

REPORT

Russia in the Black Sea region and in the High North

similarities and differences in strategic posture and responses to war in Ukraine

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I. INTRODUCTION

After months of massing troops and conducting military exercises along Ukrainian borders, on February 24th, 2022, Russian Federation president, Vladimir Putin, ordered a full-scale military invasion of Ukraine. The unprovoked military Russian aggression is the most dramatic and the largest conventional operation against an independent and a sovereign state creating the most severe global impact on the international security and order since the World War II.

In fact, the military invasion of Ukraine is the conventional kinetic part of the Hybrid War, or in Russian actual doctrinal terms the New Generation War, that Moscow has launched against NATO and US as a part of Putin's plan of reshaping the world order, restoring Russia's status as a global power, concurrently with maintaining the spheres of influence in the areas that formed part of the Soviet Union, and that were in the Russian strategic narrative labelled "the near abroad".

After Russian unprecedented military aggression against Ukraine the European security issues were brought again into discussion after two years of Covid-19 pandemic that tested the cohesion and resilience of the Western societies. This aggression compelled the West to rethink its approach to security and focus more on resources that are necessary to cope with and operate in the new geopolitical and security environment. So, this attack also tested NATO cohesion, as it led to restructuring of both the global and European security architecture.

Russia considers the Black Sea as a buffer zone against NATO expansion. Also, unlike in the High North region, the complex politics and history of the Black Sea region make it difficult to develop a regional or consolidated NATO approach to deterrence.

The situation in the High North is different as this region plays a very important part in Russian strategic global designs as an area where most of the Russian second-strike sea-based nuclear capability is based. At the same time this area is a part of the Arctic region where Russia has traditionally sought closer cooperation with other regional actors and tried to insulate this cooperation from tensions emerging in its relations with other actors elsewhere.

The current geopolitical confrontation caused to a large degree by Russian aggression against Ukraine that started already in 2014 could be defined as the struggle between

Western democratic values and Russian autocracy. Russian aggression against Ukraine that signaled strong interest in deepening cooperation with NATO based on democratic principles, a cooperation that would change the situation in the Black Sea region tests not only Ukraine's resilience but also the resolve and credibility of the Alliance.

The purpose of this report is the comparative analysis of the actions of the Russian Federation in political, military, security domains, and its strategic posture before the military invasion of Ukraine against the two extremes of the NATO's Eastern Flank, and the examination of how the High North and the Black Sea Regions have responded to this new security challenge. The most visible immediate effects of the Russian aggression are the intensive and highly destructive kinetic warfare in Ukraine and the new enlargement of NATO that is to include Sweden and Finland as its new members. This enlargement does not only send a strong political signal to Moscow but will also bring an added value to the continuous defense and deterrence posture from the High North up to Black Sea.

Since 2005, Romania has warned NATO and EU partners about the necessity to establish a consolidated Black Sea Region stability and security architecture within the existing transatlantic and European frameworks. All this time up to the Russian invasion in Ukraine, Romania positioned itself as the main regional security promoter ensuring balanced and objective strategic assessments regarding the challenges and threats emanating from the Black Sea Region.

II. GEOPOLITICAL OVERVIEW OF THE HIGH NORTH AND THE BLACK SEA REGIONS

The geopolitical and security environment has changed dramatically after Russia's unjustified military intervention in Ukraine on February 24, 2022, and, on the other side, following the NATO Summit in Madrid (July 29-30, 2022) which focused on how to implement the NATO 2030 Agenda, as well as maintaining unanimity, resilience, and cohesion regarding the threat of Russia's aggression for Europe's security.

The current geopolitical and security context generated by the Russian invasion in Ukraine has deep roots in the historical interests that Russia had, as an imperialist state, during the Soviet era or in actual "Putinism" time vis-à-vis the states that make up the High North region and those bordering the Black Sea. However, this change in the geopolitical and security environment was predictable, considering the political-military and security events that Russia generated with its frustration after the disintegration of the USSR in 1991 and more pregnant after 2014 when Russia took over Crimea Peninsula and invaded Eastern Ukraine.

¹ Beichman, A. (2020). Regression in Russia, September 25th, 2020, at <http://politicalmavens.com/index.php/2007/02/14/regression-in-russia/>

How was it possible to reach this dramatic point of European security? Not all European countries, NATO member states, EU and allies understood that in fact Russia launched a hybrid war against all of them in 2014, Ukraine being only the victim of its desire to adopt Western values by joining NATO. The Black Sea region became the Russian laboratory for testing and deployment “New Generation Warfare”² or in Western terms of the “Hybrid War”³ prepared by the Chief of General Staff, General Valery Gerasimov in 2013⁴ and fully applied in the annexation operations of Crimea and Eastern Ukraine in 2014.

The main goal of hybrid tactics against Black Sea states is to undermine public confidence in the region's democratic institutions, especially the system of governance, judicial and electoral. The hybrid tools used are information operations, including disinformation campaigns on all available media channels, corruption at the political level and of central and local administrations, cyber-attacks, economic, commercial and energy conditioning, the use of organized crime groups⁵ and the military industry.⁶

Most likely, the hybrid war waged by Russia against the NATO and EU member states is based on distinct operational plans depending on the specifics of each of them and according to the concrete political objectives pursued by Moscow. These plans are constantly adapted to the evolution of the regional and international security situation, but also because of the actions of some international organizations, mainly NATO and the EU.

II.1. Defining the NATO Eastern Flank from the High North to the Black Sea

After the official invitation to join NATO of Finland and Sweden at the NATO Summit in Madrid (July 29-30, 2022), respectively after their membership will be ratified individually by the parliaments of all 30 existing allies and having now very clearly defined the threat within the new NATO Strategic Concept, namely Russia being the most significant and direct threat to Allied security, also not being ruled out the possibility of an attack against any of the allies, the NATO Eastern Flank has now a verry

² Celac, S., L. Dinu, G. Scutaru, M. Ion, M. Aslan, Y. Bozhilov, M. Sokolov (2021). *Classic and Hybrid Challenges in the Black Sea Region*, September 2021 @ <https://www.newstrategycenter.ro/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Policy-Paper-NSC-Classic-and-Hybrid-Challenges-in-the-Black-Sea-Region-aug2021-1.pdf>

³ Hoffman, F.G - “Any adversary that simultaneously and adaptively employs a fused mix of conventional weapons, irregular tactics, terrorism and criminal behavior in the battle space to obtain their political objectives” in *Armed Forces Journal - Hybrid vs. compound war*, October 1, 2009, at <http://armedforcesjournal.com/hybrid-vs-compound-war/>

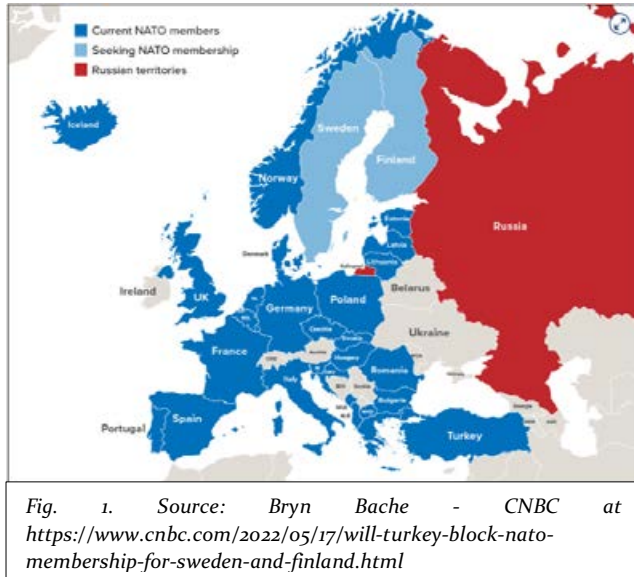
⁴ Gerasimov, V. (2013). *The Value of Science in Prediction*. *Military-Industrial Kurier*, February 27, 2013

⁵ NATO Parliamentary Assembly (2020). *The Black Sea Region: Economic and Geo-politic Tensions, Economics and Security Committee Report* (Ausrine Armonaite), November 20, 2020, at <https://www.nato-pa.int/document/2020-revised-draft-report-black-sea-region-economic-and-geo-political-tensions-armonaite>

⁶ Ibidem 1

different shape, composition and relevance for the NATO defense and deterrence posture against the common threat precisely named Russian Federation.

