



Waves of Change
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Research Report

Forum: Security Council

Issue: Addressing Maritime Security Challenges in the Black Sea Region and the Risks Posed by Russia's Military Build-up

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Introduction

The historical importance of the Black Sea cannot be overstated, as it served since antiquity as a crucial pathway linking distant territories along the famed Silk Road, even predating the birth of Christ. Across the ages, it transformed into a vital connection between the Greco-Roman world and the Eastern domains, fostering both trade and an exchange of cultures. Eventually, two dominant powers recognized and capitalized on its strategic value: first the Byzantine Empire, then later the Ottoman Empire. While the sea facilitated prosperous commerce and movements of peoples, it also witnessed conflict and warfare. Tragedy has struck in modern times, as the sea became a stage for Russia's appalling partial naval invasion of Ukraine.

Situated between NATO countries, Russia, and Ukraine, the Black Sea region has become a flashpoint of escalating tensions. Russia's desire to increase influence led to the invasion of Ukraine, inadvertently pulling the area closer into NATO's orbit and causing frustration for Russia.

This research report aims to delve into the background of the Black Sea region in order to gain an understanding of its current geopolitical dynamics. We will focus on NATO's involvement and the relationship between Ukraine and Russia, which are factors in finding solutions to the challenges and risks, in this area. Additionally, we will address the significance and environmental concerns that should be considered for a positive future. The report will highlight strategies and policies that foster cooperation while addressing disputes and criminal activities in order to promote the interests of all involved parties.

Definition of Key Terms

Maritime Security

A general term for the protection of vessels internally and externally from terrorism, piracy, robbery, illegal trafficking of goods and people, illegal fishing and pollution.

Military Build-up

The increase of military activity in a certain location.

Littoral States

Situated on the shore of a lake or sea.



General Overview

Historical background

Zalpuwa

The Black Sea has long captivated sailors with its mysterious depths and shifting shores. According to ancient records, early settlers along its coast knew the vast body of water by another name — the Sea of Zalpa, a term used by both the native Hattians and their Hittite conquerors. Zalpa was a prominent Hattian port located where a major river emptied into the sea, believed by some scholars to be the site of modern-day Kızılırmak's delta. Through the centuries, powerful empires have risen and fallen along the Black Sea's edge, but the memories of those first settlers remain etched into its name.

Pontus Euxinus

Pontus Euxinus was the later Greco-Roman name for the Black Sea. Initially, the Greeks referred to it as Pontos. The title Pontos Axeinos which means inhospitable sea came later, because of its harsh winter storms. This name was altered to Euxeinos, meaning the hospitable sea, driven by supposed superstitious fear (Kramer). But this name change reflects much more, not only the environmental challenges but also the intricate interplay of civilizations that enriched universal history and culture in this vital maritime region (Bongard-Levin and Vinogradov). The city-states along its shores, known as the north Pontic city-states, experienced a parallel development to their Mediterranean counterparts. The interlacing of general Greek history with the specific ecological, political and historical conditions of this region shaped the character of northern Black Sea City-States. These had a distinct autonomy from Near East despotisms and Alexander the Great's empires, as well as assuming an exceptional form of dependence described as barbarian protectorate. In the contemporary era, rather than occupying the remote peripheries of the civilized ('Greek') world, today's Black Sea has turned into a central hub of global politics.

Kara Deniz

The Turkish name for the Black Sea, "Kara Deniz," is often associated with Anatolian Turks, who traditionally designated the South as 'white' and the North as 'black.' Initially, the prevailing theory suggested that many modern languages adopted their common name for the Black Sea from this cultural tradition. Some scholars go as far as proposing that the Cumans, a Turkic people residing north of the Black Sea, might have played a pivotal role in introducing this name. Variants of this nomenclature continue to be widely used in various Turkic languages.

The significance of the Black Sea extends deeply into Turkish history, particularly during the era of the Ottoman Turkish Empire, which originated as a small kingdom in Anatolia, near the shores of this very sea. For the Ottoman Turks, the Black Sea held tremendous importance, which once again shows the enduring connection between the region and Turkish heritage.



This also shows the profound historical roots that may have influenced not only the Turkish name for the Black Sea, but also our own.

Great Sea or Black Sea

The Khazar Khaganate, renowned primarily for its Jewish conversion, exhibited intriguing aspects beyond its religious transformation. In medieval times, Khazarian traditions included the usage of both the terms 'Black Sea' and 'Great Sea.' However, the relationships between these two terms remains unclear (Karatay).

