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BLACK SEA CHALLENGES
OLD AND NEW

RESEARCH PAPER

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Black Sea eternal riddle

George FRIEDMAN,
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The Black Sea has played multiple roles in its history. The most common role has been as an avenue of trade. The most definitive role has been as an arena of war, or at least an adjunct to the war raging on the land around it. And though there is no war on its waters right now, the Bosporus – which provides littoral nations access to the Mediterranean and is thus the place where any discussion of the Black Sea needs to begin – is constantly at risk.

The Russians have participated in the war in Syria. At times, they have been in near-conflict with the Turks, who, treaties notwithstanding, control the Bosporus. For Russia, control of the Bosporus, or at least its neutralization, has been an overriding geopolitical imperative. Russia has always had interests in the Mediterranean that were largely blocked by the Black Sea. During the Cold War, when the U.S. placed its massive Sixth Fleet in the Black Sea, the Russian force was limited, most notably because the flow of vessels and logistic support moved through Turkish and NATO waters, and therefore any naval force they placed in the Mediterranean was at risk.

In order to have free access to the Mediterranean, Russia must be in a position to persuade or,

preferably, compel Turkey to make credible guarantees on right of passage. To achieve that, Turkey must violate the Montreux Convention, which is really only as effective as nations who might want to enforce it. Turkey has a very complex relationship with the Russians. It uses Russia to try to shape American behavior in ways that benefit Turkey. The United States does not want to see a shift in the status of the Bosporus and would likely act if Turkey went too far.

On the other hand, the United States wants an air base exactly where Incirlik is located. Close to a port for logistics, and within range of targets in Ukraine for tactical attack aircraft and able to operate through the Middle East as well, it is a precious asset. No other base would be quite as good. Therefore, the United States is not in a position to pressure Turkey too much, and Turkey doesn't want to alienate the United States excessively. Any modification of the status of the Bosporus would be excessive.

The United States has based assets in Romania to have an alternative to Turkish basing and, more important, to make certain that if the Russians undertook an unexpected adventure southward,

toward Turkey or the Mediterranean, the U.S. would be in a position to respond rapidly, with at least some force.

This all means that the Black Sea remains what it has been for a long time. It is coiled, ready to spring, but unable to do so because the complexity of force around its shores remains so intricate and with so many hostile and intertwining interests that they cannot move. This buys Romania the most precious thing in geopolitics. If the Black Sea springs, or rather when it springs, it will be too late, and Romania cannot simply be a bystander. There is now a three-player game. There is Russia, weakened but still the strongest power native to the Black Sea. There is

Turkey, potentially powerful but in the process of a painful redefinition. There is the United States, the most powerful, but not eager to fight a battle in the Black Sea, preferring the Mediterranean. All of this will change over time as it always does, but it cannot be assumed that the coil will not be let loose to spring. But of all the powers, the one least predictable and in the long run potentially the most powerful is Turkey. It is the country to watch.

Lessons of Black Sea History

Both as an extension of the wider Mediterranean space and on its own merits as a region the Black Sea has always been strategically important. Archaeological and documentary evidence proves the presence of Greek trading posts that grew into prosperous cities as early as 7th century B.C., during the pre-Hellenistic period. The legend of the Argonauts and their quest for the Golden Fleece originated on the eastern shores of the Black Sea in what is now the Georgian coast. For Imperial Rome and Byzantium control of the Black Sea was a prize asset, while in the late Middle Ages, Genoese and Venetian merchants engaged in lucrative trade in the region. The gradual expansion of the Ottoman Empire from the south and the Duchy of Muskovy, then Russia from the north eventually brought them into direct contact in the Black Sea space and inaugurated almost three centuries of competition and conflict between the two rival powers, occasionally involving other actors as well. The territories in between, some of them having an older tradition of statehood than the main protagonists, were devastated, impoverished and sometimes dismembered by the vagaries and shifting fortunes of war.