The strategic value added by the two Nordic countries is given by the creation of a continuous NATO defense line from the High North to the Black Sea, an area defined in the Northern extremity by the Barents Sea, part of Norwegian Sea and White Seas close to Barents Sea above de Artic Circle, as well as land areas and islands from Greenland to



the Iceland to the West up to Novaya Zemlya in the East. The Southern extremity of the NATO Eastern Flank comprises Black Sea Region with its riparian countries, including R. Moldova even though has not a direct access to the sea. This region includes the Azov Sea and the Marmara Sea, connecting the Black Sea through Bosphorus and Dardanelle straits to the Mediterranean Sea, considered one of the most strategically significant waterways of the world.

So, in just a few months since the Russian military invasion in Ukraine on February 24, 2022, the geopolitical map of the NATO's Eastern Flank has changed dramatically. In the High North an important security gap is closed, giving to the Nordic states a strategic depth towards the Baltic states and Poland, and Barents Sea becoming de facto a NATO sea. Also, the combined military capabilities and logistics of these states will create a comprehensive and robust deterrence posture in the northern part of NATO's Eastern Flank when all 30 NATO members will ratify Finland and Sweden accession. On the other hand, in the southern extreme of the NATO's Eastern Flank, after Russia's military invasion that occupied around 25% of the Ukrainian territory (Crimea and Donbas included since 2014), the NATO Madrid Summit (June 28-30, 2022) identified revisionist Russia as the main direct threat to the Alliance, NATO defense and deterrence posture being also reviewed in this region with the shift of posture from Forward Presence to Forward Defense, and the decision to create four new battle groups, balancing the presence on the Eastern Flank.

II.2. Definition of High North as a security space

To understand the strategic importance for Russia of the area described in the West as the High North it is crucial to examine Russian policy in the broader Arctic context. Although Russian policy in the Arctic has deep historical roots but going back to 17th century when Russian Cossacks reached the Bering Strait, Russia's strategic interest in the area that is defined as the High North is of a more recent date.

Over the past centuries Russia's North has played an important part in Russia's relations with the outside world and in the country's strategic designs.⁷ The North was an area where the West confronted Russia, like during the Western intervention against the Bolshevik regime in the aftermath of the WWI⁸, but also an area where Russia embarked on a mutually beneficial cooperation with other powers, like during the WWII when Western military convoys reached Russia through Murmansk.

It was, however, the confrontation with the West during the Cold War, that turned Russia's part of the High North into an important strategic asset.⁹ It was namely in the Soviet naval bases on the Kola Peninsula that nearly 60 percent of Russia's second retaliatory nuclear strike capability was located in the area known in the strategic parlance as the Northern Bastion.¹⁰ In the case of cold war turning hot this area had to be defended to protect these strategic assets. However, to be able to protect these assets located there and to cut Western Sea lines of communication (SLOCs) in the Northern Atlantic, Soviet strategists treated this area also as a launching pad for Soviet offensive naval operations in the Northern Atlantic.¹¹

After the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet state project many hoped that a new chapter in Russia's relations with the West could be opened. It was also expected that these processes would have consequences for Russia's strategic posture in the High North and for Russia's relations with its northern neighbours. Since the deep economic, political, and social crisis forced the Russian political class to focus on addressing domestic challenges¹² Russia embarked on a more cooperative foreign policy. At the same time Russia's western and northern neighbours decided to provide political and financial support to facilitate Russia's transition into a full-fledged democracy. As one of the steps in this policy of strengthening regional cooperation, the Barents Euro-Arctic Region (BEAR) was set up in 1993. Another important step was taken in 1996 with setting up of the Arctic Council where 8 countries with direct interests in the Arctic were expected to work together on addressing common Arctic challenges.¹³

However, already in 1996, an important shift in Russian policy took place that would also have consequences for Russia's strategic posture in the High North. With the new

⁷ LeDonne, J. P. (2003). *The Grand Strategy of the Russian Empire, 1650-1831*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁸ Long, J. W. (1982). "American Intervention in Russia: The North Russian Expedition, 1918-19." *Diplomatic History*, 6(4), 45-86.

⁹ Archer, C. (ed.) *The Soviet Union and northern waters*. London: Routledge, 1988. See also

¹⁰ Atland, K. (2007). "The Introduction, Adoption and Implementation of Russia's "Northern Strategic Bastion" Concept, 1992-1999". *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 20(4), 499-528.

¹¹ MccGwire, M. (1988). Naval Power and Soviet Global Strategy. In S. E. Miller, & S. Van Evera (Eds.) (1988)., *Naval Strategy and National Security* pp. 115-170, An "International Security" Reader): Princeton University Press. and Ranft, B., & G. Till (1983). *The Sea in Soviet Strategy*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

¹² Putin, V. (1999). *Rossiia na rubezhe tysachletiya* (Russia at the turn of the millennium). Moscow: *Rossiyskaya gazeta*.

¹³ Cottey, A. (1999). *Subregional cooperation in the new Europe : building security, prosperity, and solidarity from the Barents to the Black Sea*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

foreign minister, the period of romantic Atlanticism was replaced with the period of Russia's hectic search for multipolarity.¹⁴ The main purpose of this strategic shift was to put an end to what in Russia was referred to as the Western hegemony. This was to be achieved by building a new international power constellation together with other centres of global power, first and foremost China and India. The West was no longer defined solely as Russia's most important economic and political partner but was viewed as an actor whose power had to be constrained and contained. The cooperation with the West was viewed as an instrument in rebuilding Russia's status as a great power and Russia's trade in energy resources with the West was to play an important part in these strategic designs.

Once the West was again defined as a strategic rival and potential source of strategic threat, the need to secure the country's strategic assets in the High North became obvious. This renewed Russian focus on the strategic importance of the High North could also be driven by problems President Vladimir Putin was confronted with in the first year of his presidency when he had to deal with the *Kursk* accident in August 2000.

Russian official thinking about the strategic importance of the High North is shaped the historical pattern of cooperation and confrontation in the region. The area – and the Arctic more broadly – is viewed as an area where Russia on the one hand wants to continue mutually beneficial cooperation with other actors, but at the same time Russian policymakers signal strong interest in retaining sovereign control in the area and try to hedge against what they view as a harmful Western influence.¹⁵

When embarking on this more confrontational line in its relations with the West that Putin signalled already in his famous 2007 speech at the Munich Security Conference Russia decided also to improve its military capabilities and the strategic assets in the High North were again to play a key part in this confrontation. The fact that the Northern Fleet was recently turned into the fifth Russian military district seems to confirm this renewed focus on the importance of this region in Russia's strategic designs. Russia's intervention in Ukraine in 2014 followed by annexation of Crimea resulted in growing tensions in Russia's relations with the West. Since the High North is one of the three geographical regions in Europe where Russia meets NATO viewed in the Russian strategic narrative as the main instrument of the US policy towards Russia, the strategic assets in the Russian part of the High North play an important part in the current situation and are treated as a sort of Russia's strategic life insurance deterring the West from taking actions damaging to Russia's strategic interest.

¹⁴ Rahr, A., & Krause, J. (1995). Russia's New Foreign Policy. *Arbeitspapiere zur Internationale Politik*(91), Pushkov, A.(1998). The Primakov Doctrine" and a New European Order. *International Affairs*, 44(2), 1–13., Chebankova, E. (2017). Russia's idea of the multipolar world order: origins and main dimensions. *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 33(3), 217–234.

¹⁵ On this duality in Russian approach to the Arctic/High North see Godzimirski, J.M and A. Sergunin (2020). "Russian Formal and Practical Geopolitics in the Arctic: Change and Continuity." *Arctic Review on Law and Politics* 11, at <https://arcticreview.no/index.php/arctic/article/view/1350>.