Our own 'Black Sea'

Contemporary understanding suggests that the origin of the term 'Black Sea' in our lexicon is not attributed to the Turks. Instead, it is traced back to both a Hungarian document and Nordic sources, including Icelandic sagas, within the Western, including English, tradition. In this narrative, the Turks play a minor role in the utilization and dissemination of the term. However, our connection with the Black Sea transcends linguistic and historical origins, encompassing a broader spectrum of geopolitical and intellectual considerations. These terms, once firmly rooted in historical narratives, now mirror the dynamic interplay of diverse national forces in this nearly global region, shaping our continuous engagement with this pivotal body of water.

Current geopolitical dynamics

In recent years, the strategic importance of the Black and Caspian Seas region, which once played a relatively unimportant role in commerce and conveyance, is undergoing a profound transformation. This shifting significance mainly stems from Russia's intrusion into Ukraine and the consequent obstruction of Ukrainian ports along the Black Sea. The geopolitical and economic weight of this area has witnessed a startling escalation, resulting in amplified tensions and reconfiguring the Black Sea into a pivotal point of focus. It stands poised to exert substantial sway over European politics well into the foreseeable future.

Central to the region's newfound importance is its role as a crucial corridor for energy routes and trade, connecting Asia and Europe. Russia and Turkey stand as important players in this evolving landscape, actively reshaping geopolitical coordinates. The Black Sea, in particular, serves as a strategic springboard for power projection into key regions, including the Mediterranean, the Middle East, North Africa, and Southern Europe.

The ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine thrust Europe into a precarious position while highlighting the need for bolstered regional cooperation. As violence escalates, leaders must dedicate themselves to ambitious plans which strengthen infrastructure and diversify energy supplies. Only through such forward-thinking projects can stability be secured and dependence on Russian fossil fuels alleviated in the turbulent Black and Caspian Seas. Now more than ever, partnership between the EU and NATO proves pivotal in resolving crises and establishing independence for at-risk nations. Despite present obstacles, united and purposeful action can yield a future defined not by foreign influence but rather security and self-determination for all.



Economic importance

The Black Sea's economic significance primarily, as stated many times before, lies in its historical and well-established role as a crucial hub connecting the East and West, serving as a vital year-round transportation route that links European markets. This connectivity is facilitated by key ports, including Odessa in Ukraine, Batumi in Georgia, and Istanbul in Turkey. Moreover, the Black Sea region plays a pivotal role in connecting oil-bearing regions to foreign markets, promoting and enhancing its trade. Biologically, the Black Sea is of course rich in fish, constituting a major and widely utilized resource.

Beyond its economic and biological significance, the Black Sea region is also renowned for its splendid climate and mineral springs, establishing it as a prominent centre for recreation and recuperation. Crimea stands out as the most important region in this regard, offering therapeutic experiences. Additionally, the sandy beaches of Bulgaria and Romania have become increasingly popular among tourists, further contributing to the region's allure as a multifaceted destination for both economic activities and leisure (Britannica).

Environmental concerns

Environmental concerns in the Black Sea Region have been addressed through a series of conservation and antipollution measures. For example, dolphin fishing was banned as early as 1966 by Soviet authorities, recognizing that there was a need to protect marine ecosystems. Furthermore, there were limitations on oil tankers and the disposal of industrial wastes to minimize the destructive effects on the ecological balance of the Black Sea. The six countries bordering the Black Sea led by this cooperation signed what is known as Bucharest Convention or Convention on the Protection of the Black Sea against Pollution in the 1990s. Through pollution control, fisheries, and marine life protection programs involving many comprehensive approaches; this accord signifies a common dedication toward environmental stewardship. This concerted effort by these countries has helped ensure that their maritime region remains ecologically healthy and biologically diverse over time.

Piracy in the Black Sea

Throughout history, the Black Sea has played host to a diverse range of pirates, spanning from ancient Greeks to Ukrainian and Russian Cossacks. The exploits of Cossack pirates in the Sea of Azov during the 17th century brought an era of lively confrontations with Turkish ships and garrisons. Italian seafarers and Byzantines also left their mark in the annals of Black Sea piracy. As we shift to modern times, the nature of piracy takes on a different form, moving away from traditional swords to contemporary weaponry such as Chechen machine guns.



A significant episode in this modern narrative is the Black Sea hostage crisis of January 16–19, 1996, during the First Chechen War (BBC News). The Panamanian-registered ferry Avrasaya, with 177 passengers and 55 crew members, was hijacked in the Turkish port of Trabzon by an armed group demanding a cessation of the Russian offensive against Chechen separatists. The hijackers, a mix of Turkish and Chechen nationals, threatened to blow up the ship with 114 Russian hostages unless Russian forces ceased their military operations. The crisis concluded without bloodshed after three days, resulting in the safe release of over 219 captives. The subsequent legal proceedings saw the hijackers sentenced to more than eight years in prison by March 1997, with some members escaping and being recaptured later. This incident perfectly gives an example of modern-day piracy in the Black Sea region.

