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Oleksii Polegkyi, Tomasz Stępniewski,
Stephen Blank, Polina Sinovets

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Security dilemma in the Black Sea region in light of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict

Edited by
Oleksii Polegkyi and Tomasz Stępniewski





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Reviewers

Dr. habil. Marcin Orzechowski, University of Szczecin

Dr. Artur Adamczyk, University of Warsaw

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Table of contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Executive summary | 7 |
| Oleksii Polegkyi and Tomasz Stępniewski | |
| Security dilemma in the Black Sea region in light of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict: Introduction | 9 |
| Stephen Blank | |
| Russia's War in and around the Black Sea | 19 |
| Polina Sinovets | |
| Between the rock and the hard place: Will the Black Sea avoid the escalation ladder? | 57 |
| References | 73 |
| Authors | 77 |

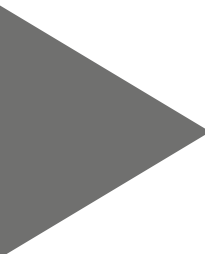


Executive summary

- The Kremlin has been de facto operating in a war mode. In its perception, Russia is at war with the West, and it is a many-sided, multi-domain war. This war is not a frozen conflict but a multi-theatre, simultaneous conflict that is highly dynamic and can be activated by Moscow in any domain that it wants, e.g. conventional escalation, at a time of its choosing.
- Russia has pursued highly aggressive policies in order to secure its dominance over the Black Sea region. Russia has embarked on a long-term rearmament program designed to establish an anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) zone, or “bubble”, over the region.
- Moscow’s threats to Ukraine are multi-dimensional in nature, as are its similarly conceived threats to Europe. We have already seen wars in Georgia and Ukraine and there are too many signs of further conflict against Ukraine to be comfortable.
- A new Western strategic and many-sided response is urgent. Despite the aggressive measures taken by

Russia, its dominance over the Black Sea continues to face enduring challenges. NATO's inaction would greatly enhance Russia's prestige, demonstrating its ability to challenge the West.

- The “West” (first of all, the EU) must invest in both hard securities as well as soft security or resilience and governance and their accompanying infrastructures to deter the Russian threat and strengthen its members. This also means blocking Russia's energy strategies of isolating Ukraine and corrupting Central and Eastern European states with its energy and forcing it to sell oil and gas on a purely commercial basis, not as an instrument of political warfare.
- It is still necessary to keep the balance on the Black Sea to avoid boosting Russian expansion in the region, which inevitably breaks the status quo for the sake of the most vulnerable NATO partners, such as Ukraine and Georgia. Such measures should be firm and consistent, but they must avoid any non-transparency or actions that might create a misperception in Moscow and lead to conflict escalation in the region.



Oleksii Polegkyi and Tomasz Stępniewski

Security dilemma in the Black Sea region in light of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict: Introduction

Introduction

The strategic environment of the Black Sea region has been shaped by the interaction of three interconnected factors: the shifting balances of power among global and regional centres of influence; the political ambitions and counteractions of smaller states directly affected by the actions of these “big powers”; and the status of the region as a transit zone.

After the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula by Russia in 2014, the Black Sea area has gradually turned into a hotbed of mutual NATO-Russia tensions. Moscow has made the Crimean Peninsula one of the most militarized points of the region. In this strategic context, Russia's supremacy in the Black Sea becomes critical for restoring its domination in the Black Sea area and is a part of a larger anti-NATO

strategy in which naval forces play a significant and growing role. During recent years, Russia has strengthened its military presence in the Crimea along with enhancing its Black Sea fleet. Such a situation indicates the clear intentions of Moscow to turn the Black Sea into its anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) zone where annexation of Crimea is presented as *fait accompli*.

As indicated by Bugajski and Doran¹, Russia is using the Black Sea as a more advantageous method of revisionism than extensive land conquests. Control of sea routes and ports gives several benefits: it prevents NATO from projecting sufficient security for its Black Sea members; it deters the intervention of littoral states on behalf of vulnerable neighbours; it threatens to choke the trade and energy routes of states not in compliance with Russia's national ambitions; and it gives Moscow an enhanced ability to exploit fossil fuels in the Ukrainian maritime area.

Russia employs a variety of tools to influence countries that border the Black Sea besides solely military threats, including economic, political, diplomatic, media influence, and other tools. Moscow could also utilize its power and influence in the Black Sea to challenge and disrupt energy supplies via pipeline from the Caspian Basin to Europe. The TurkStream pipeline project is a good example of how Russia is using energy ties to further its political and security interests in the Black Sea region and elsewhere in Europe.

¹ J. Bugajski, P. Doran, *Black Sea Rising: Russia's Strategy in Southeast Europe*, Centre for European Analysis – Black Sea Strategic Report, 2016, no. 1, pp. 1-16.

As Steven Blank claims in his paper, Russian arms build-ups in the Black Sea area is clearly not just a defensive formation but an offensive one against all the other littoral states. This combined arms build-up has generated a formidable force to deny NATO access to the Black Sea or to sympathetic partners like Georgia and Ukraine. Finally, the Black Sea Fleet is the foundation of Russia's increasingly important power projection capabilities into the Mediterranean, Middle East, and Africa.

Russian Black Sea Fleet forces

In fact, the Russian Black Sea Fleet was largely neglected until 2014. According to a RAND analysis², from 1991 until 2014, it did not receive a single major surface combatant or submarine except for some small missile ships. Prior to 2014, the Black Sea Fleet consisted of just 33 warships and one attack submarine, supported by naval aviation and a naval infantry brigade.

After Russia attacked Ukraine and annexed Crimea, the situation significantly changed. Moscow began placing new, advanced surface combatants and submarines in the Black Sea Fleet alongside a massive shore-based build-up of air defence and coastal defence cruise missiles. From 2014 to 2018, the fleet received six new Kilo-class submarines, three frigates, and several other smaller surface vessels. Assuming that the military-industrial complex has also delivered the requisite missiles, these platforms will allow Russia to

² S.J. Flanagan et al. *Russia, NATO, and Black Sea Security*, RAND, 2020; https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR300/RR357-1/RAND_RRA357-1.pdf.

project power beyond the immediate region and hold NATO assets and territory at risk from long-range precision strikes.

According to a State Armament Program for 2018-2027, Russia intends to acquire additional ships with long-range strike capability, with an emphasis on small missile ships. Even if those plans will be delayed because of sanctions, Russia may add three frigates, five corvettes, and 12 small missile ships to the Black Sea Fleet by 2025.

Countries of the Black Sea area and NATO are not ready to meet the Russian ambition of transforming the Black Sea into a "Russian lake". NATO is trying to keep control over the situation in the region by more and more relying on Romania as a new southern pillar. Romania, ever sceptical of the Russian invasion, clearly shows its attempts to preserve its sovereignty and survival for as long as possible against the stronger Russian foe. Bringing in additional NATO troops and having them permanently present on Romanian territory augments and fortifies a key part of Romania's A2/AD bubble against Russia. In 2014, Romania offered its territory as a location to host the United States Aegis Ashore Missile Defense System (AAMDS) in Deveselu. In 2017, Romania established the Headquarters Multinational Brigade – South-east (HQ MN BDE-SE) in Craiova³. In 2021 Romania signed a \$296 million deal to purchase a coastal subsonic anti-ship Naval Strike Missile, which is to be fulfilled by 2024⁴.

³ T. Francis, O. Manea, *The Black Sea and NATO in the Age of Access-Denial*, "Studia Politica: Romanian Political Science Review", 18(3), pp. 477-505.

⁴ *Romania approves the purchase of NSM Naval Strike anti-ship Missile systems*, Navy-recognition, 15 January 2021, <https://www.navyrecognition.com/index.php/news/defence-news/2021/january/9560-romania-approves-the-purchase-of-nsm-naval-strike-anti-ship-missile-systems.html>.

One of the main challenges for countering Russian activities is that Black Sea allies and partners have a diverse range of interests and threat perceptions with respect to Russia, making it difficult to achieve consensus on a multilateral response to Russian military posturing in the absence of overt aggression⁵.

The Turkish position is critical of any NATO's response because of Turkish naval capabilities and their responsibility for the straits. Turkey, despite its recent rapprochement with Russia, seeks to boost its naval presence in the Black Sea.

Increasingly close economic and political ties with Russia combined with diplomatic discord concerning the US and NATO makes Turkey a less reliable ally in the fight against Russian aggression and A2/AD development in the Black Sea region. Turkey will be the only NATO country with a Russian SAM system, and its integration into NATO defence is a cause of concern for many NATO leaders⁶.

Bulgaria put an end to a proposed tripartite naval alliance between Turkey, Bulgaria, and Romania in 2016. Steven Blank reminds us that in the military sphere, Moscow has successfully intimidated the Bulgarian government to the degree that it publicly refused to join any kind of regional cooperative security organization, a decision that severely undermines any realistic chance for effective regional naval coordination in the Black Sea. It also apparently sees Bulgaria as a key base for espionage against NATO.

⁵ A. Binnendijk, *Understanding Russian Black Sea Power Dynamics Through National Security Gaming*, RAND Corporation, 2020, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR3000/RR3094/RAND_RR3094.pdf.

⁶ T. Francis, O. Manea, op. cit., pp. 477-505.

Security dilemma and Russian-Ukrainian conflict

Russia's key strategic goal in the Black Sea is to lock the basin under its supervision. Control of Crimea allows Russia to turn the Kerch Strait between Ukraine and Russia into its own territorial waters and places the Sea of Azov under its de facto control. It also expands Russia's maritime borders and its maritime gas and oil fields⁷.

In this respect, the creation of the A2/AD area in the Black Sea also makes a strong platform for Russia's coercive behaviour, manipulating with the threat to deny (or limit substantially) NATO's military moves in the region, which at the end brings us to the growing intention of Moscow to turn the Black Sea into the "Russian lake".

As supposed by Polina Synovets, growing attention on the region is defined by the Russian annexation of Crimea, which was included in Moscow's defence perimeter in the "Fundamentals of Russia's Nuclear Deterrence Policy" 2020 and, therefore, made the Black Sea the area of possible sub-strategic use of nuclear weapons. However, a consistent and firm policy by NATO is capable of preventing the ultimate transformation of the Black Sea into the "Russian lake" by drawing clear "red lines" for Russia and supporting the most vulnerable partners of the Alliance, Ukraine and Georgia.

Putin's speeches on many occasions highlight the continuity of his perception of the Ukrainian state as impermanent, and its existence is not justified by any reason.

⁷ J. Bugajski, P. Doran, op. cit.

Recently, Vladimir Putin has published an essay⁸ on the “historical unity” of Russians and Ukrainians, and it reads like a justification for an even larger war.

The scenario of developing a constant threat of conflict escalation and pushing Ukraine into an endless internal confrontation remains the basic formula for the Russian model of „controlled chaos” in its neighbouring country.

To sum up, the Black Sea basin is one the most dangerous sectors of European security and one of, if not the most militarized zones in Europe. The Black Sea region can be considered NATO’s “soft underbelly,” a vulnerable spot in its eastern flank. Russia’s aggressive behaviour is a major obstacle to making the region peaceful and safe, and there is a large mismatch between the expectations of countries like Georgia and Ukraine and the reality of what their Western allies can offer them. Nowadays Russia has limited war-fighting capabilities for large-scale operations in both the Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean regions. At the same time, changes to ground-force posture provide the ability to move large combat units rapidly into Ukraine.

It seems that the time for a Black Sea focus has not come for a majority of NATO’s members. Some NATO members call for a coherent and synchronized approach for the region that will fix the imbalance between the Russian presence and NATO’s response, but they have remained largely ignored by other members.

The region’s three NATO allies have some overlapping and some divergent views of and policies toward Russia.

⁸ V. Putin, *Ob istoricheskom yedinstve russkikh i ukrainitsev*, Official Site of the President of Russia, 12 July 2021, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>.

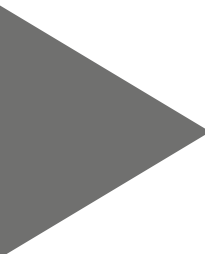
Romania is wary of Russia's intentions and military capabilities, and although it is largely resistant to malign influence, it gives high priority to countering Russian hybrid threats. Bulgaria is committed to Western integration but is subject to various Russian influences, which often leads it to balance relations between Moscow and the West. Turkey still values the NATO guarantee but is willing to impede Allied initiatives and is systematically balancing relations between Russia and the West⁹.