Russia's ambitions went far beyond the stated aim of putting an end to the frequent raids by Tatar horsemen from the northern reaches of the Black Sea into the Russian mainland. Tsar Peter I the Great (emperor 1682-1725) had the grand design of elevating Russia's status to that of a land and maritime power on an equal footing with the Western European empires. A critical element for achieving this goal was to gain access to, and control of warm-water ports that would nor freeze over in winter. By the end of the 17th century, Peter the Great successfully gained partial and temporary control over the Azov Sea, a strategic area that would repeatedly change hands in the following half century, thus eroding the Ottoman naval supremacy in the Black Sea. Following the Russo-Turkish war of 1768-1774, Catherine II the Great (empress 1762-1796) further consolidated Russia's territorial and strategic gains. The Treaty of Kucuk Kaynarca, which ended that war, enabled Russian fleets to move freely in the Sea of Azov, through the Kerch Strait and into the Black Sea. It granted the Crimean Khanate independence from the Ottoman Empire, making it easier for Russia to complete its conquest of Crimea in 1783. The treaty also declared Russia the protector of Christians in the Ottoman Empire, a position it used repeatedly in the following century to justify its decisions to go to war against Turkey and to set an enduring precedent for Russian interventions ostensibly in defense of Orthodox Christians in the Balkans and the Caucasus[1].

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1   Xander Snyder, "The Centurieslong Contest for the Black Sea", *Geopolitical Futures*, January 31, 2019, https://geopolit-icalfutures.com/centurieslong-contest-black-sea/ (accessed on May 14, 2019).

"Russia. Teritorial expanssion 1725-1795", source: Cambridge University Press, 1929

Russia's expansionist ambitions and growing naval strength eventually caused a coalition of western powers (France, Britain and Sardinia) to form an expeditionary force in alliance with the Ottoman Empire in the Crimean War of 1853-1856. The main objective of the allies was to assert their position on the Oriental Question, to preserve, for the time being, the territorial status-quo in the Black Sea region and protect the integrity of a weakened Ottoman Empire while keeping Russia in check. The Crimean war was fought on multiple fronts. In the Balkans, Russian troops occupied the Romanian principalities of Wallachia and Moldova, then under Ottoman suzerainty. An Anglo-French naval force sailed into the Baltic Sea and destroyed Russia's fortifications at Bomarsund and Sveaborg. A secondary front was opened by the Ottomans in Transcaucasia. However, the principal theatre of

war was in the Crimean Peninsula, where the allied forces intended to capture Sevastopol, Russia's main naval base in the Black Sea[2]. Outnumbered, poorly equipped, isolated and facing potential invasions from the west, the Russians were forced to sue for peace in 1856. France and Britain welcomed the opportunity since the war had become hugely unpopular at home. The Peace Treaty of Paris, signed on 30 March 1856, essentially suited the interests of the Western allies and established that neither the Russians nor the Ottomans would develop any naval or other military capabilities on the Black Sea coast[3].

By 1871, thanks mainly to the skilful diplomatic manoeuvring of the Russian foreign minister Prince A. Gorchakov, most of the treaty provisions became obsolete and Russia managed to recover its positions, including the ability to deploy a naval force in the Black Sea. The Treaty of San Stefano, which ended the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878, further enhanced Russia's influence in South-East Europe, but was soon amended at the insistence of the Western powers in the Treaty of Berlin (1878), which reconstructed the map of the region and rejected some of Russia's claims[4].

For all Russia's efforts to achieve absolute supremacy in the Black Sea and secure direct access to the Mediterranean by gaining effective control of the vital Straits of Bosporus and Dardanelles, this strategic objective stubbornly remained beyond its grasp. This always was, and still is, Turkey's ultimate point of leverage over Russia. It proved to be a major impediment for Russia during World War I, when the Ottoman Empire cut off Russian commercial shipping to and from the Mediterranean by blocking the passage through the Bosporus[5].