Russia's aggression against Ukraine in February 2022 changed the situation in the High North even more dramatically as the Russian assets in this region seem today to play a similar role in Russian strategic designs as during the Cold war. Russia views the West as a source of strategic threat and takes measures in the region that make the West worry about Russia's strategic intentions. At the same time the West has lost any illusion that Russia could in the foreseeable future change its course and again seek closer cooperation with the West to address jointly some of the common challenges and introduced several measures to both deter and contain Russia. A spiral of distrust between Russia and the West was therefore released and Russia's strategic assets in the High North are again viewed as an important strategic "life insurance".¹⁶

The 197 km long border between Russia and Norway located only 100 km from the main Russian strategic naval base in the region has therefore again turned into a possible frontline in a potential conflict between Russia and NATO. Russia launched its special military operation in Ukraine amongst others to prevent NATO's enlargement closer to its borders. However, one of the unintended consequences of these Russian actions is a new round of NATO enlargement that will include two new members from the north, Finland and Sweden. This process will have huge consequences for the strategic set up in the High North and make the border between Russia and NATO 1300 km longer. At the same time the war in Ukraine has revealed many deficiencies in Russian strategy and its implementation, making Russian strategic assets in the High North even more important from a Russian strategic perspective as an anti-Western deterrent in a situation when Russia's ability to conduct successful conventional military operations.

II.3. Definition of Black Sea Region as a security space

Black Sea is located at the geographical confluence between Europe, the Middle East, respectively Asia and North Africa, and has been, for centuries, the scene of manifestation of political, economic and trade interests and influences of regional and global powers. History proved that whoever controls or dominates the Black Sea can easily project power beyond this region. Thus, there are few moments in the Black Sea history with peace, stability and cooperation among riparian states, the region being rather characterized by conflict, rivalry, and territorial fragmentation with repercussions on the entire international geopolitical climate and this despite regional economic, trade and energy potential.¹⁷

Throughout history, Russia and Turkey have influenced and shaped the security environment in the Black Sea region but in the last 30 years, Russia has been the main

¹⁶ Wilhelmsen, J., & Godzimirski, J.M.(2017) NATO and Russia : spiral of distrust. In K. Friis (Ed.), *NATO and collective defence in the 21st century : an assessment of the Warsaw Summit* (pp. 63–76). London and New York: Routledge.

¹⁷ NATO Parliamentary Assembly - The Black Sea Region: Economic and Geo-politic Tensions, Economics and Security Committee Report (Ausrine Armonaite), November 20, 2020, at <https://www.nato-pa.int/document/2020-revised-draft-report-blacksea-region-economic-and-geo-political-tensions-armonaite>

player. For centuries Russia has fought the Ottoman Empire, first for access of the Black Sea warm water ports and then to assure its secure passage through Bosphorus and Dardanelle straits towards Mediterranean Sea, Middle East, and North Africa. Since then, Russia's continue to have a strategic goal in engaging Middle East to re-establish Russia at the crossroads of the world.¹⁸

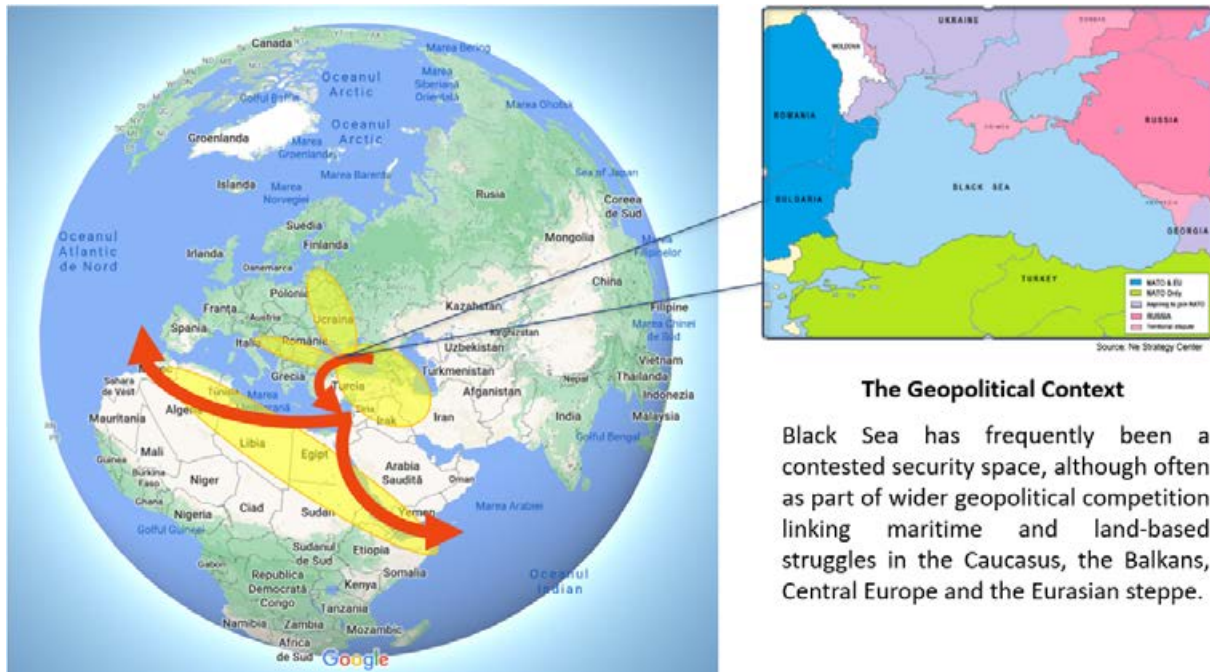


Fig. 2. The Geopolitical Context. Source: New Strategy Center

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Black Sea Region has been troubled by a series of conflicts which arose with the rediscovery of the national identity of the former Soviet republics and their desire to emancipate themselves from Moscow’s influence. At the same time, the Soviet power, and then later Russia, has supported separatist regimes politically, financially, and militarily, which challenged the independence movements and then the legitimacy of the new emerged states. Prolonged crises and frozen conflicts characterize the region from a security point of view. From Transnistria in the Republic of Moldova, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia in the South Caucasus to Nagorno Karabakh, these issues seem, at least on the short term, to have no viable solutions.¹⁹

Since 1991 up to the colorful revolutions in Georgia (2003-2004) and Ukraine (2004-2005), during which the desire to adhere to the Euro-Atlantic values was publicly expressed, Russia permanently included its former riparian Black Sea soviet republics (R. Moldova included) in the so-called concept of "near abroad" or “immediate neighborhood”. At that time, Romania and Bulgaria joined NATO (2004), changing the balance of power in the Black Sea region. The first open disagreement to this was when Putin signaled his angry at the 2007 Munich Security Conference with a bellicose speech

¹⁸ Ibidem 4

¹⁹ Dinu, L and G. Scutaru (2020). The Crimean aircraft carrier. Russian Federation militarization of the Black Sea, 2020 at <https://www.newstrategycenter.ro/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/FLANKS-Working-Paper-The-Crimean-Aircraft-Carrier.-Russian-Federation-Militarization-of-the-Black-Sea.pdf>

in which he railed against the post-Cold War international order and suggested that Russia was preparing to challenge it.²⁰

A significant geopolitical and security feature of the Black Sea region is the existence of the post-soviet protracted (frozen) conflicts and since February 2022 the Russian military invasion in Ukraine. This was possible because Russia exploited the existence of these “grey zones” that fuelled organised crime, smuggling and radicalization. All these conflicts have significant potential to destabilise dramatically the whole region and the entire trans-Atlantic community²¹. Russia took advantage of these protracted conflict to deploy its military and security forces concentrated in “forward operating bases” like in Abkhazia, South Ossetia (Georgia), Nagorno Karabakh and Transnistria (Moldova).



Fig. 3. Frozen conflicts in the Black Sea area. Source: New Strategy Center.

The Kremlin objective was, and still is, to create the necessary political, security and military leverages to block the integration within NATO of the R. Moldova Georgia and Ukraine, turning Armenia into a state dependent on Russia for its security and pressuring Azerbaijan to limit its geopolitical options. Moscow openly recognizes NATO and its values as the main threat to its national security and especially to its interests in the Black Sea region.

Over the time Russia cemented its military presence in the South Caucasus signing security agreements with Abkhazia²² and South Ossetia²³, modernizing the military equipment deployed to its bases. The Russian support transcends the normal bilateral

²⁰ Ibidem 1

²¹ NATO and EU identify the protracted conflicts in the Black Sea Region as a challenge “to the European security order”.