In the meantime, NATO is not ready to meet Russian ambition for transforming the Black Sea into the "Russian lake". The gradual increase of the Alliance military infrastructure, as well as routine operations and exercises, shows its understanding of the Black Sea's importance for the security of the West. The fact that these actions took place simultaneously with Russian military preparations suggests an increasing arms race on the Black Sea. Such a situation might potentially have a dual effect on regional security, as Polina Synovets indicates in her analysis. On the one hand, the enhancement of both rivals' defensive and war-fighting capabilities is aimed at boosting deterrence on both shores of the Black Sea. On the other, the security dilemma has always been based on rivals' ambitions to enhance deterrence concerning the opponent, which in the end risks deterrence failure. The larger states' reliability is determined by how the smaller allies view their commitment to them. Adding the nuclear factor to the equation would not necessarily give insurance for deterrence failure, but vice versa: the sub-strategic "de-escalatory" character of the regional

⁹ S.J. Flanagan et al., *op. cit.*

deterrence may rather provoke rivals in the spirit of a stability-instability paradox when the impossibility of a major war pushes opponents for escalation of their sub-strategic capabilities. Most often, Moscow explains its aggressive behaviour together with its intensive military build-up as response to the hostile moves of NATO, where the European missile defence occupies a special role.

Kyiv – Lublin, July 2021



Stephen Blank

Russia's War in and around the Black Sea

Introduction

A large literature exists concerning the security defects of the Black Sea states that stem either from defects in domestic governance – including unresolved ethnic tensions – or from clashing national security imperatives among local and external actors. But beyond the failure of Black Sea governments to overcome their internal security and governance defects, that failure has generated a situation today where this region is arguably the most dangerous sector of European security and certainly one of, if not the most militarized zones in Europe. The trends that engender this latter situation pose immense dangers to international security because the Black Sea is where European democracy to the West, Russian military aggression to the North, Middle Eastern instability to the South, and looming Chinese financial aggression in the East all come together¹.

¹ LTG B. Hodges (Ret), *The Black Sea – Or a Black Hole*, Center for European Policy Analysis, <https://cepa.org/the-black-sea-or-a-black-hole/>, 2021, p. 1.

This rising danger and military threat are most discernible in the mounting signs of a potentially larger Russo-Ukrainian war. Not surprisingly, those signs of potential war are themselves reflections of Russia's governance or democracy defects. Thus, the most urgent and primary threat here is that of Russian aggression, which could break out at any time, especially given the signs of a heavy armoured and artillery build-up on the border with Ukraine². Putin's imperial drive is rooted in the domestic dynamics of his system that has likewise revived the long-lasting system of Muscovite patrimonial government³. Indeed, as Alexei Arbatov long ago observed, "[t]his interdependence between the regime's nature at home and its projection abroad explains why those trying now to rehabilitate Stalinism and appeal for a return to this or that form of authoritarian regime al-

² J. Trevithick, *Russian Armor Floods Toward Border With Ukraine Amid Fears Of An 'Imminent Crisis'*, "The Drive", 31 March 2021, <https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/40016/russian-armor-floods-toward-border-with-ukraine-amid-fears-of-an-imminent-crisis?xid>.

³ N. Robinson, *Patrimonial Capitalism and the International Financial Crisis*, "Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics", XXVII, no. 3-4, September-December 2011, pp. 434-455; R. Hellie, *The Structure of Russian Imperial History*, "History and Theory", XLIV, no. 4, December 2005, pp. 88-112; P. Baker, S. Glasser, *Kremlin Rising: Vladimir Putin's Russia and the End of Revolution*, New York: Scribner's, 2005, p. 417; S. Rosenfield, *Russia in the 21st Century: the Prodigal Superpower*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004; M.T. Poe, *The Russian Moment in World History*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003; S. Hedlund, *Russian Path Dependence*, London: Routledge, 2005; E. Pain, *Will Russia Transform Into a Nationalist Empire*, "Russia in Global Affairs", III, no. 2, April-June 2005, pp. 71-80; S. Kotkin, *It's Gogol Again*, paper presented as part of the project "The Energy Dimension in Russian Global Strategy", James A. Baker III Institute for Public Policy, Rice University, Houston; *These are only a few of the authors who now see the vitality of the Tsarist metaphor as a means of explaining Putin's Russia*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Praeger, 2004, passim; R. Pipes, *Russia Under the Old Regime*, New York: Scribner's, 1975; S. Blank, *Rosoboroneksport, Its Place in Russian Defense and Arms Sales Policy Carlisle Barracks*, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2007; H. Balzer, *Confronting the Global Economy After Communism: Russia and China Compared*, paper presented to the Annual Convention of the International Studies Association, Honolulu, Hawaii, 1-5 March 2005.

ways link it to a revival of some form of Russian (or Soviet) empire and permanent confrontation with the West"⁴.

For example, we see some of these trends in the development of civil-military relations in Putin's Russia. A recent Swedish study has found that the Russian military's ability to influence foreign policy and function as a reliable instrument of state policy has grown under Putin⁵. Certainly, it possesses unchallenged dominance over threat assessments, so the government has long since come to accept its enduring anti-Western animus. For example, Putin told the G-8 press corps in June 2007, that Russia and the West were returning to the Cold War and added that

Of course, we will return to those times. And it is clear that if part of the United States' nuclear capability is situated in Europe and that our military experts consider that they represent a potential threat then we will have to take appropriate retaliatory steps. What steps? Of course, we must have new targets in Europe. And determining precisely which means will be used to destroy the installations that our experts believe represent a potential threat for the Russian Federation is a matter of technology. Ballistic or cruise missiles or a completely new system. I repeat that it is a matter of technology⁶.

⁴ A. Arbatov, *Russia's Own Imperial Road*, N. Bubnova (ed.), *20 Years Without the Berlin Wall: A Breakthrough to Freedom*, Moscow: Carnegie Center, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2011, p. 32.

⁵ F. Westerlund, *The Role of the Military in Putin's Foreign Policy*, Stockholm: Swedish Defense Research Agency (FOI), 2021, www.foi.se, passim.

⁶ *Putin Interviewed by Journalists from G8 countries – text*, Official Site of the President of Russia, www.kremlin.ru, 4 June 2007, retrieved from Nexis-Lexis.

So, if the military says it is a threat, it is one. Not only does this trend reinforce the traditional tendency to see Russia as being comprehensively threatened from abroad, in domestic politics it also ratifies the military and intelligence agencies' unchallenged power of threat assessment and formulation. This has decidedly negative tendencies for both domestic politics (budgetary allocations for example) and in foreign policy. Certainly, it reinforces the trend towards martial conceptions of the state and its administrative order as well as an atavistic and classical Realpolitik approach of zero-sum games to Russian thinking about international relations. For example, Russian officials are now proclaiming that the West is waging – apart from its military threats – “psychological war” against Putin and his government, no doubt to justify the increasing totalitarian and repressive drift in domestic policy, e.g. regarding information policy⁷. Supposedly these Western threats that actually were, and are, fundamentally imaginary are the product of Putin's and his entourage's personalities, training, and interests in preserving his and their wealth and power as well as those of the unreconstructed Cold War warriors who rose with him. Given this outlook, it is hardly surprising that Putin has bought and then, with his entourage, enforced the view that the West seeks Russia's humiliation and to deny its natural great power status while threatening it in myriad ways. As Pavel Felgenhauer, a leading defence correspondent, reported years ago, “Russia has a Prussian-style all-powerful

⁷ G. Tétrault-Farber, A. Osborn, *US Wages Psychological war On Moscow – Russian Defense Adviser*, “National Post”, 25 March 2021, <https://nationalpost.com/pmn/news-pmn/us-wages-psychological-war-on-moscow-russian-defense-adviser>, from www.reuters.com.

General Staff that controls all the different armed services and is more or less independent of outside political constraints. Russian military intelligence – GRU, as big in size as the former KGB and spread over all continents – is an integral part of the General Staff. Through GRU, the General Staff controls the supply of vital information to all other decision-makers in all matters concerning defence procurement, threat assessment, and so on. High-ranking former GRU officers have told me that in Soviet times the General Staff used the GRU to grossly, deliberately, and constantly mislead the Kremlin about the magnitude and gravity of the military threat posed by the West in order to help inflate military expenditure. There are serious indications that at present the same foul practice is continuing”⁸.

More recently, Lilia Shevtsova writes that Russia’s demand for equality in world politics masks an actual demand for unequal status whereby states like Ukraine and the other Black Sea states, whose sovereignty and integrity count for nothing for Russia, are diminished⁹. So Russia wants more than “a sphere of influence”. Actually, it wants some form of an empire, a formation that ineluctably comprises the real diminution of the sovereignty and integrity of its neighbours. Obviously, on this basis integration with Europe is inconceivable, especially since Russian leaders have recognized that a democratically integrated Europe, despite being an inherently democratic project, threatens their autocratic system. Therefore, it is not surprising, giv-

⁸ P. Felgenhauer, *Russia's Imperial General Staff*, “Perspective”, XVI, no. 1, October-November 2005, <https://open.bu.edu/handle/2144/3628>.

⁹ L. Shevtsova, *Fallacies and Failures In the Western Perception Of Russia*, Robert Bosch Academy, 24 March 2021, www.robertboschacademy.de.

en Ukraine's role in driving EU and American sanctions and pressures on Russia, that Russia now has pronounced EU-Russian relations as dead¹⁰. Foreign Minister Lavrov's fit of pique in announcing this rupture betrayed Russia's refusal to hold itself accountable to European norms and the preservation of its autocratic system of rule as its true priority that has led it to what increasingly looks like an alliance with China, wherein China is the rider and Russia the horse. Indeed, Vladimir Putin, who directs the policy, has apparently come to terms with China's rising position, having said that "the main struggle, which is now underway, is that for global leadership and we are not going to contest China on this"¹¹. Given China's growing presence in the Black Sea, this Sino-Russian relationship could be of portentous significance¹².

But it should be clear that Russia's repudiation of Europe owes as much to domestic imperatives drive and intermingle with foreign policy postures. Neither should we simply assume, as so many do, some element of rationality here, for as Dmitri Trenin observes, "[e]motions compel Russia to escalate the confrontation with the United States, or even turn the fight against U.S. global domination into the central idea of Russia's foreign—and to some extent domestic policy. This positioning harks back to Cold War-era Soviet policy, but it's not practicable with Moscow's current shortage

¹⁰ Lavrov Pronounces Russia-EU Relations As Dead, "Euractiv", 24 March 2021, www.euractiv.com.

¹¹ I. Krastev, *Robert Mueller Will Never Get to the Bottom of Russia's Meddling*, "New York Times", 1 November 2017, www.nytimes.com.

¹² M. O'Hanlon, I. Safranchuk, I. Denisov et al., *A Sea Change, China in the Black Sea*, www.mei.edu.

of resources. Furthermore, overextension in foreign policy was one of the factors that led the Soviet Union into crisis in the 1980s. Letting off emotional steam through rhetoric – which is what we are seeing for now – is less dangerous, of course, but also entirely unproductive. There is an illusion that Russia can still prove something to the United States, bring Washington to its senses, and force the United States to respect Russian national interests on the basis of a global Russian-American understanding: some sort of a grand bargain. These illusions have faded over the past four years, but the Russian elites still haven't completely let them go"¹³.

This process has long registered in the Russian leadership's threat assessments and foreign policies. Thus, in 2006, as Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov publicly stated, the greatest threat perceived by Russia was alleged foreign efforts (and since domestic ones are invariably special operations fomented by the West, all such revolutions are inherently foreign) to alter the constitutional order in any of the CIS states, including Russia¹⁴. Obviously under these circumstances, a democratic or even democratizing Ukraine cannot, therefore, be allowed to stand. Thus, President Zelensky's recent offensive against oligarchs like Viktor Medvedchuk who is one of Moscow's men in Ukraine, stung the Kremlin as to Zelensky's determination, along with the Biden Administration's strong support for Ukraine, and possibly some new Franco-German inclination towards Kyiv.

¹³ D. Trenin, *No Emotions or Illusions: The Future of U.S.-Russian Relations*, "The Daily Chín", 30 March 2021, <https://dailychin.net/no-emotions-or-illusions-the-future-of-u-s-russian-relations-carnegie-moscow-center/>.

¹⁴ S. Ivanov, *Russia Must Be Strong*, "Wall Street Journal", 11 January 2006, www.wsj.com, p. 14.

