement support)¹⁹.

Development of infrastructure projects and economic ties with the Black Sea partners is another important direction for Japan's foreign policy in the region. Infrastructure and environmental protection assistance has been provided through Japan International Cooperation Agency in the form of Official Development Assistance, Japan's government aid designed to promote economic development and welfare of developing countries. The main projects include East–West Highway Improvement Project in Georgia; modernisation of the port of Bourgas and extension of Sofia metro in Bulgaria; Bosphorus Rail Tube Crossing Project in Turkey; the Bucharest International Airport Rail Access Link Project in Romania; Greater Tirana Sewage System Improvement Project in Albania; Boryspil State International Airport Development Project and Modernisation of the Bortnychy Aeration Station in Ukraine.

From the 2010s, Japan has been promoting bilateral cooperation with BSEC members in the security area. In 2013, Japan's Parliamentary Vice-Minister of Defence


16 *Section 2. Objectives and Priorities of Japan's Foreign Policy*, "Diplomatic Bluebook", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 1992 [<https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/1992/1992-1-2.htm> access: 02 March 2020].

17 *Japan's International Cooperation*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2016 [<https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000282089.pdf> access: 02 March 2020].

18 *Maps of JICA Major Projects Ukraine*, Japan International Cooperation Agency, 2019 [https://libportal.jica.go.jp/library/Data/PlanInOperation-e/Europe/760_Ukraine-e.pdf access: 02 March 2020].

19 *Japan's Caucasus Initiative*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2018 [<https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000436761.pdf> access: 02 March 2020].

Sato Masahisa visited Azerbaijan. In 2015, Japan's State Minister of Defence Sato Akira visited Bulgaria. In 2015, Minister of Defence of Japan Nakatani Gen met his counterpart from Georgia, Khidasheli Tinatin, in Tokyo. Japan also launched bilateral security dialogues with two Black Sea regional powers – Ukraine and Russia.



***One of Japan's close partners
in the Black Sea region is
Ukraine – a country that shares
the same values and approaches
to international relations***

Consultations with Russia in a “2+2” format with the participation of the representatives from the ministries of Foreign Affairs and Defence were launched in 2013. Following Crimea's occupation, such consultations were put on hold, but were resumed in 2017, then held in 2018 and 2019.²⁰

In 2018, the “2+2” security consultations were held between Japan and Ukraine resulting in the signing of the Memorandum on Cooperation and Exchanges in the Defence Sector.²¹ Japan-Ukraine security cooperation was further strengthened by the meeting between Defence Ministers Andriy Zagorodniuk and Kono Taro at the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference in February 2020. Japan also plans to take part for the first time in Sea Breeze exercise in 2020, which is traditionally organised by Ukraine and the United States.²²

Japan's interest in the security environment of the Black Sea area can be explained by two reasons. First, Japan has been promoting adherence to the norms and principles of international law as well as the non-recognition of change of the status quo through the use of force around the globe. After Russian occupation of Crimea, Japan expressed support for Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty, and became the only country in Asia to introduce sanctions against Russia.

As a maritime nation, Japan has made consistent efforts in order to ensure freedom of navigation. Practical implementation of this position is reflected in Japan's support for the UN General Assembly Resolutions on the “Problem of militarisation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Ukraine, as well as parts of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov”, which were adopted in 2018 and 2019.

Japan-Ukraine Synergy and the Future of the Black Sea Region

There are positive expectations regarding further development of cooperation between Japan and the Black Sea area. Except for the territorial dispute with Russia, Japan has enjoyed friendly relations with BSEC members, which provides a firm basis for their strengthening in the future. Japan is deeply involved in the dialogue with its Black Sea partners on bilateral, regional, and international levels on a wide range of issues, including democratisation support, economic cooperation, infrastructure development, and improvement of security

20 *Bilateral Cooperation and Exchanges in Defense Area (Kakkoku to no Bōei Kyōryoku Kōryū)*, Ministry of Defense of Japan [<https://www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/exchange/area/index.html> access: 02 March 2020].

21 *First Ukraine-Japan Bilateral Consultations on Security Issues Held in Tokyo*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, 2018 [<https://mfa.gov.ua/en/news/67780-v-tokio-vidbulisya-pershi-ukrajinsyko-japonsyki-konsulytacij-i-z-pitany-bezpeki> access: 02 March 2020].

22 *20 Countries to Participate in Sea Breeze 2020 Exercise*, “KyivPost”, 08 February 2020 [<https://www.kyivpost.com/ukraine-politics/20-countries-to-participate-in-sea-breeze-2020-exercise.html> access: 02 March 2020].

environment. Japan's expertise as an active member of the UN and G7, world's third economy, technological know-how leader, and one of the biggest international donors provides vast opportunities for the stabilisation of the region as well as promoting of prosperity and well-being of its people.

On the other hand, Japan's involvement in the international processes in the Black Sea region has allowed it to broaden the horizons of its international outreach. With the introduction of the "Arc of Freedom and Prosperity" and adoption of the National Security Strategy, value-oriented diplomacy has become an important pillar of Japan's foreign policy. Integrity of its policies towards Central Asia, the Black Sea region, the Balkans, Eastern and Central Europe has been ensured. Such strategy provides Japan with an opportunity of better understanding the dynamics of regional affairs. It also confirms its leading role in fostering cooperation between Asia and Europe as well as supports the reasoning for Japan's bid for UN Security Council permanent membership.

One of Japan's close partners in the Black Sea region is Ukraine – a country that shares the same values and approaches to international

relations. Bilateral ties between the two states are based on common interests in the region, such as promoting democracy and market economy as well as ensuring peace and security.

Japan's support for Ukraine in the backlight of illegal occupation of its territories and its first ever participation in a naval exercise in the Black Sea go in line with the concept of "Proactive Contribution to Peace" and confirms Japan's status as an active player of international relations. Further strengthening of synergy between Ukraine and Japan through such structures as BSEC, GUAM plus Japan, as well as Japan's support for Eastern Partnership will contribute to the achievement of common goals and lead to better coordination of joint activities in the Black Sea area.

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