²² Agreement between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Abkhazia on the Joint Russian Military Base on the Territory of the Republic of Abkhazia, signed 17 Feb. 2010, entered into force 20 Jan. 2012 (in Russian); Agreement between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Abkhazia on the Combined Grouping of Troops (Forces) of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation and the Armed Forces of the Republic of Abkhazia, signed 21 Nov. 2015, entered into force 3 Dec. 2016 (in Russian).

²³ Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance between the Russian Federation and the Republic of South Ossetia, signed 17 Sep. 2008, entered into force 20 Jan. 2009 (in Russian) contains a mutual defence guarantee in case of attack. Agreement between the Russian Federation and the Republic of South Ossetia on the Joint Russian Military Base on the Territory of the Republic of South Ossetia], signed 7 Apr. 2010, entered into force 7 Nov. 2011 (in Russian). Treaty between the Russian Federation and the Republic of South Ossetia on Alliance and Integration, signed 18 Mar. 2015, entered into force 30 July 2015 (in Russian), Article 2; and Civil Georgia, ‘Moscow, Tskhinvali sign “integration treaty”’, 18 Mar. 2015.

boundaries and offers Russia more prerogatives of command over the Russia-Abkhazia joint force “in times of war” and the integration of South Ossetia militaries in Russian forces.

Russia's historical memory is still alive about the five major invasions when “the West” sent its military to “destroy” Russia: the Polish occupation of the Kremlin in the early 17th century, the Swedish attack in the early 18th century, the Napoleon invasion of 1812, and two wars with Germany in the first half of the 20th century. In each case, the very existence of the Russian state was threatened. In this way, suspicion and fear of the West developed in the Russian mentality, even before the Bolshevik revolution in 1917.²⁴



Fig. 4. Source: New Strategy Center.

Thus, Moscow is not happy with the current geopolitical context in the Black Sea being surrounded by six independent countries, three of which are NATO members; two of which are aiming to make their armed forces interoperable with those from the NATO member states and only one – Russia – acting as a military force of intimidation and occupation. Beyond using conventional military force, Russia is also applying asymmetrical means of warfare²⁵ in this region, aimed to disrupt and incapacitate the nations’ sovereign decisions and democracy along with their Euro-Atlantic integration. To support this narrative, Moscow also started an aggressive propaganda and disinformation, both at home and internationally, aimed primarily to describe the former Soviet Union states (Georgia, R. Moldova, and Ukraine) democratic endeavor being supported by NATO, becoming so its spears against Russian Federation’s sovereignty.

To counter the expansion of NATO in the Black Sea region, respectively towards its borders, Russia, immediately after its military intervention in Georgia (2008), started an extensive military build-up to dominate the Black Sea, materialized later through the illegal occupation of Crimea Peninsula, becoming thus the centerpiece of its military presence in the Black Sea, supported the armed conflict of pro-



Fig. 5. Source: New Strategy Center.

²⁴ Rogov, S.(2009). NATO and Russia: A View from Moscow, in *Politique étrangère* 2009/5, pages 107-121 at <https://www.cairn.info/revue-politique-etrangere-2009-5-page-107.htm>

²⁵ Isolation policy, access denial, stirring conflicts in other regions, propaganda (injecting pro-Moscow, anti-NATO stories, encouraging euro-scepticism), manipulation, subversion, political corruption, patronage networks, and election stalemates to paralyze the government, financing the socialist and nationalist parties, supporting separatists, energy dependence, it exploits ethnic, financial, and social factors to unsettle the local government, engaged in media and cultural warfare and so on.

Russian separatists in Donbas (2014) and launched a full-scale military invasion against Ukraine on February 24, 2022.

Most of those describing the security situation in Black Sea today mean that the Russian unprovoked war in Ukraine and its consequences pose a challenge not only to the riparian states, but to the whole Europe and, by undermining the existing world order, to the whole international system.

III. THE MILITARY FACTOR: RUSSIA'S EXCESSIVE MILITARIZATION OF THE HIGH NORTH AND BLACK SEA REGIONS

The Russian Federation actions to consolidate the military capabilities along the Eastern NATO Flank, from Kola Peninsula to the Eastern Mediterranean Sea, represent the main concern from a military perspective, however coordinated actions in other domains (political, diplomatic, energy, religious, socio-cultural, etc.) intended to influence regional states are also to be considered. The Russian military invasion in Georgia (August 01-12, 2008) and later Ukraine (February 24, 2022) pointed out to an increase of such actions, as well as to the extension of the geographical area and the domains where threats are identified. The use of the military instrument is differentiated, depending on the targeted state and its own specific vulnerabilities.



“[...] no one feels safe! Because no one can feel that international law is like a stone wall that will protect them. Of course, such a policy stimulates an arms race.” – Vladimir Putin

Fig. 6. Source: Vystupleniye Putina v Myunkhene, <http://www.kremlin.ru/>

After the Georgian War in 2008, even though Russian Armed Forces came out victoriously, their reputation had suffered and Russia embarked on a fundamental reformation of its Armed Forces, aiming at significantly increasing Russia's military capability. Since then, a serious re-armament program was implemented, the Armed Forces' cadre unit organization was reformed, conducted large-scale exercises and readiness controls, and have been tested in military operations in Ukraine and Syria. Therefore, it became clear that Russia's military capabilities have improved substantially,

as the military is transformed into a more efficient fighting force.

Although at this moment of the war in Ukraine it is too premature to carry out a comprehensive analysis of the results of the modernization process of Russian armed forces, however, we can mention some of the most important factors that influence a nation's ability to generate and sustain military forces are security priorities, societal support, economic performance, defence spending, demographics, quantity and quality of military personnel and the interactions between them. Russia's ability to generate and sustain military forces has significantly changed in the past decade, but these factors still

show signs of stability over the medium term²⁶. Also, the Russian elite has reached consensus on the threats facing Russia, and there is no indication that this will change in the coming years. With quite a few exceptions, public attitudes show support for Russia's government, foreign policies, and the military²⁷.

Between 2000 – 2013 Russia's military budget has increased gradually, especially because of growing acquisition expenditures, but in the last five years the military budgets were fluctuated proportionately to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) especially after the harsh international economic sanctions imposed after Crimea occupation and first military invasion of Ukraine in 2014.²⁸

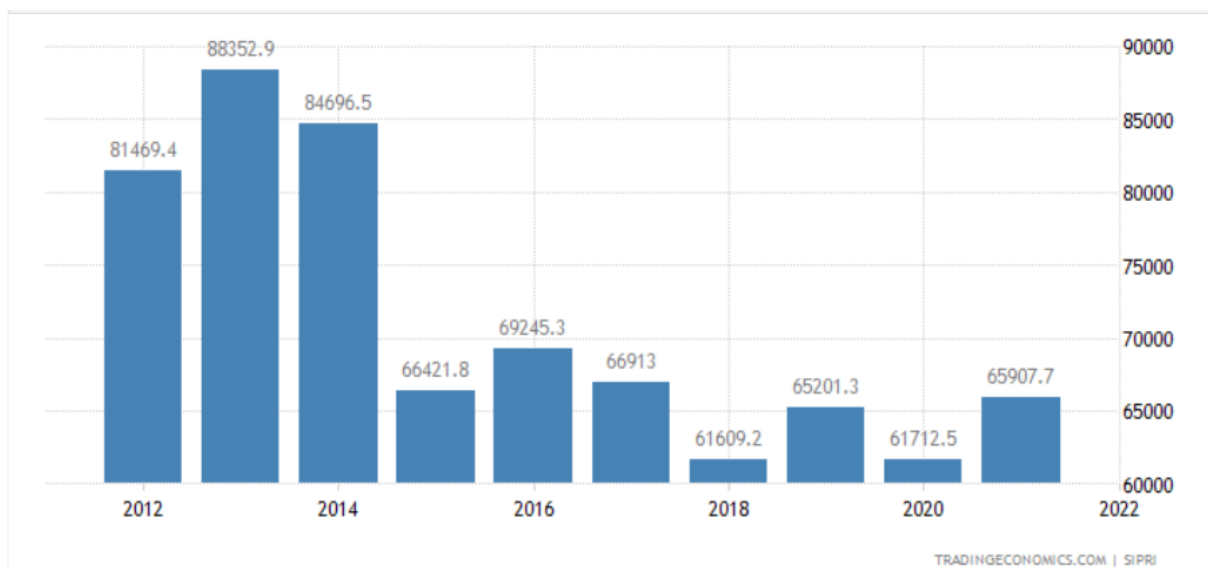


Fig. 7. Source: www.tradingeconomics.com

Also, while Russia will not record major population growth, its demographic situation is not expected to have an overwhelmingly negative effect on its military. Russia has also built a relatively stable mixed conscript and contract Manning system, enabling it to address the quality challenges that undermined its Armed Forces after USSR dissolution.