Major Parties Involved

The UN

The United Nations naturally took responsibility in overlooking the growing risk in the Black Sea Region. In collaboration with the JCC and the IMO, the UN are a major party involved.

The JCC

Standing for the Joint Coordination Center, found in Istanbul, is comprised of representatives from the Russian Federation, Turkey, Ukraine and the United Nations. The purpose of its establishment is to implement the Black Sea Initiative to establish a humanitarian maritime corridor in order to allow ships to export grain and other similar foodstuffs and fertilizers from Ukraine.

The IMO

The International Maritime Organisation is a liaison with all key stakeholders in the region to contribute efforts in order to maintain safety and security for seafarers and the logistics of shipping in the Black Sea Region. The ongoing armed conflict between Ukraine and the Russian Federation poses a direct, serious threat to the wellbeing and security of crews and vessels that operate in the Black Sea Region. The IMO have since started a stranded ship reporting form as well as provide guidance and advice to Flag States. In addition, the IMO Secretariat works with littoral states to encourage and improve regional information sharing to aid in the safety and security of navigation and shipping.

In regards to humanitarian support for maritime personnel (i.e. crew members), the IMO Secretariat has been facilitating discussions with Ukrainian ports administrations, charities and the International Labour Organization (ILO) to appropriately support port workers and seafarers impacted by the crisis.



Surrounding Countries

In total, six countries border the Black Sea: Ukraine, the Russian Federation, Georgia, Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania. Of the aforementioned countries, Bulgaria and Romania are in the EU and Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey are all members of NATO. Furthermore, the Russian Federation and Ukraine entered armed conflict in February 2020 after previous tension between the two countries,

Ukraine, The Russian federation and Turkey

Russia and Turkey, being allies, prioritize the geostrategic relevance of the Black Sea Region. Turkish-Russian relations are constituted through economic and trade relations, ergo, The Black Sea is a way of gaining power and influence in the Mediterranean, the Middle East, North Africa, and Southern Europe. The Black Sea itself provides access to key regions of important security challenges as well as significant energy resources in the Middle East, the Caspian Sea and North Africa. For NATO, Turkey is the most important factor in the Black Sea Region in regards to Ankara being a bridge for trade between Asia and Europe and one of Turkey's main goals is to become an energy hub from the Caspian region as well as from the Middle East to Europe and is thus plays a key mediatory role between Ukraine and Russia in times of conflict.

Timeline of Key Events

2020: Covid-19 Pandemic

The global pandemic had significant impacts on the region from economies, health systems and daily life.

2020: Kerch Strait Incident

On the 30th of November 2020, the Russian Coast Guard intercepted and detained three Ukrainian naval vessels near the Kerch Strait, accusing them of violating Russian territorial waters. As a result of this incident, tensions heightened in the Black Sea Region.

2020: Black Sea Security Concerns (Russia Military Build-up)

Throughout the entirety of 2020, concerns grew regarding maritime security in the Black Sea Region due to an increase in Russian military activity. This included: Russia deployed advanced coastal defense systems including Bastion and Bal missile systems which are capable of engaging surface ships. Another example would be the



deployment of S-400 Triumf Air Defense Systems which are capable of intercepting airborne targets from aircrafts to missiles

Russia expanded its military presence and infrastructure in the Crimea Peninsula (which it annexed in 2014 from Ukraine) which entailed the development and upgrading of naval bases and airfields to support a stronger military presence.

Moreover, the Russian Navy has conducted numerous naval exercises in the Black Sea which involved vast numbers of warships, submarines, and aircrafts. On top of this, Russia had regularly conducted military drills and readiness exercises.

Finally, Russia has invested in the construction of infrastructure to enhance its military capabilities in the Black Sea such as the building of the Crimean Bridge which provides a direct land link between Russia and Crimea, which encompassed the movement of military forces.

2021: Nato Exercises

Early 2021 saw NAto conducting naval exercises in the Black Sea, prompting reactions from Russia and such maneuvers were part of broader efforts to enhance security and deter potential threats.

2021: Kerch Strait Incident

This time in April of 2021, Russia threatened maritime traffic as well as regional stability due to closing parts of the Black Sea close to the Kerch Strait in order to carry out military exercises.

2021: Nord Stream 2 Pipeline

The Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, connecting Russia to Germany, put pressure on the Black Sea Region due to a growing dependence and demand of energy supply.