In the aftermath of the Great War, the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) established the demilitarization of the Turkish Straits and placed them under international supervision. However, in 1935, following the expansionist moves of Fascist Italy in the Mediterranean, Turkey called for the revision of the treaty. The negotiations involving Australia, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Greece, Japan, Romania, the Soviet Union, Turkey, Great Britain and Yugoslavia resulted in the conclusion of the Montreux Convention of 1936. Under the provisions of that document Turkey gained sovereignty over the Straits and was allowed to proceed with the remilitarization of the Dardanelles. Furthermore, the Convention enshrined specific restrictions on the size, number and length of stay for the warships belonging to non-Black Sea littoral states transiting the Straits. The naval vessels of the riparian nations enjoyed complete freedom of navigation in the Black Sea, but the same restrictions applied to them when transiting into the Mediterranean[6]. After World War II, Moscow felt that it was unjustly constrained by the Convention; in 1945, the Soviet Union repealed the treaty of friendship with Turkey (1925) and launched an aggressive campaign to modify the regime of the Straits in its favour. Soviet pressure pushed Turkey into closer cooperation with Britain and the United States to counter those moves and eventually to join NATO in 1952.[7] At that time, Turkey considered the possibility for a

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2   Serge Berstein, Pierre Milza, "Istoria Europei. Naționalis-mele și Concertul european. Secolul XIX (1815-1919)", translated by Monica Timu, published by *Institutul European*, Bucharest, 1998, pp. 132-133

3   Harold Temperley, "The Treaty of Paris of 1856 and Its Execution", in *Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (Sep., 1932), pp. 387-414.

4   Brad Dennis, "Patterns of Conflict and Violence in Eastern Anatolia Leading Up to the Russo-Turkish War and the Treaty of Berlin", in M. Hakan Yavuz, Peter Sluglett, *War & Diploma-cy: The Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878 and the Treaty of Berlin*, The University of Utah Press, 2011, pp. 273-301.

5   Xander Snyder, *op. cit.*

6   Barry Buzan, "The Status and Future of the Montreux Convention", *Survival*, March 3, 2008, pp. 242-247.

7   *Ibidem.*

revision of the Convention in view of the fact that the geopolitical circumstances had changed since 1936. The US negotiating team even prepared a set of concrete proposals for an amended version of the Convention.[8]. Although the Montreux Convention was due to be revised in 1956, the conflicting positions of the principal actors made it impossible to produce an agreed text, and so the document has remained in force, by tacit consent, in its original form to this day. Over the time, Turkey adopted additional clarifying provisions in its domestic legislation and implemented the Maritime Traffic Regulation of the Turkish Straits in 1994 regarding maritime transit through the Straits[9].

In the years preceding the outbreak of World War II, the Soviet Union actively sought to strengthen its strategic positions in the Baltic and Black seas at the expense of the neighbouring states. In its secret negotiations with Nazi Germany, Moscow openly stated its interest to control the mouth of the Danube and increase its influence in the Pontic Basin. As a result of the ignominious Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact Romania lost the province of Bessarabia[10] and a portion of the Black Sea coast, and so the Soviet Union acquired control of the lower reaches of the Danube.

After the war, the Soviet Union emerged as the dominant military power in the region, with total control, either directly or through its satellites in the Warsaw Treaty, over two-thirds of the Black Sea coastline and an increased ability to project

power beyond its confines. During the Cold War the Soviet navy maintained a significant presence in the Mediterranean (the Fifth Squadron) under the authority of the Black Sea Fleet commander. The importance that the Soviet Union attached to its operations in the Mediterranean was underlined in 1968 by Andrei Gromyko, Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs (1957–1985): "As a Black Sea power, therefore a Mediterranean Sea power as well, the Soviet Union is interested in peace and security in the area located in the proximity of the southern borders of the USSR. The presence of Soviet ships in the Mediterranean enables safeguarding the security of the entire Mediterranean region"[11]. Political unrest and military confrontations in the wider Middle East, particularly the Six-Day War of 1967, offered the Soviet Union additional opportunities to justify its increased presence in the Mediterranean. The growing Soviet assertiveness and naval warfare capabilities caused David Charles Richardson, commander of the US Sixth Fleet, to comment in 1970 that the Soviet Fifth Squadron had become a challenge in a region long regarded as a NATO lake[12].