Apparently, Moscow concluded that the West is mounting a new offensive against it, and therefore, it is preparing to counter-attack in Ukraine¹⁵. Moscow has many potential options for attack, as James Sherr has recently written, and in the meantime, all the hallmarks of an operation are emerging, “[h]ot information war, creeping escalation and other warnings and developments indicate that Russia is moving towards another attack on Ukraine. Will it be the annexation of Donbas, a launch of full-scale military operations or insertion of Russian ‘peacekeepers’?”¹⁶ Not surprisingly, Moscow now says that it fears that Ukraine could restart the war in the Donbas, forcing it to reply, a standard line of Soviet and now Russian propaganda that Moscow has assiduously propagated for quite some time¹⁷. Typically, this build-up apparently has occurred during and under the auspices of one of Russia’s many military exercises¹⁸. In keeping with what has now become standard Russian practice of “Maskirovka” (deception and deception plans are a mandatory element of any military operations),

[s]ome military movements in the same general region had been observed earlier the month and appeared to be related to a previously announced exercise. However, there have now

¹⁵ J. Sherr, *Rumours of War: Another Russian Surprise in Ukraine?*, International Centre for Defence and Security, 30 March 2021, <https://icds.ee/en/rumours-of-war-another-russian-surprise-in-ukraine/>.

¹⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁷ *Kremlin Says It Fears Ukraine Could Restart Conflict In War-torn East*, Reuters, 31 March 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-military-putin/kremlin-says-it-fears-ukraine-could-restart-conflict-in-war-torn-east-idUSKBN2BN13Q>.

¹⁸ A. Kramer, *Fighting Escalates in Eastern Ukraine, Signaling the End to Another Cease-Fire*, “New York Times”, 30 March 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/30/world/europe/ukraine-russia-fighting.html?searchResultPosition=3>.

been reports that Russian forces that took part in those drills remained deployed after the training officially wrapped up on March 23. In addition, subsequent deployments had reportedly seen troops, including units not known to have been involved in the aforementioned drills, head out to locations outside of the publicly announced exercise areas¹⁹.

Meanwhile, the repeated use of the military to intimidate other countries, e.g. through overflights, threats, probes at sea, etc., have also strengthened the military's role and combat capability. The armed forces also command a high and persisting amount of Russian resources, probably more than is reported. Therefore they will be loath to accept a policy that diminishes their importance or reduces foreign tensions. While the armed forces are currently serving the interests and desires of the political leadership and are under its firm control, this is not necessarily a long-term stable condition, particularly if a succession scenario emerges²⁰.

Vladimir Putin has been at war with the U.S. and the West for over a decade²¹. Already on January 18, 2005, Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov told the Academy of Military Sciences that "[l]et us face it, there is a war against Russia under way, and it has been going on for quite a few years. No one declared war on us. There is not one country that would be in a state of war with Russia. But there are people

¹⁹ J. Trevithick, op. cit.

²⁰ F. Westerlund, op. cit., passim.

²¹ *Putin's Revenge*, "Public Broadcasting Service", <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/putins-revenge/>.

and organizations in various countries, who take part in hostilities against the Russian Federation”²².

More recently, Dmitri Trenin, Director of the Moscow office of the Carnegie Endowment, observed that for some time “the Kremlin has been de facto operating in a war mode”²³. One sign of this war is that by 2007-08, i.e. a decade ago, European Security services were reporting across the board an enormous expansion in Russian espionage, both traditional and economic, across Europe²⁴. That war is manifested in current military Russian thought as the promotion of “colour revolutions”, which the Russian military views as any insurgency against authoritarian regimes in the recent past²⁵.

War as inherent in Putin’s project

In fact, we may argue that war and empire have been and are inherent in Putin’s project since the beginning. Indeed, some analysts trace covert actions against Russia’s neighbours back to 1992 and the Russian interventions in Abkhazia and Moldova at that date²⁶. Autocracy, Putin’s legacy from the Tsars and Soviets, presupposes empire in Russia, and empire under present conditions all but forces Russia into

²² M.A. Gareyev, *Srazheniya na Voenno-Istoricheskoy Fronte*, Moscow: ISAN Press, 2010, p. 729, cited in MG I.N.; Vorob’ev (RET) and Col. V.A. Kisel’ev (RET), *Strategies of Destruction and Attrition*, “Military Thought”, Moscow, in English, no. 1, 2014, 1 January 2014 – 31 March 2014.

²³ Trenin quoted in I.H. Daalder, *Responding to Russia’s Resurgence Not Quiet on the Eastern Front*, “Foreign Affairs”, November-December 2017, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2017-10-16/responding-russias-resurgence>.

²⁴ Open Source Center Report, *Europe – Economic Espionage a Growing Concern For Intelligence Services*, “Business”, 12 May 2008.

²⁵ V. Bunce, A. Hozic, *Diffusion-Proofing and the Russian Invasion of Ukraine*, “Demokrati-zatsiya”, XXIV, no. 4, Fall 2016, p. 444.

²⁶ Ibidem, p. 447.

a constant state of threat, if not war, against its neighbours since it is consumed with projects that diminish their sovereignty, if not their territorial integrity. Indeed, as Russian civilian and military leaders came around to the consensus that the West was behind all of these colour revolutions and was looking to destabilize Russia, they came to the conclusion that not only did Russia have to wage a counter or asymmetric war against the West, but that it also had to become more autocratic and militaristic to save itself²⁷.

Other analysts, like Lilia Shevtsova, see this as well and argue that the state inherently needs militarization to preserve itself, and moreover, as argued below, that salvation of the state means its preservation as an imperial autocracy. As Shevtsova has written,

[i]n the Russian case the primacy of the state has been legitimized with reference to real (or more often) imagined threats, both internal and external. Those threats had to be severe enough to justify the militarization of everyday life in Russia and the subjugation of the very foundations of society to the militarist goals. In short, Russia developed a unique model for the survival and reproduction of power in a permanent state of war. This situation was maintained even in peacetime, which has always been temporary in Russia. The country is constantly either preparing for war against an external enemy or pursuing enemies at home. Russia has survived by annihilating the boundary between war and peace; its state simply could not exist in a peaceful environment²⁸.

²⁷ Ibidem, p. 444.

²⁸ L. Shevtsova, *What's the Matter With Russia?*, "Journal of Democracy", XXI, no. 1, January 2010, quoted in S. Stewart, *Fundamental Attitudes of the Russian Political Elite: Law, Truth,*

This inherent gravitation towards militarization is inextricable from Russia's continuing self-presentation as an empire. Already in 2000, Alexei Malashenko observed that Russia's war in Chechnya is logical only if Russia continues to regard itself as an empire²⁹. Similarly, Alexander Etkind observed in 2011 that Russian history remains one of internal colonialism³⁰. As Professor Alfred Rieber of the Central European University has written, "[f]or Russia there was no hard and fast distinction between colonial questions and the process of state building. This was not true of any other European state"³¹. This was also the situation in Soviet times, when the state structure and domestic and foreign policy all came together, and it remains the case today³². Putin's wars in both Ukraine and the North Caucasus confirm that this is still the case. Indeed, Trenin, along with many other analysts, has acknowledged that Putin's Russia is a Czarist state, and this designation applies to more than just Putin's personal status³³. As a result, the wars in the North Caucasus, like the war in Ukraine, possess extraordinary resonance for Russia's past, present, and future state structure. And we have good grounds to assert, therefore, that resorting to war is "over-determined", i.e. inherent in the very nature

Public Welfare, and Violence, SWP Research Paper, Stiftung Wissenschaft Und Politik, 2017, www.swp.org.de, p. 31.

²⁹ M. Reynolds, *Moscow Has Chechnya Back – Now What?*, "Los Angeles Times", 19 June 2000.

³⁰ A. Etkind, *Internal Colonization: Russia's Imperial Experience*, London: Polity Press, 2011.

³¹ A.J. Rieber, *Persistent Factors in Russian Foreign Policy: An Interpretation*, Hugh Ragsdale (ed.), *Imperial Russian Foreign Policy*, Washington D.C. and Cambridge: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 346.

³² S. Kotkin, *Stalin: Paradoxes of Power 1878-1928*, Volume I, New York: Penguin Press, 2014, pp. 343-344.

³³ D. Trenin, *Russia's Breakout From the Post-Cold War System: The Drivers of Putin's Course*, Carnegie Endowment, 2014, www.ceip.org, p. 20.

of the Putin state and program³⁴. Andrei Illarionov, Putin's former economic advisor, has similarly testified:

Since its outset, the Siloviki regime has been aggressive. At first it focused on actively destroying centres of independent political, civil, and economic life within Russia. Upon achieving those goals, the regime's aggressive behaviour turned outward beyond Russia's borders. At least since the assassination of the former Chechen President Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev in Doha, Qatar on 14 February 2004, aggressive behaviour by SI (Siloviki-author) in the international arena has become the rule rather than the exception. Over the last five years the regime has waged ten different "wars" (most of them involving propaganda, intelligence operations, and economic coercion rather than open military force) against neighbours and other foreign nations. The most recent targets have included Ukraine (subjected to a "second gas war" in early 2009), The United States (subjected to a years-long campaign to rouse anti-American sentiment), and, most notoriously, Georgia (actually bombed and invaded in 2008). In addition to their internal psychological need to wage aggressive wars, a rational motive is also driving the Siloviki to resort to conflict. War furnishes the best opportunities to distract domestic public opinion and destroy the remnants of the political and intellectual opposition within Russia itself. An undemocratic regime worried about the prospect of domestic economic social and political crises – such as those that now haunt Russia amid recession and falling oil prices – is likely to be pondering further acts of aggression. The note I end on, therefore, is a gloomy one: To me, the probability that Siloviki

³⁴ V. Bunce, A. Hozic, op. cit., p. 447.

Incorporated will be launching new wars seems alarmingly high (Original)³⁵.

It is largely because the structure and nature of Russian politics also generates a constant predisposition to magnify a sense of threat, if only for domestic purposes, and a tendency towards securitization and even militarization of many, if not all, aspects of Russia's politics, economy, and political rhetoric³⁶. The idea that Russia is under constant threat from the movement of armed forces to its borders by NATO (i.e. its Soviet borders – a fact that shows the residual imperialism of these elites) despite NATO's self-evident inability to launch offensive operations against Russia, or the idea that the West is actively fomenting missile defence and colour revolution threats against the regime, an idea that existed mainly in the perfervid threat assessments of the *Silovye Struktury* (force structures), but which enjoys uncontested sway in the media, constantly reinforces this besieged castle mentality.

The Imperial project in the Black Sea zone

Bearing these points in mind, we must realize that this Russian imperial project directed towards the Black Sea zone was already fully underway by 2005/2006. At that same time, Russia started augmenting its capabilities for covert subversion on its periphery by instituting a substantial program whereby

³⁵ A. Illarionov, *The Siloviki in Charge*, "Journal of Democracy", XX, no. 2, April 2009, p. 72.

³⁶ S. Blank, *A Work in Regress? Russian Defense Industry And the Unending Crisis of the Russian State*, Paper Prepared for the FOI Conference on Russian Military Development, Stockholm, 4 October 2010; E. Bacon, B. Renz with J. Cooper, *Securitizing Russia: The Domestic Politics of Russia*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006, p. 16.

soldiers and officers in the Transnistrian “Army” that occupies part of Moldova receive Russian military service passports and rotate through elite Russian officer training courses, called Vystrel, at the Russian combined arms training centre at Solnechegorsk. As one intelligence officer in a post-Soviet republic told American analyst Reuben Johnson,

[y]ou do not try to cover up a training program of this size unless you are someday planning on using these people to overthrow or otherwise take control of a sovereign government. The facility at Solnechegorsk is used by Russia to train numerous non-Russian military personnel openly and legally for peace-keeping and other joint operations. If then, in parallel, you are training officers from these disputed regions – officers that are pretending to be Russian personnel and carrying bogus paperwork – then it does not take an enormous leap of faith to assume that Moscow is up to no good on this one³⁷.

Both of these examples show that by 2006, Moscow, apart from private military companies and the first stages of its long-term military build-up, had discovered the idea of working with indigenous militias, terrorists like Hezbollah, and/or ethnically disaffected forces that it would then use in Ukraine, Syria, and Central Africa³⁸. As the subsequent

³⁷ R.F. Johnson, *The Expansion Process Has Begun*, “The Weekly Standard”, XII, no. 4, 10 October 2006.