2021: Aggressive Russian Maneuvers

Reports claiming Russian naval vessels showing aggression through maneuvers and harassing foreign ships in the Black Sea.

2022: Blockade Partially Lifted

Due to UN intervention, the UN-brokered Grain Deal was introduced in July 2022 - meaning that Ukraine was able to ease the blockade of its country's Black Sea Ports. As a result, Ukraine implemented a new humanitarian maritime corridor for merchant vessels sailing to and from Ukraine's Black Sea Ports. By early December 2023, more than 200 ships had



passed through Ukraine's Black Sea humanitarian corridor, carrying over seven million tons of grains, metals and other cargo.

2023: Easing Tension

Satellite footage and international media reports, in early October 2023, confirmed that the bulk of the Russian Black Sea Fleet had been withdrawn from Crimea to the relative safety of Russian ports. Crucially, Ukraine has also been able to ease the blockade of the country's Black Sea Ports.

Previous attempts to solve the issue

Black Sea Naval Force

Turkey founded the Black Sea Naval Co-Operation Task Group (BLACKSEAFOR) in 1998 to promote peace and stability in the Black Sea region through increased regional cooperation. The establishment agreement was signed by Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Turkey, and Ukraine in 2001. Since 2001, BLACKSEAFOR has been activated under different member countries' command for several phases of operations. In 2004 a significant development took place when there were political consultations among the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Black Sea littoral countries. It showed that the strategic importance of this body of water, as well as recognized BLACKSEAFOR as an instrument contributing to peace and stability maintenance in the area. Also stressed was the necessity for regional cooperation to deal with problems such as terrorism, organized crime, illicit trafficking and proliferation of WMD (Ministry of Foreign Affairs). The Ankara Communiqué also reiterated its commitment towards joint protection against various threats within the Black Sea.

Black Sea Economic Cooperation

BSEC, an abbreviation for the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, is an international organization that aims to consolidate friendly relations among its member states. Its principal interests include promoting dialogue and cooperation, deepening and diversifying bilateral and multilateral cooperation based on international law principles, and improving the investment climate. The BSEC therefore exists to strengthen economic collaboration between companies or organizations. In addition, it also takes into account other obligations of which a particular member state may be bound by. For example, through memberships with other organizations when formulating trade policies which will be most beneficial to its member states while at the same time netting it as many third parties as possible. Rather than just focusing on what seems right in economic perspective; this entity also recognizes the specific economic conditions of its Member States and encourages other states



interested in these processes as well as international institutions and businesses to participate in it.

Thus, for example Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece etc are all part of BSEC whose main objectives is to promote friendship between countries. In recent times, however, Russia's actions seem not very friendly, raising questions about whether they fully acknowledge their mission statement that constitutes good neighbourliness along with 2 others but yet still leading the way.

Montreux Convention Regarding the Regime of the Straits

One of the most significant international agreements concerning this issue is the Montreux Convention of 1936 which deals with Dardanelles Strait, the Sea of Marmara and Bosphorus Strait. The diplomats from other countries besides Turkey, who were signatories of the Treaty of Lausanne, converged in Switzerland on request from Turkey to discuss matters relating to this region (Britannica). The agreement made sure that military control was handed back to Turkish jurisdiction. It is worth mentioning one important part of the Montreux convention is that Turkey can limit access for war ships during times of conflict yet merchant vessels should be free to transit through. The Montreux Convention exemplifies the nuanced balance between national sovereignty and global maritime interests in this vital strategic waterway.

Possible Solutions

Diplomatic Cooperation

Whether through direct meeting or via liaison and intermediary parties, there should be promoted diplomatic communication and dialogue among littoral states to build trust and foster understanding. In addition, there should be an emphasis on the encouragement of using already-existing regional forums and organizations for discussions regarding maritime security issues.

Using Pre-existing Measures

There should be a reinforced adherence to international laws such as that of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Furthermore, states should resolve disputes through legal mechanisms such as the International Court of Justice (ICJ) or the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS).



Promote Economic Cooperation

Introduce initiatives in the region to address underlying causes of tension and promote stability, Foster joint projects related to maritime infrastructure, trade and resource management,

Foreign Intervention

Encourage multinational naval cooperation to address common security threats, such as piracy, terrorism and illicit trafficking. This could be achieved through joint naval exercises and patrols to enhance interoperability and responsiveness capabilities.

Conflict Prevention

Develop and implement mechanisms for conflict prevention and crisis management to de-escalate tensions and avoid future military confrontations which could be achieved through the establishment of communication channels for rapid response and crisis resolution.

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