The geostrategic consequences of the collapse of the communist system and its institutional expressions in Europe leading to the dismantlement of the once all-powerful USSR itself brought about momentous changes in the political configuration of the Black Sea space and in the actual balance of regional power. Of the six littoral states three are now NATO members and two have officially stated their national aspiration to join the alliance. As the successor state of the former Soviet Union, the Russian Federation struggled for a decade to stop economic decline and to adjust to its new condition

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8   *Ibidem.*
9   Stylianos Politis, Evoluția istorică a regimului legal al Strâmto-rilor și accesului în Marea Neagră, (Euxeinos Pontos) [Historical Evolution of the Legal Regime of the Straits and Access to the Black Sea (Euxeinos Pontos)], in *Revista de Istorie Militară*, no. 3-4.
10   Sergiu Celac, Alessandra Giada Dibenedetto, Alexandru Purcăruș, "Militarization of the Black Sea and Eastern Mediter-ranean theatres. A new challenge to NATO", *New Strategy Cen-ter and Centro Studi Internazionali*, 2019, p. 7.

11   Quoted by Mohrez Mahmoud El-Hussini, *Soviet-Egyptian Relations*, 1945-85, New York, Palgrave Macmillan,1987, p. 180.
12   *The New York Times*, 13 May 1970.

of regional rather than global power. The election, in 2000, of Vladimir Putin as President of Russia gradually reversed that negative trend by imposing an authoritarian regime based on a vertical of power, stabilizing the economy and regaining control over national resources. After some tentative overtures to the West during his first term in office in an unsuccessful attempt to recover Russia's stature as a great power, president Putin reverted to the traditional stance of besieged fortress surrounded by enemies, specifically targeting the United States, NATO and, lately, the European Union. The material expression of this policy orientation was the accelerated development of Russia's military and security establishment, across-the-board modernization of equipment and enactment of a new, comprehensive doctrine of modern warfare comprising also hybrid, cyber and information war capabilities in addition to conventional and strategic vectors. It is important to note that, while the Russian military buildup and non-conventional probing operations were mostly directed against NATO member states and occasionally in some remote places such as Central African Republic or Venezuela, the actual use of a combination of all the above-mentioned methods causing death and destruction on a massive scale occurred in the wider Black Sea area, spreading also to the Levant and the Balkans.Newly acquired capabilities engendered more confidence in the minds of Russian military planners and hence a stronger resolve to test their effectiveness in action. The opening salvo was the brief expeditionary war with Georgia in 2008. Regardless of how and why it all started in South Ossetia, the result was occupation and actual incorporation of that Georgian province, plus Abkhasia as a bonus, into the military, political and economic structures of the Russian Federation. Both those unlawful territorial acquisitions are of

strategic significance to Russia: Abkhasia forms almost half of the Georgian Black Sea coastline and used to be home for major naval bases in Soviet times, while South Ossetia is the outlet of the vital military highway across the Caucasus Mountains. The Georgian war was carefully analysed by the Russian General Staff, weak points were identified and practical conclusions were drawn and speedily implemented for the conduct of future offensive operations.

Crimea and Kerch: Turning the page?

The next target was Ukraine. Ever since Ukraine's independence in 1991 the possibility that it might shift its allegiance to the West had been regarded in Russia as an intolerable security risk and an end to any hope of restoring Russia's greatness as a world power. Bowing to heavy Russian diplomatic and economic pressure to preclude any attempt by Kiev too seek accession to NATO, Ukraine President Viktor Yanukovych enacted a law in 2010 committing Ukraine to "a non-bloc policy meaning non-participation in military-political alliances"[13]. In November 2013, President Yanukovych reneged on already agreed association agreement with the European Union, triggering a wave of protest known as Euromaidan. The remarkable resilience of the popular movement and the excessive use of violence by the government finally caused the Ukrainian Parliament to remove President Yanukovych from office on 22 February 2014. He fled the country and sought refuge in Russia. Soon after that, a pro-western government was installed in Kiev[14].