³⁸ A. Corbeil, *Russia Is Learning About Hezbollah*, “Carnegie Endowment”, 11 January 2017, <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/67651>; K. Truevsev, *Middle East: Long Term Forecast, What Next?*, “Valdai Discussion Club”, 27 February 2020, <https://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/middle-east-long-term-forecast-what-next/>; A. Ross, *How Russia Moved Into Central Africa*, Reuters, 17 October 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-africa-russia-insight-idUSKCN1MRoKA>.

invasions in Georgia and Ukraine, as well as Syria after 2015, showed, this tactic of mobilizing members of the diaspora and integrating them with regular Russian army units was clearly already policy well before those two invasions.

Since then, the threat to Ukraine and to its neighbours in all directions has obviously grown larger. It is clear that the continuation of Putin's system at home and abroad depends upon reducing Ukraine to either a vassal state or, if possible, dismembering it (as was intended in 2014) and eliminating its territorial integrity and sovereignty³⁹. As former Polish Defence Minister Janusz Onyszkiewicz has written,

The Russian President has made his opinion clear on many occasions. It boils down to the view that the Ukrainian state is impermanent, and its existence is not justified by any historical, cultural or ethnic reasons. Ukraine should return to where it belongs, which means the "Russian World": either as a part of Russia or as an entity permanently under Russian domination and control. While the attention is currently focused on the Sea of Azov, Russia is using almost all its instruments of hybrid warfare on Ukraine. The goal is to erode Ukraine's international standing and credibility by provoking inter-nationalistic tensions in the country and its neighbours (Hungary, Poland, Romania and others), fomenting social unrest and political conflicts, and destabilizing the economy. The hope is to provoke another revolution which will topple the present government and push Ukraine on a path back to Moscow. However, if these

³⁹ J. Onyszkiewicz, *A Lend-Lease Program for Ukraine: Deterrent Against Conflict Escalation*, European Leadership Network, 3 December 2018, <https://www.europeanleadership-network.org/commentary/a-lend-lease-program-for-ukraine-deterrent-against-conflict-escalation/>.

measures do not bring the expected results, Moscow may conclude that military means should be brought to bear⁴⁰.

That goal remains a constant one, as it is only on this basis that Russia's great power project can be founded. Putin's speeches in Crimea in 2014, to the Duma in 2018, and most recently in a speech at Luzhniki Stadium underscore the continuity in this project. As he did in 2014, and as countless spokesmen have done since, Putin essentially insisted that Ukraine is Russia⁴¹. Moreover, Crimea is a sacred or holy Russian territory whose return back to Ukraine would not only be politically unthinkable and highly dangerous for Russia (and presumably Putin) but also a sacrilege⁴². Thus negotiations on Crimea and the Donbass are ruled out from the start. But this also means there is no basis for a Ukrainian state or territory. So, though he claimed pacific intentions towards former Soviet republics that are now independent, he made clear that Crimea (and presumably Donbass) are part of Russia, and any effort to sunder this connection means war. To ensure that Crimea stays Russian, Putin has resorted to the historical Russian imperial practice of moving Russians into Crimea at the expense of native populations⁴³.

⁴⁰ Ibidem.

⁴¹ Transcript: Putin Says Russia Will Protect the Rights Of Russians Abroad, "Washington Post", https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/transcript-putin-says-russia-will-protect-the-rights-of-russians-abroad/2014/03/18/432a1e60-ae99-11e3-a49e-76adc9210f19_story.html.

⁴² Ibidem.

⁴³ E.G. Alla Hurska, *Demographic Transformation of Crimea: Forced Migration as Part of Russia's 'Hybrid' Strategy*, The Jamestown Foundation Global Research and Analysis, 29 March 2021, <https://jamestown.org/program/demographic-transformation-of-crimea-forced-migration-as-part-of-russias-hybrid-strategy/>.

We must understand that this attack on Ukraine is not merely a repudiation of the agreements pursuant to the breakup of the USSR, but on the entire post-Cold War settlement of 1989-92 because the pretext of support for Russians abroad, one of the oldest tropes of the Russian imperial repertoire, can be played elsewhere in Europe and the former USSR, e.g. the Caucasus. Moreover, since Russian foreign (and defence) policy approaches its tasks from the standpoint of what the German philosopher Carl Schmitt called the presupposition of enemies or of conflict, such claims (like Hitler's and Stalin's similar claims concerning their peoples) aims to place Europe in a permanent state of siege where the elite obsession that Russia is constantly surrounded by enemies provides a justification for the regime's crimes at home and abroad⁴⁴.

We have already seen wars in Georgia and Ukraine, and there are too many signs of further conflict against Ukraine to be comfortable. Indeed, former Ukrainian president Leonid Kravchuk does not rule out the possibility of Russia triggering another war, ostensibly as a humanitarian intervention, to alleviate Crimea's water shortage⁴⁵. Duma members, like the odious Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, who takes his lead from the government, regularly circulate propaganda fabrications to justify new strikes on Ukraine without declar-

⁴⁴ J. Kipp, *Russia: New Draft Military Doctrine*, U. Markus, D.N. Nelson (eds.), *Brassey's Eurasian and East European Security Yearbook*, Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 2000, p. 343.

⁴⁵ *Envoy Kravchuk doesn't rule out Russia's further invasion of Ukraine over lack of water in Crimea*, UNIAN Information Agency, 18 March 2021, <https://www.unian.info/war/kravchuk-envoy-doesn-t-rule-out-russia-s-further-invasion-of-ukraine-over-lack-of-water-in-crimea-11357560.html>.

ing war⁴⁶. Leon Aron of the American Enterprise Institute in Washington, D.C., similarly warns that the constellation of factors that propelled the invasion of Crimea are recurring and that this could lead Putin to think of another invasion:

Now, on the seventh anniversary of the Crimean Anschluss, many of the same vectors that produced the invasion of Ukraine are here again. Anticipating their trajectory and formulating a plan ought to be among the Biden administration's main concerns.

There are at least two reasons for Putin to be thinking about similar big and bold actions today. One is strategic and abiding: glory for himself and his Russia, the two by now entwined in his mind. The other motive is tactical: He is working toward a lifetime presidency—a six-year term in 2024, at 72, and perhaps another in 2030—in a country where the economy and incomes have stagnated for over a decade and the still-raging Covid-19 pandemic has left deep scars. What's more, the arrest of pro-democracy leader Alexei Navalny has ignited waves of protest rallies in over 100 Russian cities for the first time since anti-Putin demonstrations in the winter of 2011-12. The same factors – deeply held beliefs and perceptions, bleak economic prospects, and the exigencies of his regime's survival – overlapped in 2012 and 2013⁴⁷.

⁴⁶ *Odious legislator suggests Russia attack Ukraine „without declaring war”,* UNIAN Information Agency, 21 March 2021, <https://www.unian.info/politics/donbas-russia-s-odious-leg-islator-suggests-russia-attack-ukraine-without-declaring-war-11360353.html>.

⁴⁷ L. Aron, *Could Putin Launch Another Invasion?*, "Politico", 15 March 2021, <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2021/03/15/russia-putin-invasion-ukraine-baltics-nato-475527>.

Indicators of threat

Apart from the officially generated media belligerency, e.g. Zhirinovsky's attack, under conditions where both the Minsk Formula and the Normandy Four negotiating format are dead in the water, thanks mainly to Russian refusal to negotiate seriously, Moscow has also escalated tensions along the line of control in the Donbass. Thus, beyond calling for a preventive war against a supposed Ukrainian attack, Moscow has given Donbass forces orders to fire pre-emptively to destroy Ukrainian army positions. Since the advent of spring might permit operations within a few months, such trends cannot be seen as anything but deeply disturbing warning signs of possible new conflict⁴⁸. Parallel political developments here also suggest strengthening Russian intentions to enhance its threats to Ukraine if not a process leading to new hostilities. As a recent Russian report observed,

[t]he self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics (DNR and LNR), which were conceived as temporary entities, have survived and even grown stronger. They have acquired their own political systems and new elites ready to ensure Donbas's lengthy existence as a Russian protectorate. The doctrine of Donbas having its own "special path" is very likely to come true, even though irredentist ideas are waning there⁴⁹.

Concurrently Moscow, as in the Georgian territories that it now claims as Russian, is handing out passports in the

⁴⁸ P. Felgenhauer, *Russia Escalates Its Proxy War In Eastern Ukraine*, "Eurasia Daily Monitor", 21 March 2021, www.jamestown.org.

⁴⁹ K. Skorkin, *Merge and Rule: What's In Store for the Donetsk and Luhansk Republics*, 16 March 2021, Carnegie Moscow Center, <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/84089>.

Donbass facilitating potential assimilation of this territory into the Russian state. Russia also conducts a systematic media attacks on NATO in Georgia, although it has not yet shaken that population's faith in NATO⁵⁰. At the same time, Russia has also launched local political initiatives that point to this process of forming a rump state there or even of incorporating the area into the Russian state⁵¹. Thus, Moscow is creating, once again, a political process to blackmail Ukraine into accepting this permanent truncation of its sovereignty and integrity and also setting the stage to use this potential rump state as the basis for a new pro-Russian state that at some point might "voluntarily" abandon its sovereignty and join Russia, a trick devised by the Soviets over a hundred years ago and again in World War II⁵². So it is no surprise that not only the Ukrainian high command, but also the U.S., now find these signs of war and "escalation" to be concerning, if not threatening⁵³.

Meanwhile, Moscow continues to augment its military positions in Crimea, the Donbass, and around Ukraine. The deployment of an air assault regiment to Feodosia in Crimea

⁵⁰ A. Yatsyk, *Russian Influence on the Parliamentary Elections 2020 in Georgia*, "The Kremlin's Influence Quarterly", no. 3, 2021, https://www.4freerussia.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Malign-Influence_3_ENG_FINAL.pdf, pp. 18-25.

⁵¹ Y. Lapaiev, *Turning Ip the Conflict Dial: The Political Reasons Behind the Resumed Fighting In Donbas*, "Eurasia Daily Monitor", 24 March 2021, <https://jamestown.org/program/turning-up-the-conflict-dial-the-political-reasons-behind-the-resumed-fighting-in-donbas/>.

⁵² K. Skorkin, op. cit.

⁵³ *Ukraine Says Russian Military Buildup Threatens Its Security*, Reuters, 30 March 2021, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-military-idUSKBN2BM1N6?fbclid=IwAR2_bX-EvuUZjlhW4QCQxPoxKtUZd-uDTgCZCKcuroYwBozUq3Q7t93211Xw; *Closely Watching „Escalation“ Near Ukraine-Russia Border*, MSN, 30 March 2021, <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/us-sees-concerning-buildup-of-russian-forces-near-ukraine-border/ar-BB1f8RLn>.

is only the latest example of such deployments⁵⁴. Similarly, in 2014-20 we saw the following build-up of Russian forces in Crimea. In Crimea, the size of Russian Military presence has grown significantly between 2014-2020 adding:

- 20,100 military troops;
- 195 main battle tanks;
- 318 armoured vehicles;
- 259 artillery pieces & multiple rocket launchers;
- 78 combat aircraft: 22 to 100.

And this does not include the ongoing build-up of the Black Sea Fleet and the capabilities inhering in these weapons. In short, Russia has introduced 850 major combatant systems – more than a 6-fold increase since 2014⁵⁵.

Russia also oversees some 28,000 personnel in “separatist” units in areas of eastern Ukraine known collectively as the Donbass who have been fighting the government in Kyiv since 2015. Though the Kremlin denies it, the evidence is clear that a substantial portion of these forces is simply regular Russian military units deployed on Ukrainian soil. There are also strong links between Russia’s intelligence services and ostensibly “local” forces⁵⁶.

⁵⁴ *Armija RF rozgortaje novi desantno-shturmovi polky u Feodosii ta Pskovi: zagrozy dlya Ukrainy ta krain Baltii* [Армія РФ розгортає нові десантно-штурмові полки у Феодосії та Пскові: загрози для України та країн Балтії], “Defense Express”, 26 March 2021, https://defence-ua.com/army_and_war/armija_rf_rozgortaje_novi_desantno_shturmovi_polki_u_feodosiji_ta_pskovi_otsinka_zagrozi_dlja_ukajini_ta_krajin_baltiji-3251.html.

⁵⁵ P.A. Karber, Russian Military Build-up in Crimea & Destabilization of the Black Sea Region, Invitational Lecture before the United Nations Security Council High-Level Arria-Formula meeting on Crimea: 7 Years of Violations of Ukraine’s Sovereignty, 12 March 2021.

⁵⁶ J. Trevithick, op. cit.