The actual evolution of the war in Ukraine demonstrates that Russian Armed Forces will generally meet their security goals within the available resources. Russia will likely face higher costs for military recruitment because of its declining population of military-age males through 2025 but should be able to find and recruit enough personnel to maintain the current size of its military forces. No matter what the outcome of the war will be,

²⁶ Radin, A., L. E. Davis, E. Geist, E. Han, D. Massicot, M. Povlock, C. Reach, S. Boston, S. Charap, W. Mackenzie, K. Migacheva, T. Johnston, and A. Long (2019). *What Will Russian Military Capabilities Look Like in the Future?* Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB10038.html.

²⁷ Ibidem 16

²⁸ Trading Economics - Russia Military Expenditure based on SIPRI Data at <https://tradingeconomics.com/russia/military-expenditure>

Russia will continue to focus on achieving regional dominance in its near abroad, emphasizing the readiness and professionalization of a small component of the force.

In the last ten years Russia heavily invested in its expeditionary capabilities that pose a great challenge to the Alliance, especially to the NATO's Eastern Flank, that will require preparedness for both asymmetric and high-intensity conventional wars. Despite these investments in special operations and expeditionary forces, along with the long-range precision land, air and maritime strikes and an extended air-defense and interdiction area (A2/AD), Russian military operations are still confined to the regions in its immediate neighborhood due to its logistical architecture, services, and support. On the other hand, Russia heavily relies on private security companies and other proxies' groups to inflict political and military damages to the Western interests.

III.1. Russia's militarization in the High North

Russian strategic assets in the High North have over the past two decades received renewed attention as the country's "strategic life insurance" and an important deterrent factor in Russia's increasingly conflictual relations with NATO and the broadly understood West. As one of the key objectives of the current Russian regime is recognition of Russia as an important great power other great powers must reckon with, possessing adequate military capabilities is one of the preconditions of achieving this strategic goal. Russian military assets and capabilities in the High North are to serve various purposes. The top objectives to be achieved by deploying these strategic capabilities is the question of securing strategic stability and parity, as well as establishing protective barriers ensuring the country's and the regime's survival in a situation with a higher level of great power competition. In the case of Russia, the main geopolitical competitor is the collective West. Russia's assets in the High North are to help it retain certain level of strategic parity in its relations with the collective West and build a credible deterrent to discourage the collective West from taking actions against Russia that could trigger Russian nuclear response.



Fig. 8. Northern Fleet – area of responsibility. Source: Wikipedia

The country's Northern Fleet that is the main Russian military instrument in the High North was on 1 January 2021 elevated to the status of the country's fifth military district. Its area of responsibility includes the Northern Sea Route and the islands off Russia's Arctic coast as well as the north and northwest of Russia itself. The Fleet headquarters and its staff have received greater status and autonomy, but the structure or tasks of the fleet remained the same.

Over the past years Russia invested heavily to strengthen its strategic footprint in the High North in a situation with growing tensions in its relations with the West. These heavy investments had in the context of the High North two main objectives – the qualitative improvement of military capabilities and turning the High North into an area that Russia could use both for defensive and offensive purposes. The area should be defended as a bastion in which Russia's retaliatory second-strike capability assets were to operate to inflict damage on the theoretical enemy and the Northern Fleet played a key part in this scenario. However, the Northern Fleet and other strategic assets operating from the region were also to play a part in Russian offensive operations against NATO's Sea Lines of Communications in the Northern Atlantic and against other targets that were to be hit from the region by Russia's superweapons as announced by Vladimir Putin in his dramatic speech on 1 March 2018. When Russian media in the ensuing months presented how these new superweapons could be used against Russia's enemies, many of these presentations assumed that these weapons were to be launched from the High North.

To be able to operate in the High North and launch both offensive and defensive operations from this area the Northern Fleet had to be modernised. Table 1 presents how the composition of the fleet has evolved during the realisation of Russia's most recent State Armament Programme GPV-2020.

Table 1. Evolution of the composition of the Northern Fleet 2013-2021 (IISS data)

Category	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Submarines	40	41	33	34	32	30	29	25	26
<i>Strategic Submarines</i>	9 (+1)	10	9	9	7 (+1)	6 (+2)	8 (+2)	7 (+2)	8 (+1)
SSBNs	9 (+1)	10	9	9	7 (+1)	6 (+2)	8 (+2)	7 (+2)	8 (+2)
<i>Tactical Submarines</i>	23	23	24	25	25	22	21	18	18
SSGNs	3	3	4	4	3 (+1)	4	4	4	4
SSNs	13	13	13	13	9 (+3)	8 (+4)	11 (3+1)	8	9
SSKs	7	7	7	8	5 (+1)	5 (+1)	6 (+1)	6 (+1)	5
AGS/SSAN	8	8	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Principal Surface Combatants	10	10	11	11	10	11	10	8	10
Aircraft Carriers	1	1	1	1	1	(1)	(1)	1	(1)

Cruisers	1 (+1)	1(+1)	1(+2)	1 (+2)	2 (+1)	2 (+1)	2 (+1)	2	2 (+1)
Destroyers	6 (+1)	6 (+1)	7	7	6	6	7	5 (+1)	5 (+1)
Frigates	-	-	-	-	-	(+1)	-	-	2
Coastal Combatants	29	28	25	24	28	26	27	29	32
Corvettes and Patrol Crafts	12	12	9	8	10	10	10	16	16
Mine Warfare and MCM	12	12	12	12	12	10	10	12	9
Amphibious	5	4	4	4	6	6	7	7	7

The current structure of the fleet reflects the tasks assigned to it by the country's policymakers and strategists.²⁹ A detailed overview of the Northern Fleet composition based on data provided by the IISS is presented in Table 2.³⁰ These assets included the only Russian aircraft carrier (in the state of almost permanent repair), 7 of Russia's 11 strategic submarines as well as 18 of 38 Russia's tactical submarines and 10 of 31 principal surface ships. In addition, there were elements responsible for providing air defence and air strike capabilities, ability to project power through various types of combined naval and land-based operations, and those responsible for coastal defence.

Table 2. Composition of the Northern Fleet 2021

Submarines, total	26 (13)
Strategic Submarines SSBN	8 (3)
Submarines tactical total	18 (5)
Submarines tactical SSGN	4
Submarines tactical SSN	9 (3)
Submarines tactical SSK	5 (2)
Principal surface combatants total	8 (4)
Battlecruisers and cruisers	2 (1)
Aircraft carriers	(1)
Destroyers	1
Frigates	5 (2)
Patrol and coastal comb	16
Corvettes	10
Mine Countermeasure	9 (1)
Amphibious landing ships and craft	7
Air defence	Long range: 6 SAM regt with S-300PS (SA-10B Grumble); S-300PM1 (SA-20 Gargoyle);

²⁹ For more details see Godzimirski, J.M., I.Holst Pedersen Kvam, L.Dinu and G. Scutaru (2022). Russian Military reset in the High North and the Black Sea Region: Similarities and Differences, FLANKS Final Report, New Strategy Center and Norwegian Institute of International Affairs at <https://www.newstrategycenter.ro/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/FINAL-FLANKS-1-REPORT.pdf>

³⁰ International Institute of Strategic Studies, *Military Balance 2021* London: Routledge, 2021.