Russian response to the loss of their man in Kiev was immediate and decisive, indicating a carefully pre-planned operation. On February 27, soldiers in unmarked uniforms, also known as "little green men", seized the Crimean parliament and official buildings and blockaded all the Ukrainian military bases and installations in Crimea[15]. In a matter of days, the occupying forces managed to control the entire province and hastily organized a so-called referendum, in March 2014, with an overwhelming majority of voters in Crimea opting to join Russia. On March 20, the Russian Parliament ratified the decision to annex the Republic of Crimea and Sevastopol[16] to the Russian Federation.

"The Black Sea", source: Geopolitical Futures

13   Valentina Pop, "Ukraine drops Nato membership bid", *Eu-observer*, June 4, 2010, https://euobserver.com/news/30212 (accessed May 15, 2019).
14   Alan Taylor, "Ukraine's President Voted Out, Flees Kiev", *The Atlantic*, February 22, 2014, https://www.theatlantic.com/pho-to/2014/02/ukraines-president-voted-out-flees-kiev/100686/ (accessed May 15, 2019).
15   John Biersacka, Shannon O'Leara, "The geopolitics of Russia's annexation of Crimea: narratives, identity, silences, and energy", *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, p. 249.
16   Maria Tsvetkova, Steve Gutterman, "Russia's lower house votes to bring Crimea into Russia", *Reuters,* March 20, 2014, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-russia-crimea-idUSBREA2J0YR20140320 (accessed May 12, 2019). "

Almost simultaneously, Russian agents and local collaborators started a rebellion in portions of the Ukrainian provinces of Donetsk and Lugansk, adjacent to Russia. Nearly five years of military operations with proven involvement of whole Russian units under single professional command, produced massive destruction, dislocation of about a million people and 13,000 casualties according to a recent United Nations count. The active war theatre in Donbas became, along with the Syrian operation, a testing ground for new Russian weapon systems, command and control methods, intelligence and surveillance, tactical innovation in conventional, hybrid, cyber and other electronic warfare, disinformation and hostile propaganda. The real Russian designs in south-eastern Ukraine were recently revealed in Moscow's decision to facilitate and expedite the issuance of passports to residents of the region certifying their Russian citizenship[17].

Adding to the already tense and complicated military-political situation in the region, the Russian attack on, and subsequent sequestration of three small Ukrainian coastguard vessels in the vicinity of the Kerch Strait linking the Sea of Azov to the Black Sea, on 25 November 2018, now appears to have been a lot more than a mere passing naval incident and may herald a new phase in the implementation of Russia's strategic designs in the Black Sea space. According to the Treaty on Cooperation in the Use of the Azov Sea and the Kerch Strait, signed by Russia and Ukraine in 2003, the Sea of Azov was declared an internal water of the two riparian states under their joint management. However, with the annexation of Crimea and Russia's enforcement of its unilateral claims of sovereignty over the relevant maritime space, the status of the Azov Sea and Kerch Strait remained in a legal limbo. It was no coincidence that, on 21 March 2014, the day when the annexation of Crimea was ratified by Moscow, Russia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergey Lavrov, stated that, "in light of the recent events, the Kerch Strait can no longer be subject to negotiations"[18].