Under the circumstances it is, therefore, not surprising that General Ruslan Khomchak, the CINC of Ukrainian forces, charged Russia with generating enhanced threats to Ukraine's security. Specifically, he stated that

[a]n additional concentration of up to 25 tactical groups is expected, which, together with the already deployed forces near the state border of Ukraine, poses a threat to the military security of the state – Moscow holds 32,700 troops in Crimea, annexed by Russia in 2014, while its officers command 28,000 separatist servicemen stationed in temporarily occupied territories in eastern Ukraine⁵⁷.

Typically, as well, Moscow, for some time now, has launched an upgraded information offensive against Ukraine, blaming it for the lack of progress on the Minsk agreement, threats to Donbass and Crimea, and has refused to extend the cease-fire agreement at the front lines which expired on April 1. All of these signs are hallmarks of Russian "actions preparatory for war"⁵⁸. These deployments and threats to Ukraine are very serious. While Russia's Southern Military Theatre command had previously announced major exercises were to be held, the scale and combined arms diversity of the particular units deployed is striking. This includes a heavy emphasis on infantry fighting vehicles,

⁵⁷ *Ukraine Says Russian Military Buildup Threatens Its Security*, Reuters, 30 March 2021, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-military-idUSKBN2BM1N6?fbclid=IwAR2_bX-EvuUZjlhW4QCQxPoxKtUZd-uDTgCZCKcuroYwBozUq3Q7t93211Xw.

⁵⁸ M. Seddon, R. Olearchyk, *Tensions Flare Between Russia and Ukraine*, "Financial Times", 31 March 2021, <https://www.ft.com/content/6a3d49e4-ffc8-4fd2-90c8-8516c2c89c8f?dsktop=true&segmentId=7c8f09b9-9b61-4fbb-9430-9208a9e233c8#myft:notification-daily-email:content>.

rapid mobility airborne and special forces, air force fighter and bomber units, and logistics trains. Moving these forces is expensive and complex, and is already constricting Russian civilian economic activity by disrupting arterial train routes. Put simply, Vladimir Putin will soon have the means to conduct a rapid offensive into southeastern Ukraine, pushing through Ukrainian army positions that have taken up a defensive posture. We should also note that Russian aviation forces have also been reinforced in Crimea. This means that the Ukrainian government-held cities reaching along the Sea of Azov, from Henichesk to Mariupol, are now heavily vulnerable to encirclement and rapid seizure. Such a seizure would give Russia dominion over the Sea of Azov and contiguous sea control right up to the Kerch Strait. It would also provide a Ukrainian land bridge from Crimea to the Russian border, without reliance on the Kerch bridge⁵⁹.

Not only has Moscow buzzed US ships in the Black Sea and shadowed NATO ships as they enter those waters, it recently deployed and dispersed all of its Black Sea Fleet submarines to shadow those ships and threatened submarine attacks against NATO vessels and/or land targets⁶⁰. Inasmuch as strikes from the surface and sub-surface vessels armed with dual-capable missiles is now a prominent feature of Russian strategy, the escalatory potential demon-

⁵⁹ T. Rogan, *Decoding Russia's Military Buildup Near Ukraine*, MSN, 31 March 2021, <https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/decoding-russia-s-military-buildup-near-ukraine/ar-BB1faYEe?ocid=msedgdhp>.

⁶⁰ *Russia Deploys All Black Sea Submarines as NATO Kicks Off Drills*, "The Moscow Times", 19 March 2021, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2021/03/19/russia-deploys-all-black-sea-submarines-as-nato-kicks-off-drills-a73298>; *Russia's Black Sea Fleet Escorts Spanish Frigate Mendez Nunez*, *Defence Ministry Says*, "Sputnik", 17 March 2021.

strated by these moves should be obvious to any reader and observer⁶¹.

These signs of political, media, and military preparations for escalation must also be viewed in the context of the US and NATO's growing interest in challenging Russia in the Black Sea, the ongoing massive build-up of Russian dual-capable forces there, and Moscow's response to NATO. NATO is intensifying and increasing its patrols in the Black Sea in response to Russian threats there to Ukraine and other NATO littoral states⁶². Meanwhile, the UK is helping Ukraine build new bases in the Black Sea⁶³.

Russia's build-up and threats to Black Sea states are not confined to Ukraine, nor are they strictly military. Moscow's unrelenting campaign of information subversion of Ukraine is so well-known that it has become for many a template of Russia's overall pattern of information war. And we also know that Moscow's European energy policy pivots around the base of building pipelines to Germany and Turkey precisely in order to isolate Ukraine from Europe and force it into direct dependence on Moscow. This point is, in fact, a major reason for the controversy over the Nord Stream II Pipeline project. Thus, Moscow's threats to Ukraine are multi-dimensional in nature as are its similarly conceived threats to Europe. Armenia now wants more Russian troops

⁶¹ M.B. Petersen, *Strategic Deterrence, Critical Infrastructure, and the Aspiration-Modernization Gap in the Russian Navy*, J. Mankoff (ed.), *Improvisation and Adaptation in the Russian Military*, Washington, D.C.: Center For Strategic and International Studies, 2020, pp. 30-37.

⁶² *NATO Scales up Black Sea Presence to Counter Alleged Russian Threat*, Sofia News Agency, 16 February 2021, <https://www.novinite.com/articles/208067/NATO+Scales+up+Black+Sea+Presence+to+Counter+Alleged+Russian+Threat>.

⁶³ J. Vandiver, *Ukraine plans Black Sea Bases As US Steps Up Presence In Region*, "Stars and Stripes", 10 February 2021, <https://www.stripes.com/ukraine-plans-black-sea-bases-as-us-steps-up-presence-in-region-1.661679>.

in its country beyond those currently at the Russian base in Gyumri and Nagorno-Karabakh. Apparently, the question of expanding Russian presence “has always been on the agenda”⁶⁴. While obviously Armenia is preoccupied with defence of its claims on Nagorno-Karabakh and its homeland against Azerbaijan, the capabilities Moscow has already installed at the base in Armenia at Gyumri threaten Black Sea states like Turkey and Georgia, if not also Ukraine. Just as Moscow has delivered Iskander missiles to Kaliningrad – a move that garnered much attention – it has also deployed them in Armenia, ostensibly, though not actually, under Armenian control. Indeed, it is virtually inconceivable that Moscow would grant Yerevan operational as well as physical control over those missiles, which are dual-capable and could take out any target in Azerbaijan or a radius of 500 kilometres (if not more), i.e. including parts of Turkey. Air and air defence deployments at Moscow’s Gyumri base in Armenia thus provide coverage of the entire Caucasus and eastern Turkey. Those deployments in Armenia have received virtually no publicity in the West, but they have vital strategic significance far beyond Azerbaijan and Georgia. It appears that Armenia may have tried to use those Iskander missiles in its recent war with Azerbaijan, but this merely adds to the fact that Russia probably has its own missiles at Gyumri if not elsewhere that are under its operational control⁶⁵. Similarly, Georgia’s State Security Service has reg-

⁶⁴ *Armenia Seeks Bigger Russian Military Presence On Its Territory*, Reuters, 22 February 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/news/picture/armenia-seeks-bigger-russian-military-pr-idUSKBN2AM1AP>.

⁶⁵ O. Jalilov, *Armenia Threatens Azerbaijan With Use Of Ballistic Missiles*, “Caspian News”, 30 September 2020, <https://caspiannews.com/news-detail/armenia-threatens-azer->

ularly reported that Russian operations pose an existential threat to Georgia.

As maintained by the Security Service, Russian occupation and illegal presence of its military forces in the occupied regions still pose “an existential threat” to Georgia.

“Activities of Russian military personnel and intelligence agencies in the occupied regions pose a threat not only to the security of Georgia and the region, but also to Europe”, the report reads. The Security Service drew attention to “the policy of substitution of Russian occupation by annexation processes”, increasing militarization, intensive military drills, discrimination of ethnic Georgians, restriction of “fundamental right” to free movement and the process of deliberate isolation of the occupied regions as the “main challenges” to the country⁶⁶.

In this context, it also is necessary to examine Russia's military posture in the Black Sea. Since 2014, Russia has regained maritime dominance over Turkey. Although Ankara clearly fears that this sea might become a Russian lake – and NATO's enhanced presence there clearly owes much to Turkey's support for it – NATO faces a serious challenge in addressing that superiority⁶⁷. Russia's Black Sea build-up comprises a combined arms build-up of land, air, air defence, surface, sub-surface, and precision-strike capabilities, many, if not most of which, are dual-strike in nature.

⁶⁶ [baijan-with-use-of-ballistic-missiles-2020-9-28-45/](https://civil.ge/archives/347347).

⁶⁶ *State Security Service Reports on Internal, External Threats to Georgia*, “Civil.ge”, 17 April 2020, <https://civil.ge/archives/347347>.

⁶⁷ *Turkey Says Black Sea Turned Into Russian Lake*, “Global Security”, 11 May 2016, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2016/05/mil-160511-presstv01.htm>.

The objective is to build up a combined force that will bar the way to foreign, i.e. NATO fleets, and preserve the Black Sea as *Mare Nostrum* where Russia can do as it pleases. This is clearly not just a defensive formation but an offensive one against all the other littoral states⁶⁸. This combined arms build-up, comprising large investments in land, air, air defence, long-range strike, surface, sub-surface, dual-use electronic warfare capabilities, and over the horizon radars enjoying interior lines of communications, has generated a formidable force to deny NATO access to the Black Sea or to sympathetic partners like Georgia and Ukraine⁶⁹. These capabilities are not merely defensive; these long-range strike capabilities, distributed among all the services, have the intended capacity to strike land-based targets in all the other littoral states, putting them at constant risk⁷⁰. Finally, the Black Sea Fleet is the foundation of Russia's increasingly important power projection capabilities into the Mediterranean, Middle East, and Africa.

⁶⁸ S.J. Flanagan, A. Binnendijk, I.A. Chindea et al., *Russia, NATO, and Black Sea Security*, 2020, Research and Development Corporation, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRR357-1.html, pp. 53-73; M. Petersen, *The Naval Power Shift In the Black Sea*, "War On the Rocks", 9 January 2019, <https://warontherocks.com/2019/01/the-naval-power-shift-in-the-black-sea/>.

⁶⁹ Ibidem.

⁷⁰ Ibidem.

Threats to other littoral states

Russian threats to the Black Sea states and NATO hardly end here. Moscow and Putin personally have explicitly threatened Romania about hosting NATO's defence missile system. They and other officials have called missile defences a clear threat to Russian security and warned that Romania would now be the target of Russian missiles. Russian planes and ships regularly threaten Romanian energy installations in the Black Sea where, because Moscow seized Ukrainian energy installations, they are now Romania's neighbour⁷¹. And in places where Moscow does not rely exclusively on military threats, it resorts, instead, in Romania as in Bulgaria, to media attacks, subversion, and corruption⁷². In the military sphere Moscow has successfully intimidated the Bulgarian government to the degree that it publicly refused to join any kind of regional cooperative security organization and naval agreement, a decision that severely undermines any realistic chance for effective regional naval coordination in the Black Sea. It also apparently sees Bulgaria as a key base for espionage against NATO. In other examples, one recent spy ring has been broken up, leading to expulsion of diplomats by Sofia. But this is the second major spy ring broken up in the last 18 months, and a total of 8 diplomats have been expelled by Bulgaria, an unusual sign of intense espionage activity by Russia here⁷³.

⁷¹ S.J. Flanagan et al., *Conversations with Romanian Diplomats*, p. 77.

⁷² R.-O. Ceuca, *The Kremlin's Malign Influence Through Strategic Narratives: Sputnik's Discourse on the Relation Between Romania and NATO*, "The Kremlin's Influence Quarterly", no. 3, 2021, https://www.4freerussia.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Malign-Influence_3_ENG_FINAL.pdf, pp. 36-45.

⁷³ *How An Alleged Russian Spy Ring Stole NATO and EU Secrets From Bulgaria*, "Local News 8", 24 March 2021, <https://localnews8.com/news/2021/03/24/how-an-alleged-russian-spy->

Beyond these examples and in the domains of subversion and corruption based on dominance in Bulgaria's energy sector and media, Russia has steadfastly frustrated EU plans for energy integration of the Balkans with the rest of Europe while exercising continuing leverage on the Bulgarian government's policies at home and abroad⁷⁴. Indeed, Bulgaria can almost serve as a case history or textbook example of how Moscow utilizes energy to leverage influence in European governments.