	S-400 (SA-21 Growler); Short range: 96K6 Pantsir-S1 (SA-22 Greyhound)
Naval aviation	38 fighters: 20 MiG-31BM Foxhound C; 18 Su-33 Flanker D 25 fighters/ground attack: 19 MiG-29KR Fulcrum; 4 MiG-29KUBR Fulcrum; 2 Su- 30SM Flanker H 18 attack: 13 Su-24M Fencer; 5 Su-25UTG Frogfoot (training role) Anti-submarine warfare: 21: 10 Il-38 May; 11 Tu-142MK/MZ/MR Bear F/J ISR 4 Su-24MR Fencer Electronic intelligence: 3: 2 Il-20RT Coot A; 1 Il-22 Coot B Transport: 9: 8 An-26 Curl; 1 Tu-134 Helicopters: Anti-submarine warfare Ka-27 Helix A Transport helicopters• Medium Ka-29 Helix B; Mi-8 HipLong range
Naval Infantry	2 Motorized rifle brigades 1 naval infantry brigade
Coastal defense	1 Anti-ship missiles brigade

*Numbers in parentheses denote additional hulls under maintenance or modernization or otherwise inoperable.

Since relations between Russia and the West entered into a new negative phase after Russian intervention in Ukraine in 2014 and deteriorated even further after Russia launched its war against Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the current Russian perception of the importance of the assets in the High North reminds to a very large extent situation from the period of the Cold War. The tasks assigned to the Northern Fleet then and now include therefore:

1. the need to protect Russia's strategic assets in this region described as a strategic bastion that plays a key part in the Russian strategy of deterrence by securing Russia's retaliatory strike capability;
2. the ability to project power to the high seas where Russia is interested in building a capable forward defence for its strategic bastion;
3. the ability to project power to the North Atlantic and to other areas to be able to cut NATO sea lines of communication (SLOCs) and challenge other actors.

To cope with these tasks and to make it possible for Russia to launch a retaliatory nuclear strike, the Bastion Defence concept was developed during the Cold War.³¹ This was also the key raison d'être for the Northern Fleet that was also tasked with deterring other actors from operating in the Norwegian Sea which could threaten Russian assets in the

³¹ Atland 2007, see also Tamnes, R.(2016). "The Significance of the North Atlantic and the Norwegian Contribution", *Whitehall Papers* 87:1, 8-31.

Barents Sea. In addition to these defensive tasks, the Northern Fleet was also expected to take part in various offensive operations encroaching on NATO member states' territories, air space and ocean areas for securing the strategic submarines' operational freedom and for cutting NATO's SLOCs in the North Atlantic.³² The High North played therefore a crucial part in the Cold War's strategic dynamics, where the two military blocks led by the two Cold War superpowers vied for regional and global supremacy. Although Russia is no longer viewed as a superpower because its status has been demoted to the great power in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet project, Moscow still approaches the High North in a similar manner and the Northern Fleet plays a similar role in Russian strategic designs and military strategy. It is, however, important to understand that some new elements have been added to Russian strategic calculations in the meantime. Especially the development of new superweapons systems announced by Putin in March 2018 as well as development of more precise strike capabilities have contributed to modifying Russian military strategy in general, and in the High North context.

The weapons systems discussed by Putin in 2018 included a heavy intercontinental missile (*Sarmat*), a hypersonic aircraft missile (*Kinzhal*), a strategic missile system with a manoeuvrable hypersonic gliding wing unit (*Avangard*), a nuclear-powered missile with unlimited range (*Burevestnik*), and unmanned submersible vehicles with conventional or nuclear warheads, capable of travelling intercontinentally at great depths (*Poseidon*) as well as laser weapons (*Peresvet*). By development of these new capabilities Russia would therefore be able to use its technological edge to deter potential aggression, and should such aggression occur regardless, it had the offensive capability to respond accordingly, also in the High North. This can be interpreted as an offset strategy, with Russia using technical innovation to counter the strength of potential adversaries.³³ To assess what impact these new technologies will have on Russia's understanding of the strategic importance of the High North we need to understand what these new weapons are capable of achieving in strategic terms, how Russia plans to use them and how this may change the *raison d'être* of the Northern Fleet.

Ranges
Zirkon – 1000 km
Kinzhal – 2000-3000 km
Poseidon – 10 000 km?
Avangard – 10 000 km?
Sarmat – 18 000 km?
Burevestnik – unlimited?

Fig. 9. Ranges. Source: New Strategy Center.

Concerning Russia's plans, limited insights are available, though there have been instances where Russia has communicated how these weapons might be employed. *Burevestnik* (range theoretically unlimited), *Sarmat* (estimated range of 18,000 km), *Avangard* and *Poseidon* (both with an estimated range of around 10,000 km) are all often presented as being capable of reaching the US mainland and central parts of Europe from either the Russian mainland or from bases and delivery systems located in the Russia's 'Northern Bastion'. However, to deliver *Zirkon* (estimated range of 1,000 km) and *Kinzhal* (estimated range of 2,000– 3,000 km) missiles to the US mainland and other core areas of a potential

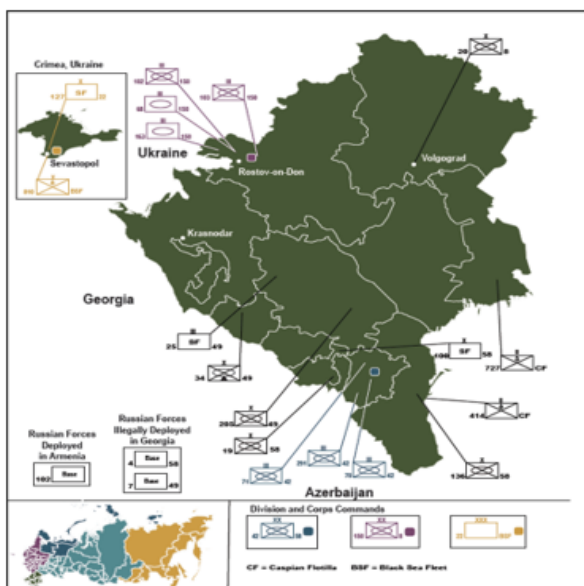
³² Lehman, J. (2018). *Oceans Ventured. Winning the Cold War at Sea* New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

³³ Breedlove, P., and M.E. Kosal,(2019). *Emerging Technologies and National Security: Russia, NATO, & the European Theater*. Winter Series. Stanford CA: Hoover Institution.

adversary (read: NATO), the Russian military would need to access areas beyond the Northern Bastion, beyond the Bear Gap, beyond the area of bastion defence, and even beyond the so-called GIUK line.³⁴ This could suggest that the Northern Fleet will be still necessary to achieve these strategic, operational and tactical objectives in the broadly understood High North and will remain an important instrument facilitating Russia's projection of military power also to other key areas as was recently demonstrated in 2012, 2014 and 2016 when main Northern Fleet vessels, including Russia's sole and visibly aging aircraft carrier *Admiral Kuznetsov*, were deployed to the Mediterranean.

III.2. Russia's militarization in the Black Sea Region

Moscow's use of the military power as the main instrument for fulfilling its political and diplomatic objectives were already proved in the Black Sea region: Georgia (2008), Ukraine (2014, 2022) and Eastern Mediterranean and required the modernization of its military capabilities. Thus, in the last decade, Moscow has constantly modernized its military capabilities in the Black Sea. Even though the actual war in Ukraine demonstrated that Russian military power to that of a decade ago made some progress in transforming its military into an efficient fighting force, however, with all the political, doctrinal, structural, equipment and training measures, the Russian Armed Forces have not demonstrated, at least until now, that they have reached the level of operationalization of an armed force adapted to the requirements of the 21st century battlefield.



Russian Ground Forces in Southern Military District (including Crimean Peninsula)
 Fig. 10. Southern Military District of the Russian Federation
 (Source: Institute for the Study of War - ISW)

The Russian military operations are still land-centric, and in the Black Sea region the main military force is represented by the Southern Military District one of the Five Military Districts of the Russian Armed Forces.