After 2014, Russia undertook a massive program of militarisation focused primarily on Crimea with an aim to rapidly transform the peninsula into "a naval and air force bastion fitting the description of an anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) system" as its main instrument to consolidate its control over the Azov-Black Sea basin and thus essentially to reshape the European security environment and subsequently "alter the military balance in the region and beyond"[19].
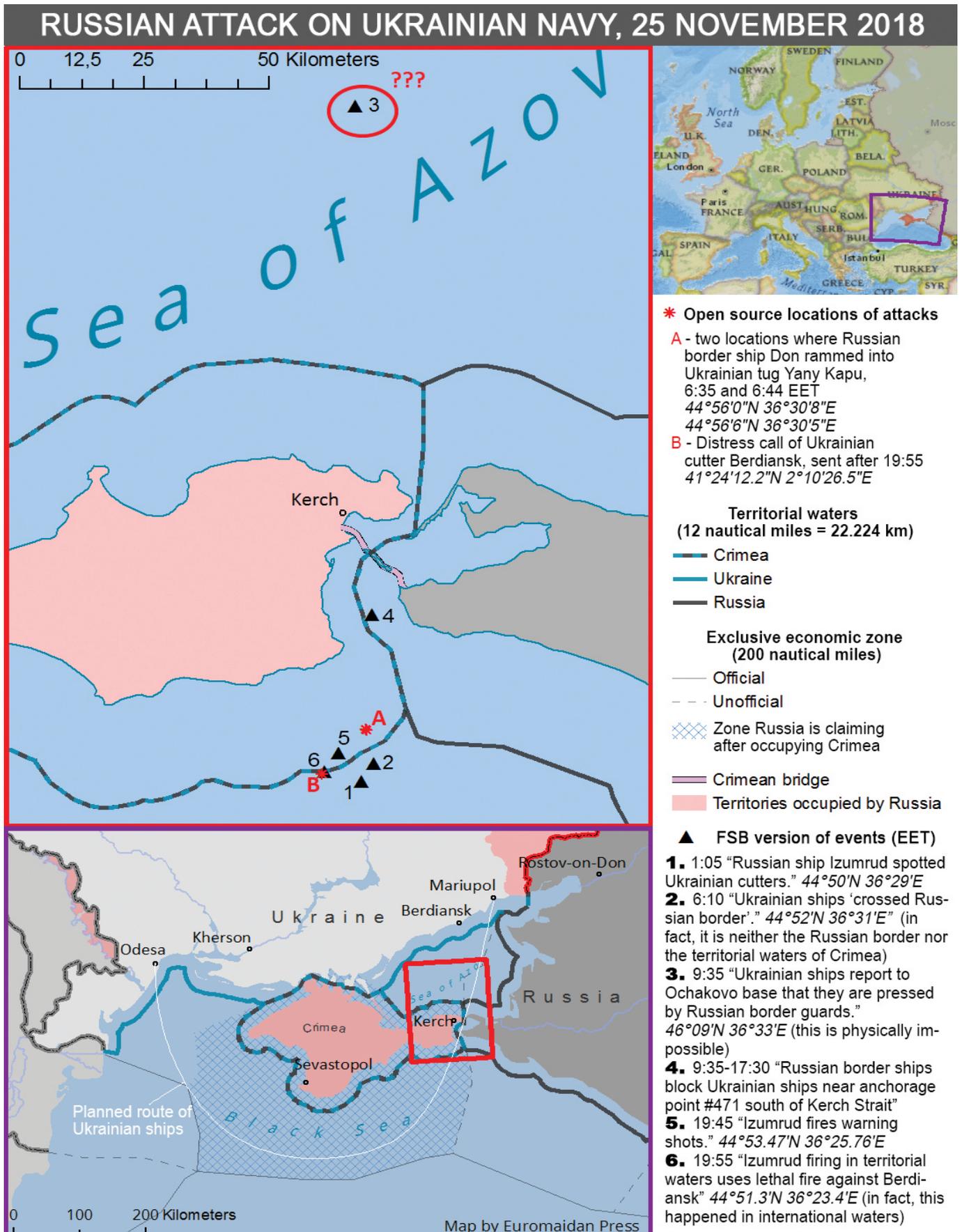
As part of its programme of expansion by military means Russia built a bridge over the Kerch Strait connecting occupied Crimea to the Russian mainland, purposefully designed to prevent large merchant ships from reaching the Ukrainian ports of Berdyansk and Mariupol[20]. The imposition of this stranglehold already has major implications on the economy of Eastern Ukraine, which is vitally dependent on maritime transport via the Azov Sea.

17   Vladimir Socor, "Russia Launches 'Passportization' in Occupied Ukrainian Donbas", in *Eurasia Daily Monitor, The Jamestown Foundation*, May 2, 2019 -- Volume 16, Issue 64.