Moscow's undeviating aim of dominating in a monopolistic role the energy supply of Central and Eastern Europe remains a fundamental obstacle to Balkan integration into Europe and improved governance, not to mention economic security and improved climate change policies. Russia can pursue that goal due to its dominance of Balkan (including Western Balkan) gas and energy imports⁷⁵. Indeed, by virtue of its monopolistic practices, Russia has steadily over the last 15-20 years forged a situation of asymmetric interdependence whereby Balkan states pay the highest rates in Europe for Russian gas and are thus economically and politically far

ring-stole-nato-and-eu-secrets-from-bulgaria/, March 24, 2021, from CNN News Source.

⁷⁴ H.A. Conley, J. Mina, R. Stefanov, M. Vladimirov, *The Kremlin Playbook, Understanding Russian Influence in Central and Eastern Europe*, vol. I, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2016; H. A. Conley, D. Ruy, R. Stefanov, M. Vladimirov *The Kremlin Playbook, Vol. 2: The Enablers*, Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2019, M. Vladimirov, *Reassessing Russian Influence: Economic and Governance Underpinning*, O. Shentov, R. Stefanov, M. Vladimirov (eds.), *The Russian Economic Grip On Central and Eastern Europe*, London and New York: Routledge, 2019.

⁷⁵ N. Sekarich, V. Lazich, *The Western Balkans' Energy Security In a Triangle: The Role of the EU, Russia, and Turkey*, "Research Gate", https://www.researchgate.net/publication/341460246_The_Western_Balkans'_Energy_Security_in_a_Triangle_The_Role_of_the_EU_Russia_and_Turkey.

more dependent on Russian support than are other states⁷⁶. The importance of Balkans to Russia of the Balkans from an economic-political standpoint is clear, especially as the region's strategic profile becomes more important.

While Bulgaria is hardly the only country to fall under considerable Russian influence, the pervasiveness of the state capture process in energy and evidently in policy has gone farther than in other Balkan countries⁷⁷. Bulgaria is actively – albeit covertly – fulfilling Moscow's policy to block non-Russian gas, e.g. the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP), from getting into Bulgaria and beyond, thus blocking Balkan energy integration. Although the Borisov government has hailed the advent of the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline-Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TANAP-TAP) line as heralding true diversification of gas supplies, it has done nothing to bring about the conclusion of the Interconnector Greece-Bulgaria (IGB), which has been under construction for 11 years⁷⁸. Meanwhile, the Turkstream 2 pipeline bringing gas from Turkstream 1 (the Russia-Turkey gas pipeline) from Turkey to Bulgaria and then Serbia and Hungary has been completed and is now bringing Russian gas not only to Bulgaria but also to Serbia⁷⁹. In like manner, Bulgaria has claimed that the TurkStream

⁷⁶ R. Stefanov, M. Vladimirov, *Structural Economic Vulnerabilities*, O. Shentov, R. Stefanov, M. Vladimirov (eds.), *The Russian Economic Grip On Central and Eastern Europe*, London and New York: Routledge, 2019, pp. 69-94.

⁷⁷ M. Vladimirov, R. Stefanov, *Bulgaria: State Capture Unplugged*, O. Shentov, R. Stefanov, M. Vladimirov (eds.), *The Russian Economic Grip On Central and Eastern Europe*, London and New York: Routledge, 2019, pp. 116-136.

⁷⁸ *Greece-Bulgaria Line Lags Timetable: Update*, "Natural Gas World", 12 February 2021, www.naturalgasworld.com; *Conversations with Bulgarian Political Figures*, Washington, D.C., 25 February 2021.

⁷⁹ *Serbia Opens Russian-Turkish Gas Project Portion*, "Euractiv", 1 January 2021, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy/news/serbia-opens-russian-turkish-gas-project-portion/>.

2 project has been wholly financed by Sofia and not Russia. Therefore, Turk Stream does not cross Bulgaria, and Bulgaria should not be subjected to the real threat by Washington of US sanctions on firms and governments supporting TurkStream 1⁸⁰. However, Washington did not and now should not believe these claims. As the Center for the Study of Democracy in Bulgaria reported in 2020 on the basis of leaked corporate documents, since 2019 (before construction began) Russia has been using Saudi, Belarussian, and European companies to evade US sanctions against TurkStream. Consequently, Russia ships the gas, builds the pipeline, and finances it through proxy entities⁸¹.

Russian citizens and former Gazprom officials are in control of the management of the consortium building the TurkStream pipeline on Bulgarian territory although the bid for the construction has formally been won by the Saudi company ARKAD.

- The Saudi company has subcontracted all of the actual construction activities to several Russian firms including the Infrastructure Development and Construction (IDC) company that has listed Gazprom as its ultimate owner.
- ARKAD has also used as a subcontractor the Belarussian state-owned pipeline-builder, Beltruboprovodstroy, previously reflagged by EU countries as a national security risk.

⁸⁰ *The Bulgaria Government: The Turk Stream Doesn't Cross Bulgaria*, 4 January 2020, www.altanlyses.org.

⁸¹ *Russia Evades US Sanctions On TurkStream Using Proxy Companies*, "Center for the Study of Democracy", October 19, 2020; <https://csd.bg/blog/blogpost/2020/10/19/russia-evades-us-sanctions-on-turkstream-using-proxy-companies/>.

- The pipelines for the project have been ordered, paid for, and transported to Bulgaria even before the start of the project by Russia's biggest pipeline-maker, TMK. The latter's owner, Dmitry Pumpyansky, is on the US sanctions list of 96 oligarchs in the US CAATSA legislation⁸².

Furthermore, opting *de facto* for Turkstream rather than for diversifying gas supplies with Azeri gas will also replace Bulgaria's ship-or-pay transit agreement with Gazprom through 2030, with a guaranteed annual revenue to Russia of over 700 million EUR in exchange for the contract for the TurkStream 2 gas transmission. In other words, it will end up subsidizing Russia and Putin's oligarchs⁸³. That is habitually the case with Russian energy projects that look good at first but end as concealed subsidies to Moscow. Finally, and most importantly, by finishing TurkStream 2, which is a Russian project, and spurning completion of the IGB and Azeri gas, Bulgaria not only submits to Russia, it also ensures Russian dominance of its energy for some time and invigorates Russia's overall Balkan policies that aim to prevent countries like Albania from realizing their energy goals. As the Center for the Study of Democracy has observed,

What's at stake: The TurkStream pipeline will cement Gazprom's dominant position in the Southeastern European (SEE) region by:

⁸² Ibidem.

⁸³ Ibidem.

- booking up to 90% of the Bulgarian national gas transmission system for the next 20 years and thus significantly limiting regional gas trading;
- crowding out alternative LNG and Azeri gas supply from the regional gas transmission network;
- forcing Bulgaria to replace its ship-or-pay transit agreement with Gazprom valid until 2030 with guaranteed annual revenues of more than EUR 700 million in exchange for the new TurkStream transmission contract;
- becoming an effective instrument to feed Russian and local pro-Russian business networks, which are used to engage and capture political figures, energy state-owned enterprises and regulatory institutions to expand the Russian economic and political influence⁸⁴.

These examples of the diversity of means used by Moscow that exist at its disposal do not end here. We have not discussed, for example, Russian financed political movements in the Balkans, including Bulgaria⁸⁵. Thus, a global assessment of Russian probes and policies reveals that its strategy is only partly one of military threat and intimidation as in the Black Sea littoral. Instead, its strategy has been aptly captured by Dmitry Adamsky, who termed it one of “multi-domain coercion”⁸⁶. As he writes,

⁸⁴ Ibidem.

⁸⁵ *How an Alleged Russian Spy Ring Stole NATO and EU Secrets From Bulgaria*, “Eureporter”, 25 March 2021; <https://www.eureporter.co/world/bulgaria/2021/03/25/how-an-alleged-russian-spy-ring-stole-nato-and-eu-secrets-from-bulgaria/>.

⁸⁶ D. (Dima) Adamsky, *Cross-Domain Strategy: The Current Russian Art of Strategy*, Institut Français Des Relations Internationales (IFRI), “Proliferation Papers”, no. 54, 2015.

The current Russian cross-domain coercion campaign is an integrated whole of non-conventional, informational, and non-nuclear types of deterrence and compellence. Finally, the campaign contains a holistic informational (cyber) operation, waged simultaneously on the digital-technological and on the cognitive-psychological fronts, which skilfully merges military and non-military capabilities across nuclear, conventional, and non-conventional domains⁸⁷.

Conclusions

Space considerations preclude a detailed inventory and analysis of how the West must address the Russian and other threats to security in the Black Sea region. Nevertheless, certain fundamental points should be clear to all. First, it should be clear that Russia is at war with the West and that this is a many-sided, multi-domain war⁸⁸. Second, this war is not a frozen conflict but a multi-theatre, simultaneous, conflict that is highly dynamic and can be activated by Moscow in any domain that it wants, e.g. conventional escalation, at a time of its choosing⁸⁹. Third, given the structural dynamics of the Russian government, only a few of which have been discussed here, it is and has long been in a permanent war state and has sought to mobilize its population

⁸⁷ Ibidem, pp. 1-2

⁸⁸ Ibidem.

⁸⁹ D. Trenin, *Russia and Europe: The Current Impasse and the Way Out*, Carnegie Moscow Centre, 23 March 2021, <https://carnegie.ru/commentary%2083905>.

accordingly⁹⁰. Fourth a new Western strategic and many-sided response is urgent⁹¹.

For these reasons, and fifth, the West, i.e. NATO (including its member governments and especially the U.S.) and the EU (also including its individual members) must invest in both hard security as well as in soft security or resilience and governance as well as their accompanying infrastructures to deter the Russian threat and strengthen their members. Many recent studies advocating a stronger Western profile in the Black Sea zone and particularly Ukraine postulate the kinds of new policies that we must launch⁹². Sixth, while keeping the pressure on Ukraine to reform its politics, judicial system, media, military, and economy, these entities should step up military assistance and training to Ukraine to negate Russian plans of a short, victorious war and raise the costs to Moscow of its occupation of Ukraine beyond its present level. The French move to sell Ukraine Rafale fighter jets exemplifies what can be done in the military sphere, as does the U.S. transfer of Mark VI boats⁹³. But much more must

⁹⁰ S. Blank, "No Need to Threaten Us, We Are Frightened of Ourselves," *Russia's Blueprint For A Police State, The New Security Strategy*, S.J. Blank, R. Weitz (eds.), *The Russian Military Today and Tomorrow: Essays in Memory of Mary Fitzgerald*, Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, July 2010, pp. 19-150; A. Monaghan, *Russian State Mobilization: Moving the Country on to a War Footing*, London, UK: Chatham House, 20 May 2016, available from: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/publication/russian-state-mobilization-moving-country-war-footing>; A. Monaghan, *Defibrillating the Vertikal? Putin and Russian Grand Strategy*, London, UK: Chatham House, 7 October 2014, available from: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/publication/defibrillating-vertikal-putin-and-russian-grand-strategy>

⁹¹ B. Hodges, op. cit.

⁹² Ibidem; L. Coffey, *To Boost NATO's Presence In the Black Sea, Get Creative*, The Heritage Foundation, 23 March 2021, www.heritage.org; A. Aslund, M. Haring, W.B. Taylor et al., *Biden and Ukraine: A Strategy For the New Administration*, Atlantic Council Eurasia Center, 2021, www.atlanticcouncil.org; J. Onyszkiewicz, op. cit.

⁹³ *Macron wants to propose sale of Rafale fighter jets to Zelensky*, "UAWire", 30 March 2021, <http://uawire.org/macron-wants-to-propose-sale-of-rafale-fighter-jets-to-zelensky>.

be done throughout the Black Sea zone. This also means blocking Russia's energy strategies of isolating Ukraine and corrupting Central and Eastern European states with its energy and forcing it to sell oil and gas on a purely commercial basis, not as an instrument of political warfare.

In short, the West must wake up to the fact of its being under attack and conduct itself accordingly. Since there is no such thing, politically speaking, as Europe, it falls again to the U.S. and leading European states to take the lead here. But apart from strengthening Black Sea states' capacity for democratic governance and self-security, this also means restoring engagement with Turkey, which is as much at risk as are other states here. No Black Sea strategy in any dimension is credible without Turkey's participation, and NATO's recent moves into the Black Sea reflect Turkish support as does Turkey's arms sales, technology transfer, and political support for Ukraine's integrity⁹⁴. Our situation would be much worse if Turkey here followed the same instincts we have seen in the Eastern Mediterranean, Middle East, etc. Nonetheless, despite Turkey's behaviour in those theatres, its behaviour in the Black Sea reveals its understanding of this new iteration of Russia's historic threats to it. NATO and the EU must find solutions to issues like the Eastern Mediterranean energy, not only to unlock those gas riches for the Balkans and Central Europe to reduce dependence on Russia, but also to reforge a basis for dialogue with Turkey. Even if Turkey remains undemocratic, it cannot be judged to be a threat to its neighbours like Russia, and in any case, if we do not defend our interests, we cannot defend our values.