Right after Crimea invasion the Southern Military District's was reinforced with 8th Combined-Arms Army (CAA), dislocated near the south-eastern borders of Ukraine, including one motor-rifle division (150th) and a motor-rifle brigade (20th). As of 2021, the 20th Guards Motor Rifle Division in the Volgograd region and the 464th Rocket Brigade are also reported to be subordinated to the 8th Army, with the

³⁴ For more on these strategic considerations, see Black, J., et al. (2020). Enhancing deterrence and defence on NATO's northern flank: Allied perspectives on strategic options for Norway. RAND Report. Santa Monica CA: Rand. See also Hamre, J. J., and Conley, H. A., (2016). The Centrality of the North Atlantic to NATO and US Strategic Interests. *Whitehall Papers* 87 (1), 43–58; Foggo, J. G., and Fritz, A., (2018). NATO and the Challenge in the North Atlantic and the Arctic. *Whitehall Papers* 93 (1), 121–128.

former 20th Guards Brigade reportedly having expanded into a division-strength formation.³⁵ The formation of these new divisions and armies has required an unprecedented level of infrastructure development, in an area where previously almost no troops were based.

The 8th Combined Arms Army is considered to be the centerpiece of the Southern Military District, and some analysts also describe the 1st (Donetsk) and 2nd (Luhansk) Army Corps of the Russian separatist forces in Donbas, Ukraine, as under the command of the 8th CAA HQ and having a major role on February 24th, 2022, invasion in Eastern Ukraine.^{36,37}

At the end of 2016, the ground troops stationed in Crimea formed the 22nd Army Corps which was subordinated to the Black Sea Fleet. There have been reported repeated increases in the numerical strength of the Russian group of forces in Crimea, rearmament of naval and air-force aviation, as well as the increase of the air defences deployed here.

The Ground Forces (as well as the airborne troops) train and deploy units in task-organized, tailored battalion tactical groups (BTGs), which are in fact battalion-sized units with integrated combined arms. They have become the unit of measurement for Russian conventional ground combat capability, based on statements by both analysts and senior officials referring to Russian operations in Ukraine.

An example of a battalion tactical group identified in open sources was from the 35th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade, which was part of the 41st Army of the Central Military District. It consisted of the following³⁸:

- a motorized rifle battalion, equipped with infantry fighting vehicles (BMP³⁹s) or armoured personnel carriers;
- a tank company with 10 -15 tanks;
- two to three artillery batteries, including rocket artillery as well as cannons;
- an air defence detachment;
- engineer, intelligence, and other elements.

BTG appears designed to permit ready forces to deploy and conduct operations, but as a reinforced battalion sized organization, the BTG's capabilities are limited. It is appropriate for smaller-scale combat operations that have been the norm in and around

³⁵ Rondeli Russian Military Digest: Issue 81, 29 March - 9 May 2021 at <https://www.gfsis.org/russian-monitor/view/2963>

³⁶ "The Russian and Ukrainian Spring 2021 War Scare" - Center for Strategic & International Studies at <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russian-and-ukrainian-spring-2021-war-scare>

³⁷ Bowen, A.S. (2021-11-19). "Russian Troop Movements and Tensions along the Ukrainian Border". Insight. Congressional Research Service at <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IN/IN11806>

³⁸ "Sostav svodnovo podrazdeleniya 35-I MSBR sil vtorzheniya" [Composition of the consolidated subunits of the 35th Motor Rifle Brigade invasion force], InformNapalm, December 5, 2014 see also Crane, K., Olikier, O. and Nichiporuk, B. (2019). *Trends in Russia's Armed Forces – An Overview of Budgets and Capabilities*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.

³⁹ boyevaya mashina pekhoty

Russia's periphery. Therefore, it may fall somewhat short of what would be needed to enable the coordinated manoeuvre of large-scale Ground Forces⁴⁰.

Also, in the Black Sea region Moscow created a strong **Anti-Access/ Area Denial (A2/AD)** to effectively cover the area of operations of its military forces and through the occupation of the Crimean Peninsula was able to expand the A2/AD umbrella beyond the Extended Black Sea Region to provide quick response options in the event of an armed conflict. Strike capabilities have increased considerably, especially after being equipped with Kalibr cruise missiles, which have a radius of 1500 km (or even 2600 km in the modified version). To them are added the Iskander missiles, with a radius of 500 km, which can also have a nuclear charge, the anti-ship ones Bal (120 km radius) and Bastion (320 km) and air defense systems S-300V4 and S-400 Triumf.⁴¹

The modernization of the **Black Sea Naval Forces (RBSF)**, for which it was allocated a 2.4 billion USD budget by 2020⁴² for new generations of submarines and coastal defense systems. It is expected that 18 new naval units will be introduced in RBSF, most of which will be equipped with Kalibr missile systems. To which naval aviation units and combat helicopters were added.⁴³ So far, RBSF has received six Diesel Electric submarines all equipped with Kalibr missiles, to corvettes and two minesweepers. At present RBSF has 12 naval units equipped with Kalibr missiles. The Caspian Flotilla was also modernized with two frigates and three corvettes.⁴⁴

The Air Force was another line of effort characterized primarily by refurbishment of air bases and airfields in Crimea in the first instance, as well as the deployment of new combat and air support capabilities from mainland Russia. The air component has been reinforced by the deployment on the Peninsula of bomber, assault, fighter, and army aviation. Belbek and Gvardeyskoe airfields were reconstructed to accommodate Russian long-range bombers. In total, Russia has more than 85 aircraft of various types and 34 helicopters in Crimea that cover the entire Black Sea airspace⁴⁵, including the straits and the main bases and military facilities located near the coast of Black Sea riparian states.⁴⁶

Till now there is no evidence of deployed nuclear assets in Southern Military District, although strategic vectors that can deploy tactical and strategic nuclear warheads like Tu-22M3 from air, Bastion from land and Kalibr from water are already existing in the region. Vladimir Putin has already expressed on the possibility of using nuclear weapons if the Russian territorial integrity and security is threatened. Russia's nuclear doctrine

⁴⁰ Crane et al 2019

⁴¹ Dinu, L. (2019). The Crimean Aircraft Carrier. Russian Federation Militarization of the Black Sea - Flanks Policy Briefs at <https://www.newstrategycenter.ro/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/FLANKS-Policy-Brief-The-Crimean-Aircraft-Carrier.-Russian-Federation-Militarization-of-the-Black-Sea.pdf>

⁴² DefenceTalk.com: Russia to reinforce Crimea fleet: minister, by AFP, May 8, 2014 at <https://www.defencetalk.com/russia-to-reinforce-crimea-fleet-minister-59507/>

⁴³ Ibidem 41

⁴⁴ Manaranche, M. (2020). *Russia's Black Sea Fleet Completes the First Stage of Its Modernization*, NavalNews 21 May at <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2020/05/russias-black-sea-fleet-completes-the-first-stage-of-its-modernization/>

⁴⁵ Ukrinform (2020). 1,100 Russian tanks, 330 warplanes along border with Ukraine, July 3.

⁴⁶ Ibidem 41

allows for a nuclear strike after "aggression against the Russian Federation with conventional weapons when the very existence of the state is threatened".⁴⁷

III.3. Russia's military operational failures in the war against Ukraine

When the Russian invasion started in Ukraine it was expected that the 10-year effort of doctrinal, structural modernization and endowment of the Russian armed forces with modern technology should have corresponded in the results of the military operations. Instead, after more than 8 months of war, with considerable efforts and losses, Russia is currently being pushed back by the Ukrainian army, which has taken the initiative and is gradually recapturing the lost territory.