18   "Speech by the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, and his answers to questions from deputies during the 349th extraordinary session of the Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, Moscow, 21 March 2014", in *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation*, March 21, 2014, http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/69394 (accessed May 12, 2019).
19   Sergiu Celac, Seth Cropsey, Dan Dungaciu, Iulian Fota, Cosmin Ioniță, *Why The Black Sea Matters*, New Strategy Center and Center for American Seapower, Hudson Institute, May, 2017, p. 7-10.
20   Ridvan Bari Urcosta, "Russia's Strategic Considerations on the Sea of Azov", published in *Warsaw Institute* at March 12, 2018, p. 30.

RUSSIAN ATTACK ON UKRAINIAN NAVY, 25 NOVEMBER 2018

0 12,5 25   50 Kilometers

Sea of Azov

??? ▲ 3

Kerch

▲ 4

5 ▲ ✳ A

6 ▲ ▲ 2
✳
B ▲
1

Rostov-on-Don

Mariupol
Berdiansk

Ukraine

Odesa Kherson

Sea of Azov

Kerch

Russia

Crimea

Sevastopol

**Planned route of
Ukrainian ships**

Black Sea

0   100   200 Kilometers

Map by Euromaidan Press

✳ **Open source locations of attacks**

A - two locations where Russian
border ship Don rammed into
Ukrainian tug Yany Kapu,
6:35 and 6:44 EET
44°56'0"N 36°30'8"E
44°56'6"N 36°30'5"E

B - Distress call of Ukrainian
cutter Berdiansk, sent after 19:55
41°24'12.2"N 2°10'26.5"E

Territorial waters
(12 nautical miles = 22.224 km)

━━━ Crimea
━━━ Ukraine
━━━ Russia

Exclusive economic zone
(200 nautical miles)

── Official
- - - Unofficial

▨ Zone Russia is claiming
after occupying Crimea

━ Crimean bridge

█ Territories occupied by Russia

▲ **FSB version of events (EET)**

1. 1:05 "Russian ship Izumrud spotted
Ukrainian cutters." *44°50'N 36°29'E*
2. 6:10 "Ukrainian ships 'crossed Rus-
sian border'." *44°52'N 36°31'E"* (in
fact, it is neither the Russian border nor
the territorial waters of Crimea)
3. 9:35 "Ukrainian ships report to
Ochakovo base that they are pressed
by Russian border guards."
46°09'N 36°33'E (this is physically im-
possible)
4. 9:35-17:30 "Russian border ships
block Ukrainian ships near anchorage
point #471 south of Kerch Strait"
5. 19:45 "Izumrud fires warning
shots." *44°53.47'N 36°25.76'E*
6. 19:55 "Izumrud firing in territorial
waters uses lethal fire against Berdi-
ansk" *44°51.3'N 36°23.4'E* (in fact, this
happened in international waters)

"Russian Attack on Ukrainian Navy, 25 November 2018", source: Euromaidan Press

In practical terms, as a result of the precedent set by the Kerch incident and in the absence of a clear delimitation of the maritime space under international law, Ukraine is being squeezed out, while Russia's warships are free to sail in and out of the Azov Sea[21]. But the potential consequences of the newly created situation go far beyond the Sea of Azov and may affect the security and economic interests of other Black Sea littoral states and their international partners. In Romania, for instance, there is growing concern in the business community about the fact the Romanian exclusive economic zone may have become contiguous to the claimed Russian zone in a segment of the Black Sea that holds significant, commercially viable deposits of oil and gas. Questions about the safety of offshore installations that may be exposed to hostile action, attributable or not, are also being raised.So far, the reaction of the international community to the game-changing Kerch episode has been muted at best, with a mix of expressions of concern and condemnation, but with no consistent action such as imposition of new sanctions[22]. The cautious international response to that event "adds credibility to Russia's claim of Crimea as a sovereign Russian territory and therefore Russian territorial waters"[23]. The impact of Russia's actions in the Black Sea region to date has been to "re-establish an Iron Curtain across the Black Sea, with NATO Allies Turkey, Romania, and Bulgaria on one side and strategic partners Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia on

the other side"[24]. The results achieved by Russia in the region may have reinforced the deceptive belief of policy makers in Moscow that they can "act with some impunity without concern for international law or a military reaction from NATO"[25]. In addition, the restrictions of the Montreux Convention of 1936 still overshadow the security environment in the region by inhibiting a substantive allied response to Russia's unlawful actions.[26]