⁹⁴ B. Hodges, *passim*.

Defending our shared interests is all about what we should be doing in the Black Sea, whether those be in Georgia or Ukraine, and any sound multi-dimensional strategy to meet Moscow and now Beijing's challenges must begin with this realization. This understanding is necessary because, like it or not, we are only in the early stages of what promises to be a protracted, many-sided conflict. Moreover, there is no state with vital interests in the Black Sea that can evade this war. Thus, our watchword must be the French proverb that *a la guerre comme a la guerre* (when in war act as if at war). For in plain truth, we have no other choice.



Polina Sinovets

**Between the rock
and the hard place:
Will the Black Sea avoid
the escalation ladder?**

Abstract

Since 2014 the Black Sea basin has been the showcase of the contested region where the growing expansion of Russia, on one hand, and the boosting forwarded presence of NATO, on the other, has the potential for a clash. This growing attention on the region is defined by the Russian annexation of Crimea, which was included in Moscow's defence perimeter in the *Fundamentals of Russia's Nuclear Deterrence Policy* of 2020 and therefore made the Black Sea an area of possible sub-strategic use of nuclear weapons. However, a consistent and firm policy by NATO is capable of preventing the ultimate transformation of the Black Sea into a "Russian lake" by drawing the clear "red lines" for Russia and supporting the most vulnerable partners of the Alliance, Ukraine and Georgia.

Introduction

During recent years, the Black Sea basin has gradually turned into a hotbed of mutual NATO-Russia tensions. On the one hand, the annexation of Crimea pushed forward Russia's efforts in strengthening its military infrastructure on the peninsula while enhancing its Black Sea fleet. Such a situation shows the clear intentions of Moscow to turn the Black Sea into its anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) zone where annexation of Crimea is presented as *fait accompli* for including Crimea in the Russian defence perimeter. On the other hand, the United States and NATO are trying to keep control over the situation in the region by relying more and more on Romania as a new southern pillar. As a result, the growing confrontation in the region is accompanied by an intensive arms race, carrying the high potential for future conflict.

Russian military build-up on the Black Sea

Currently, the Russian Black Sea fleet entered a time of active modernization. According to the Russian Navy, Chief Commander Nikolai Evmenov, the reason for such prompt modernization is to prevent "the emerging of threats against Russia from the sea directions on the South"¹. In the end, it will make the Black Sea fleet self-sufficient and balanced for the structure of its means and assets.

Such a decision has become part of Russia's consistent strategy, introduced after 2014. Since the annexation

¹ D. Boltenkov, R. Kretsul, *S Pritselom na Yug: kakim stanet Chernomorskiy Flot posle pereosnashcheniya*, "Izvestiya", 16 May 2020, www.iz.ru/1011772/dmitrii-boltenkov-roman-kretcul/s-pritcelom-na-iug-kakim-stanet-chernomorskii-flot-posle-pereosnashcheniia.

of Crimea from Ukraine, Moscow has made the peninsula one of the most militarized points of the region, “the land of the Russian glory” as well as the fortress of Russian power projection.

Two fleets of Russia, the Northern and the Pacific, are responsible for strategic missions; therefore, they are mostly equipped with strategic assets. Further, the newest Russian weapons are always initially included in these two fleets. The other fleets, such as the Baltic and the Black Sea ones, consist mostly of sub-strategic military units. *The Fundamentals of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Field of Naval Operations for the Period Until 2030* declares: “During the escalation of military conflict, the demonstration of readiness and determination to employ non-strategic nuclear weapons capabilities is an effective deterrent”². This can be interpreted as meaning that Russian non-strategic fleets have been designed to perform “de-escalation” actions on the borders with NATO when an upcoming bigger conflict would be deterred by the threat of the nuclear weapons limited use. This strategy of “escalation for de-escalation”, born in the 2000s, was suggested for containing any large conventional conflicts Russia could potentially face, especially in relations with NATO, which have been listed as among the main dangers and threats in the main Russian strategic documents since the beginning of the century.

² *The Fundamentals of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Field of Naval Operations for the Period Until 2030*, Russia's Maritime Studies Institute: US Naval War College, [https://dnnlgwick.blob.core.windows.net/portals/o/NWCDepartments/Russia%20Maritime%20Studies%20Institute/RMSI_RusNavyFundamentalsENG_FINAL%20\(1\).pdf?sr=b&si=DNNFileManagerPolicy&sig=fjFDEgWhpd1lNG%2FnmGXqaH5%2FDEuj-DU76EnksAB%2B1Ao%3D](https://dnnlgwick.blob.core.windows.net/portals/o/NWCDepartments/Russia%20Maritime%20Studies%20Institute/RMSI_RusNavyFundamentalsENG_FINAL%20(1).pdf?sr=b&si=DNNFileManagerPolicy&sig=fjFDEgWhpd1lNG%2FnmGXqaH5%2FDEuj-DU76EnksAB%2B1Ao%3D).

Evaluating the Russian Black Sea fleet, the general impression is that it is being constructed primarily for this mission. In particular, it combines limited but effective offensive potential with powerful defensive capabilities. Among the offensive units, it is worth mentioning cruiser “Moskva”, equipped with anti-ship missiles P-1000 “Vulkan”, existing in conventional as well as nuclear versions. It is supported by the three guided-missile class frigates (project 11356) “Admiral Grigorovich”, “Admiral Essen”, and “Admiral Makarov”, and six “Varshavyanka” 636.3 class submarines, all equipped with torpedoes, cruise, and anti-ship missiles³. Also included are ten 1241-project corvettes and two 1239 project corvettes armed with SS-N-22 Sunburn anti-ship missiles and supported by the two older 1234 project corvettes⁴.

In January 2021 the Black Sea fleet was also rounded out with the 21631 project corvette “Grayvoron”, while nine more similar corvettes are going to follow in coming years. Also, the fleet is also supposed to be enhanced with two patrol boats of the 20380 project and then two corvettes of the 20386 project. Two more frigates of the 22350 “Admiral Gorshkov” type will be added to the Black Sea fleet within the decade⁵.

Meanwhile, currently all Russian frigates, as well as 636.3 submarines and the corvettes, are equipped with “Kali-

³ M. Petersen, *The Naval Power Shift in the Black Sea, “War on the Rocks”*, 1 September 2019, www.warontherocks.com/2019/01/the-naval-power-shift-in-the-black-sea/.

⁴ S. Roblin, *Introducing Russia’s 5 Deadliest Warships in the Black Sea*, “National Interest”, 1 December 2018, www.nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/introducing-russias-5-deadliest-warships-black-sea-37677.

⁵ D. Boltenkov, R. Kretsul, op. cit.

br-NK” sea-launched cruise missiles having land-attack, anti-ship, and antisubmarine warfare versions. “Kalibr-NK” is capable of performing conventional as well as nuclear operations and has a range of 2600 km. When deployed in the Black Sea, it is capable of targeting Southern, South Western, and Central European states⁶.

The defensive potential on the Black Sea is presented by the four battalions of S-400 missile systems, as well as the K-300 P “Bastion-P” high-precision coastal missile defence systems, and can cover virtually the entire regional theatre. The “Bastion” system “Oniks-800” anti-ship supersonic cruise missiles with 400 km range makes Russia feel safe enough on the Northern part of the Black Sea. Together with S-300 and “Pantsir-S1” point defence systems, Russia managed to establish an anti-access/area-denial zone (A2AD), expanding it across almost all of the Black Sea. This situation provides Russians with the capability to inhibit military movement into the Black Sea and deny freedom of action to an opponent⁷.

In general, the Russian Black Sea Fleet does not have too many battleships or any strategic assets to be involved in strategic missions; however, a) the permanent increase of the warships number together with the ambitious plans for the coming decade shows Russia’s determination to enhance its Southern flank to confront NATO; b) the current

⁶ M. van Dijk, *Russia and NATO in a post-INF world: One year after withdrawal*, “Atlantic Forum”, 2 August 2020, www.atlantic-forum.com/content/russia-and-nato-post-inf-world-one-year-after-withdrawal.

⁷ D. Gorenburg, *Is the New Russian Black Sea Fleet Coming? Or is it here?*, “War on the rocks”, 31 July 2018, www.warontherocks.com/2018/07/is-a-new-russian-black-sea-fleet-coming-or-is-it-here/.

number and the content of the Black Sea fleet permit Russia to already fulfil sub-strategic operations (even in the framework of de-escalatory missions).

The military exercises Russia has been conducting in the Black Sea also involve strategic bombers (Tu-22M3 Backfire, deployed at the Gvardeyskoe airbase in Crimea) and some of the newest weapons, such as the hypersonic air-launched cruise missile “Kinzhal”⁸. The latter was initially introduced to the most important Northern Fleet; however, the growing strategic role of the Black Sea together with exercises involving “Kinzhal” looks promising enough to believe that it will also become part of the Black Sea fleet soon.

The US and NATO allies positions at the Black Sea

Most often Moscow explains its aggressive behaviour together with the intensive military build-up as responding to the “dangers, having a potential to turn into threats”⁹ in the hostile moves of NATO where the European missile defence occupies a special role. In particular, the European Phased Adaptive Approach (put forward by the Obama administration) suggested deploying land-based units in the theatre and Aegis Ashore missile defence in Romania and Poland to protect Europe from the Iranian missiles.

⁸ S. LaGrone, *Russians Use U.S. Navy's Aegis Ashore as Excuse to Deploy Strategic Bombers to Crimea*, “USNI News”, 18 March 2019, www.news.usni.org/2019/03/18/russians-use-u-s-navys-aegis-ashore-excuse-deploy-strategic-bombers-crimea.

⁹ *Basic Principles of State Policy of the Russian Federation on Nuclear Deterrence*, 2 June 2020, www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/international_safety/disarmament/-/asset_publisher/rpofiUBmANaH/content/id/4152094.

Both sites present the second and the third stages of PAA, while the earliest stages supposed the deployment of the Aegis systems at the navy ships in the Mediterranean. The first Aegis Ashore site was deployed in 2016 at the Deveselu base in Romania, while the second one in Poland was delayed until 2022. Meanwhile, the Romanian Aegis Ashore site already has served as a permanent irritator for Russia. Starting from the moment Moscow condemned the US withdrawal from the ABM Treaty, it has always been categorically against the European missile defence, seeing it as a US tool to undermine the Russian deterrence shield. Commenting on the opening of the Aegis Ashore site in Romania, Russian president Putin asserted that in response to the “deployment of those anti-missile system elements”, Russia “will be forced to think about neutralizing developing threats to Russia’s security”¹⁰.

To some extent, this statement was used to justify Russian intensive military build-up in the region; however, it is still based on certain practical concerns.

On the one hand, Russians monitor the growing capabilities of the SM-3 Block II A missiles, which were tested over the Pacific in 2020 and demonstrated successful capability to intercept ICBMs¹¹. Though the Romanian missile defence site currently operates SM-3IB missiles, nobody can exclude the deployment of more sophisticated missiles in the future. Due to Moscow’s logic, the only way of guaranteeing the stability of mutual deterrence with NATO could be some

¹⁰ Putin: Russia will consider tackling NATO missile defense threat, “RT”, 13 May 2016, www.rt.com/news/342915-putin-nato-threat-missiles/.

¹¹ US Conducts Successful SM-3Block IIA Intercept Test Against ICBM Target, “Missile Defense Agency”, 17 November 2020, www.cpf.navy.mil/news.aspx/110957.

formal limitations imposed on missile defence, including in its European sites. This idea has always been rejected by the US, who has refused to make NATO interests dependent on third power interests.

On the other, one of the Russian most speculated fears has always been that Aegis Ashore in Europe would be used not only as defensive infrastructure but also as offensive. In particular, Moscow claimed that the SM-3 Mk41 vertical launchers could also be equipped with the navy's Tomahawk cruise missiles, a fact the US has always denied, referring to the INF Treaty and its adherence to it. However, in August 2019, immediately after the INF collapsed, the US successfully tested SM-3 to launch a "Tomahawk" missile, thereby proving that Russian suspicions were not ungrounded¹². In August 2019, commenting on the American missile tests the president, Putin emphasized this concern: "What worries me is that this Tomahawk missile, which means sea-based, has been "grounded" to unable its launch from the soil. The launch of such missiles can be carried out from launchers that are already located in Romania and should be located in the near future in Poland"¹³.