The initial analysis of how Moscow planned and conducted the offensive operation against Ukraine, reveals that the Russian armed forces, despite their numerical and military technical superiority failed, most probably due to:

- The lack of coherence between the political objectives expressed by Vladimir Putin, including the duration of the military campaign and military operational plans. The change in political objectives during operations and Russia's military made it difficult for military planners to translate them into viable operational plans. The confusion among Russian military planners started with Putin's so called "special military operation" in which the newly developed concept of New Generation War didn't fit at all.
- The lack of the surprise element of the initial attack on the three main operational directions, as well as the execution of the ground attack without ensuring air support and air supremacy. This was mainly due to the lack of concrete information regarding the disposition of the Ukrainian forces, which led to an underestimation of the operational capacity of the Ukrainian army.
- Despite the structural and organizational reform, the command, control, and communications system functioned poorly, which led to an incoherence of operation plans and inconsistency of military actions at the tactical level. Although during the annual strategic operational exercises, including those that preceded the invasion of Ukraine, KAVKAZ 2020 and ZAPAD 2021, the battle tactical groups (BTG), practiced initiative in the battle, logistics and direct fire support, during the Ukraine invasion, because of the lack of fire support and logistics, BTG's were subordinated to some brigade headquarters, which in turn were subordinated to other divisions, lengthening the chain of command and delaying tactical decisions for frontline commanders. Later, to correct this, higher commands deployed generals in the tactical field creating more confusion, operational pressure and distrust among the fighters and tactical commanders.
- Russia failed to impose a real A2/AD zone over Ukrainian space despite its available air resources. Instead, Russia used extensively artillery and cruise missile

⁴⁷ Reuters (2022). Will Russia use nuclear weapons? Putin's warnings explained, October 5, at <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/qa-will-russia-use-nuclear-weapons-putins-warnings-explained-2022-10-04/>

bombardments causing heavy collateral damages that led to the condemnation of Russia by the international community.

- Reduced capacity to mobilize reserves and replace exhausted and/or neutralized military forces especially on the operational direction from Belarus to Kiev in the first phase of the war.
- The lack of operational experience of the Russian military, the use of recruits with insufficient operational training, some being recruited only two months before the invasion.
- Low morale of Russian troops fighting without motivation. Probably the commanders failed to translate Putin's political objectives into operational-motivational language. Also, the fierce resistance of the Ukrainian military contributed to low morale among Russian soldiers. This led to mass desertions and the refusal of the Russian military to engage in combat.
- The logistic and support system of the fighting forces on the front line was affected on the one hand by the intensity of the fighting, respectively the high consumption of the ammunition and fuel but also by the extended length of the supply lines. During the strategic operational exercises, railways were used extensively on the territory of Russia, while they could no longer be used on the territory of Ukraine due to destruction and sabotage.

These operational failures, together with consistent Allied and international support to Ukraine and a continuous information campaign, made it possible for Ukrainian military forces to go on the counteroffensive on September 6, 2022, and gradually recapture till the first decade of October about 10 percent of the total 25 percent of the lost territory (Crimea and Donbas being included).

This tactical victory was needed to boost the morale of the Ukrainian troops and maintaining the spirit of victory among the Ukrainian population, for the NATO community and for the support of future decisions as well.

IV. LESSONS IDENTIFIED FROM THE WAR IN UKRAINE FOR THE HIGH NORTH AND THE BLACK SEA REGIONS

After more than eight months of war in Ukraine it is still premature to draw effective lessons learned from the Ukrainian War, but we can still mention some lessons that we already identified:

- The importance of a real NATO Eastern Flank defense and deterrence posture. After Crimea and Donbas invasion in 2014, NATO has failed to establish a real deterrence capability on its Eastern Flank to prevent any Russian military endeavor in Ukraine or much worse against a NATO member state. Even though, the Readiness Action Plan (RAP) agreed at the 2014 Wales Summit was an essential driver of NATO's military adaptation to the evolving security environment it took time to be implemented on the ground. Also, Graduate Response Plans (GRP) were only adapted to the newly operational situation and 2014 establishment of the Very High

Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) as part of the NATO Response Force (NRF) despite that it was a good decision, it took eight years for its first operational deployment in 2022.

- Creating a strong missile and interconnected air-defense line continuously from the High North to the Black Sea Regions along the NATO Eastern Flank. Presently there is only one US Patriot battalion in Europe. The other NATO countries that have Patriot missiles comes down to Germany, Greece, Poland, Romania, Sweden, and The Netherlands. Russia massively used the long-range artillery and precision strike missiles to target towns, cities and elements of critical infrastructure to spread fear, human exodus, and chaos for the defending forces.
- Military interoperability between NATO Eastern Flank members. Joint training is a must to prepare the nation military forces to fight in a joint operation and environment through land, air, and sea capabilities integration, including special forces, cyber and based all together on real-time effective intelligence.
- A strong sea power both in the High North and Black Sea can make the difference in terms of deterrence and defense, protecting the sea lines of communications and free movement of commercial goods. At the very beginning of war Russia imposed blockade on the Ukrainian ports and access to the Black Sea and beyond. A sea coordinated and effective strategy in the High North and Black Sea must be created not only for the maritime security, but also for the interdiction of the Russian naval capabilities maneuver between the two regions as it was intended during the war in Ukraine and previously exercised several times.
- Intelligence sharing among the NATO member states is crucial for deterrence and defense posture along with a timely and comprehensive communication to the public opinion. Russia used extensively its disinformation campaigns in all available media trying to create emotions, fears or false perceptions within Slavic and orthodox communities, energy client countries, and political and military dependent ones.
- Military mobility and maneuverability. The importance of ready to fight logistics and forward pre-deployed ammunitions and military equipment. Enhancing the fast-moving connectivity along the Eastern Flank, from the High North to the Black Sea and beyond to the Mediterranean Sea.
- The important role that Russia gives to energy as a leverage against Europe needs to be dealt with. Both Norway and Romania have a role to play in this field as both are endowed with resources that can make dependence on energy supplies from Russia far less relevant. Norway has traditionally been a key energy supplier to Europe while Romania has discovered significant gas reserves in its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), estimated at over 200 bcm (billion cubic metres). Exploitation of this important energy resource began in August 2022, but the process of building the entire energy infrastructure in the most prolific perimeter, in the southern EEZ, will start in 2023, peaking in 2024, and exploitation of this perimeter will begin in 2026. From then on, Romania will become the largest gas producer in the EU and the third largest in Europe after Norway and the UK. Experts at the New Strategy Center predict that Russia will try to harass Romania by sending ships, block perimeters in

Romania's EEZ under the pretext of naval exercises, use cyber attacks or "false flag" actions. Romania would benefit greatly from cooperating with Norway and from Norwegian expertise in the safeguarding of key energy infrastructure, notably naval platforms and underwater pipelines. It is a concrete idea for how two NATO members can work together to better counter Russia's hybrid operations and help Europe become less reliant on Russian gas.

- Maintaining the cohesion and the unity of the NATO member states at least as achieved at the last NATO Summit in Madrid. Along with political determination, firmness, and unity, the 30 NATO members' combined economic and military power is much over the Russian Federation strengths and capabilities, but if only one NATO member state hesitates or is against, the entire NATO political cohesion can be put under heavy pressure, especially if such a decision was to come from the key supplier of security to all NATO members after the 2024 elections in the USA.

V. CONCLUSION

At least in a medium-term perspective Russia's autocratic and personalistic regime will increase its anti-Western foreign policy and rhetoric and will try to force the West and the rest to still recognize Russia as an indispensable great power shaping the international environment. The launching of the "special military operation" was an attempt to restore Russia's sphere of interest and influence especially in its neighbourhood that the Russian policymakers treat as a necessary buffer zone separating Russia from the West. We must expect that regardless of the outcome of the war in Ukraine, Russia will continue to consolidate its military power and the capability to launch a regional war. Strategic deterrence, primarily with nuclear forces, will remain the foremost priority, while in the future Russia may increase its military capability further while ensuring sustained political support for determined policy implementation⁴⁸. Although clearly weakened militarily, politically and economically Russia will still be a power factor and actor that we will have to factor in our national and institutional strategic calculations, an actor who will most probably use various instruments from the whole spectrum of the New Generation Warfare to promote and defend what the current and the future Russian regimes will define as Russia's vital strategic interests.⁴⁹ Having this in mind the West – both the EU and NATO – must prepare for this future with a Russia that will be far harder to deal with than this Russia that only few years ago was treated as a possible important strategic partner the West could work together with in addressing various common challenges.

⁴⁸ Westerlund, F. and S. Oxenstierna (2019). (eds). Gudrun Persson, Jonas Kjellén, Johan Norberg, Jakob Hedenskog, Tomas Malmlöf, Martin Goliath, Johan Engvall and Nils Dahlqvist, *Russian Military Capability in a Ten-Year Perspective – 2019*. FOI..

⁴⁹ Kendall-Taylor, A. and M. Kofman (2022). Russia's Dangerous Decline. The Kremlin Won't Go Down Without a Fight, *Foreign Affairs* November/December at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/russia-dangerous-decline>

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