In the meantime, the question whether the Kerch incident marked a strategic watershed or not is still a matter of scholarly debate. The fact that, during the Kerch incident, Russian naval forces actually opened fire in a shoot-to-kill mode was an unmistakable signal to Ukraine about what to expect in the future. But it also aimed higher: it was a not-so-subtle warning to NATO allies that further freedom-of-navigation demonstrations in the Black Sea may trigger, under unspecified conditions, a similar response. Some people across the Pacific may be also pondering over their own conclusions about the developments in and around the Black Sea, and weighing their possible options, for example in the South China Sea. Whatever future holds in store, those are serious matters and they require serious answers.

21 *Idem.*
22 Andrew Roth, "Kerch strait confrontation: what happened and why does it matter?" in *The Guardian*, November 27, 2018.
23 Lieutenant General Ben Hodges, "Kerch Strait Incident and International Law: opinions of Ben Hodges and Lucan Way", in *Hromadske Radio*, December 2, 2018, https://hromadske. radio/en/podcasts/ukraine-calling/kerch-strait-incident-and-international-law-opinions-of-ben-hodges-and-lucan-way (accessed May 12, 2019).

24 Sorin Ducaru, Frederick Benjamin Hodges, Greg Melcher, Phillip Petersen, Mykhailo Samus, George Scutaru, *Moscow Does Not Believe In Tears*, Center for Army Conversion and Disarmament Studies, New Strategy Center, The Centre for the Study of New Generation Warfare, The Center for European Policy Analysis, December, 2019, p. 13.
25 *Ibidem*, p. 13.
26 *Ibidem*, p. 13.

Realistic, measured response

Confronted with this set of disturbing developments, NATO has been able to adjust its policies accordingly as reflected in its two latest summit declarations and subsequent measures to enhance its deterrence and defense posture all along its eastern flank. It is encouraging to see that both the northern tier (the Baltic) and the southern one (the Black Sea with extensions to the Eastern Mediterranean and the Balkans) are now getting equal attention within the Alliance. For NATO as a whole and for frontline countries like Romania and Poland in particular it remains vitally important to preserve and further develop the transatlantic link and US continued engagement in Europe.

More specifically, in the case of Romania, a country that has proved its commitment to burden sharing in NATO and to its strategic partnership with the US, we would welcome consideration of additional steps toward improving allied resilience in a measured response to the new security challenges arising in the wider Black Sea region such as:

◆ Enhancing the presence of US troops in Romania to the level of battle group, similar to the deployment in Poland, to maintain the coherence of deterrence along the entire NATO eastern flank while supporting Romania's pivotal role in the Black Sea area.

◆ Supplementing the existing US intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities in Romania and helping develop Romania's own capacity to meet the requirement for early warning and contingency planning.

◆ Prepositioning adequate supplies of ammunition, combat hardware and logistical equipment, and strengthening US Air Force presence at the air base in Campia Turzii, which could thus become another Ramstein on the southern tier of the eastern flank.

◆ US assuming the role of driving force behind the establishment and development of the Multinational Corps Command South-East, thus facilitating the bilateral command and control connection and reinforcing NATO capabilities in the Black Sea region.

◆ Continued mentoring and assistance for the transformation and modernization of the Romanian Special Operations Forces and Cyber Command as necessary instruments to counter hybrid-type challenges.

◆ Support for developing the conceptual framework for Black Sea coastal defense and integration of required capabilities for the protection of offshore drilling and production platforms and other installations in the Romanian exclusive economic zone of the Black Sea.

◆ Continued US assistance to the Romanian Navy to identify the optimum response capabilities (corvettes, frigates, marine units) to the growing Russian naval forces in the Black Sea basin.

◆ Continued coordinated work for enhancing the capacity and capability of the NATO's Black Sea coastal states to ensure maritime and airspace security. That includes considering a permanent multilateral framework to organize a joint development of the NATO member states bordering the Black Sea.

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