Somehow it was not surprising that the "Fundamentals of Russia's Nuclear Deterrence Policy," published in June 2020, called the deployment of European missile defence the "main military risk that might evolve into many military

¹² S. Neuman, *U.S. Tests Missile With A Range Prohibited By Now-Abandoned Treaty*, "NPR", 20 August 2019, www.npr.org/2019/08/20/752657167/u-s-tests-missile-with-a-range-prohibited-by-now-abandoned-treaty.

¹³ G. Gotev, *Putin: US in position to deploy new cruise missile in Romania, Poland*, "Euractiv", 20 August 2019, www.euractiv.com/section/defence-and-security/news/putin-us-in-position-to-deploy-new-cruise-missile-in-romania-poland/.

threats (threats of aggression)”¹⁴ and therefore was defined as a potential challenge for Russian nuclear deterrence. Given that Romania is the location of the Aegis Ashore deployment and belongs to the NATO alliance, which “considers Russia an adversary,” (the latter automatically makes it an object of Russian nuclear deterrence)¹⁵ the Aegis Ashore sites turn into potential targets for Russian nuclear strikes. Moreover, it is known that in the face of the gradual withdrawal of Turkey from being the most reliable pillar of NATO at the Southern flank, the idea of transferring this role to Romania is still being considered by both capitals, Washington DC and Bucharest.

In recent years Romania has started to invest in its defence field. Having reached 2% of its GDP on defence since 2017, it has been spending 33-35% of its defence budget on acquisitions (much higher than the NATO-recommended share of 20 percent for major acquisitions)¹⁶, such as F-16 fighter jets, Patriot missiles, Piranha armoured personal carriers, etc.¹⁷ In 2021 Romania signed a \$296 million deal on the purchase of coastal subsonic anti-ship Naval Strike Missile, which is to be fulfilled by 2024¹⁸.

¹⁴ *Basic Principles of State Policy...*

¹⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁶ V. Socor, *Pillar of NATO: Romania's Ambition in the Black Sea Region*, “Eurasia Daily Monitor”, 8 July 2018, www.jamestown.org/program/pillar-of-nato-romania-ambition-in-the-black-sea-region/.

¹⁷ I.S. Joja, *Dealing with the Russian Lake Next Door: Romania and the Black Sea*, “War on the Rocks”, 15 August 2018, www.warontherocks.com/2018/08/dealing-with-the-russian-lake-next-door-romania-and-black-sea-security/.

¹⁸ *Romania approves the purchase of NSM Naval Strike anti-ship Missile systems*, “Navyrecognition”, 15 January 2021, www.navyrecognition.com/index.php/news/defence-news/2021/january/9560-romania-approves-the-purchase-of-nsm-naval-strike-anti-ship-missile-systems.

Besides the technical preparations, there are some legislative ones. The new National Security Strategy of Romania adopted in June 2020 lists “Russian aggressive actions in the Black Sea region and the consolidation of its military potential in Romania’s neighbourhood” as potential threats to national security. It emphasizes that Russian action “motivates Romania to continue the widespread efforts begun in 2015 to build extensive defence and deterrence capabilities”¹⁹.

During recent years, NATO and the US have paid special attention to the Western flank of the Black Sea. Since 2016 the Warsaw Summit Communiqué has defined the Alliance policy in the Black Sea basin. It has introduced the Tailored Forward Presence strategy, which presupposed an increase of NATO military involvement in the region, particularly the rotational presence of the allied navy in the Black Sea, as well as the air policing mission in Romania and Bulgaria, together with the deployment of the multinational brigade in Romania. Also, the resilience concept involved the most endangered regional partners of NATO to support them depending on their situations²⁰.

Maritime routine exercises and operations have increased tremendously per year, while the US Arleigh Burke-class destroyers armed with the Aegis missile defence have been regularly entering the Black Sea. During the first two months of 2021, they have already entered three times, showing special concern by the Alliance for regional se-

¹⁹ K. Calus, *Romania's New security strategy*, OSW Centre, 15 July 2020, www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2020-07-15/romania-s-new-security-strategy.

²⁰ H. Shelest, *NATO in the Black Sea: Transformation of Approaches and Tailored Presence*, [in:] *Black Sea Region in World Policy: Actors, Factors and Scenarios of the Future*, O. Brusylowska, I. Koval (ed.), Odesa: I.I. Mechnikov National University 2020, pp. 96-111.

curity. NATO officially underscored its position by stating that “The Black Sea is of strategic importance to NATO... In response to Russia’s illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea from Ukraine and its ongoing military build-up in the Black Sea, the Alliance has increased its defensive presence in the region and remains strongly committed to Black Sea security”²¹.

In his CEPA report, retired Lt. General Ben Hodges noted, “I think the greater Black Sea region is the real place of competition and poses the greatest potential for conflict”. Explaining the aggressive behaviour of Russia, Hodges suggests to “reinforce Romania” “as the centre of gravity of NATO’s regional deterrence”, noting that the “Michael Kogelnichanu” airbase “should be reinforced as a power projection platform for logistics, land, mission command, and air activity”²². He also suggested locating the regional maritime NATO HQ in Constanta, Romania, to coordinate the Black Sea Alliance naval efforts, similar to the example of the HQ in the east of Germany. Supporting partners are envisaged by establishing a common Romanian-Ukrainian brigade similar to the Polish-Lithuanian brigade²³.

Russian Black Sea Fleet main missions

The main task of the Russian Black Sea fleet is to practice successful A2/AD, based on mostly conventional deterrence

²¹ NATO *Allied ships, aircraft patrol the Black Sea*, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 28 January 2021, www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_180887.htm.

²² D. Hodges, J. Bugajski, R. Woicik, C. Scmeidl, *One Flank, One Threat, One Presence. A Strategy for NATO’s Eastern Flank*, Center for European Policy Analysis, May 2020, www.cepa.org/cepa_files/2020-CEPA-report-one_flank_one_threat_one_presence.pdf.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 62.

while still admitting the low-level nuclear operations, aimed to strengthen deterrence stability. This connection of the conventional and nuclear options forms the backbone of the Russian general deterrence posture within the permanent coordination of the Black Sea and the Northern Fleet military exercises.

The current amount and capabilities of the Russian Black Sea fleet are designed to serve several aims:

- Deterrence of the Alliance enlargement to the East along with limiting the capabilities of its military infrastructure by building up the A2/AD zone in the Black Sea region. NATO enlargement together with construction of the European Missile Defense sites in Central/Southern Europe has been listed in the “dangers” chapter in most official Russian documents since 2010. Since the 2014 annexation of Crimea, Russian actions became even more aggressive due to the necessity of retaining the absorbed territory under Moscow’s control. In this regard, the closure of the NATO assets such as the Aegis Ashore missile defence site pushed Russia to significant military build-up at the Black Sea. Therefore, the missile defence site served not so much as a reason but mostly as a justification for the Russian adventurism in the region. Since its opening in 2016, President Putin declared the Romanian Aegis Ashore site as a part of the U.S. strategic nuclear capability. In this connection, the Russian Black Sea Fleet’s rapid development looks like a consistent effort to enhance the Russian defensive perimeter at the southwest of the country. The fact that the annexed Crimea has been included in this perimeter

was perfectly described in the “Fundamentals of Nuclear Deterrence,” issued in June 2020. In the end, it shows the dialectic of offense and defence in Russian strategy where the strategy of *fait accompli* is hidden under the strong defensive rhetoric; therefore, deterrence becomes the part of the offense.

- Power projection in the Mediterranean where the Black Sea Fleet performs a supportive function. In particular, the Black Sea warships actively participated in the Syrian campaign. Since 2013 Russia restored its Mediterranean squadron, the backbone of which is the Black Sea Fleet, while only a limited part of the fleet is based at the Russian naval base in Tartus. One other dimension is the Red Sea and the Arab Gulf, where a number of weak states could provide Moscow with additional bases²⁴.

The creation of the A2/AD area in the Black Sea also makes a strong platform for Russia's coercive behaviour, manipulating with the threat to deny (or limit substantially) NATO's military moves in the region, which at the end brings us to the growing intention of Moscow turning the Black Sea into the Russian Lake.

The implications for Ukraine

The annexation of Crimea made the Black Sea fleet much more strategic for Russia in many ways. On the one hand, the 2020 *Basic Principles of State Policy of the Russian Federation on Nuclear Deterrence* officially declared Russia's terri-

²⁴ I. Delanoë, *Russian Naval Forces in the Syrian War*, Foreign Policy Research Institute, September 2020, www.fpri.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/report-chapter-6-delanoee.pdf.

torial integrity among the main objects nuclear deterrence is to stand for. This inevitably involves the annexed Crimea, which would be a reason for the de-escalatory use of nuclear weapons in case Russian conventional deterrence won't be effective enough to keep the West from direct military intervention.

On the other hand, Crimea also gains a critical hub of Russian military infrastructure on the Black Sea, having a critical role in the theatre military operations. As far as Russian "Nuclear Deterrence Fundamentals" call the "attack by an adversary against critical governmental or military sites ... disruption of which would undermine nuclear forces response actions"²⁵ a reason of their use of nuclear weapons, it may involve Crimea in the centre of the great power conflict, with the potential for escalation to a nuclear level. Besides, the attempt by NATO to deprive Russia of its exclusive A2/AD bubble in the Black Sea can be counted as a trigger for such a conflict.

Conclusions and recommendations

The annexation of Crimea, as well as the traditional phobia of the NATO strategic infrastructure on its flanks, made Russia increase its military build-up in the Black Sea basin. Altogether, the Black Sea Russian forces are capable enough to create the A2/AD zone for Russia on the Black Sea by the threat and capabilities to wage sub-strategic nuclear operations. In the meantime, NATO is not ready to meet the Russian ambition of transforming the Black Sea into a "Russian lake". The gradual increase of the Alliance military

²⁵ *Basic Principles of State Policy...*

infrastructure, as well as routine operations and exercises, shows the understanding of the Black Sea's importance for the security of the West. The fact that these actions took place simultaneously with the Russian military preparations indicated the increasing arms race on the Black Sea. Such a situation potentially might have a dual effect on regional security. On the one hand, the enhancement of both rivals' defensive and war-fighting capabilities is aimed at boosting deterrence on both shores of the Black Sea, the Eastern and the Western one. On the other, the security dilemma has always been based on the rivals' ambitions to enhance deterrence concerning their opponent, which in the end risks deterrence failure. Adding the nuclear factor to the equation would not necessarily give the insurance for deterrence failure, but vice versa, the sub-strategic "de-escalatory" character of the regional deterrence may rather provoke rivals in the spirit of a stability-instability paradox when the impossibility of major war pushes opponents for escalation of their sub-strategic capabilities.

Meanwhile, it is still necessary to maintain balance in the Black Sea to avoid boosting Russian expansion in the region, which inevitably breaks the status quo for the sake of the most vulnerable NATO partners, such as Ukraine and Georgia. In this domain the Alliance should:

Continue enhancing its deterrence of the Southern flank by the clear drawing of the "red lines" that Russia should not cross under any circumstances. This is possible by:

a) Transferring part of the NATO regional maritime command infrastructure on the Black Sea, demonstrating the growing role of the region for NATO;

b) Developing constant military support to Ukraine and Georgia, start with involving them in common military training operations and ending with introducing them to the Membership Action Plan. An idea such as the creation of common brigades with partners could be a constructive step in showing the resolve of the Alliance to stand for its partners in the region.

Such measures should be firm and consistent, but avoid any non-transparency or actions that create misperceptions in Moscow, which may lead to conflict escalation in the region. This can be achieved by keeping the permanent communication/ information line with Russia open together with the Alliance declaratory policy showing the will for dialogue not only with partners but with rivals.

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Authors

Stephen Blank – Senior Fellow, Foreign Policy Research Institute (www.fpri.org). Previously, he worked as a professor at the Strategic Studies Institute of the U.S. Army War College at Carlisle Barracks, PA, USA

Oleksii Polegkyi – Academic Director, Center for Public Diplomacy, Ukraine

Polina Sinovets – Head of the Odessa Center for Nonproliferation (OdCNP) at the Odessa I. I. Mechnikov National University (ONU), Ukraine

Tomasz Stępniewski – Doctor Habilitatus (Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, Poland), Associate Professor at the Institute of Political Science and Public Administration, Faculty of Social Sciences, The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin and Deputy Director at the Institute of Central Europe in Lublin (www.ies.lublin.pl), Poland



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