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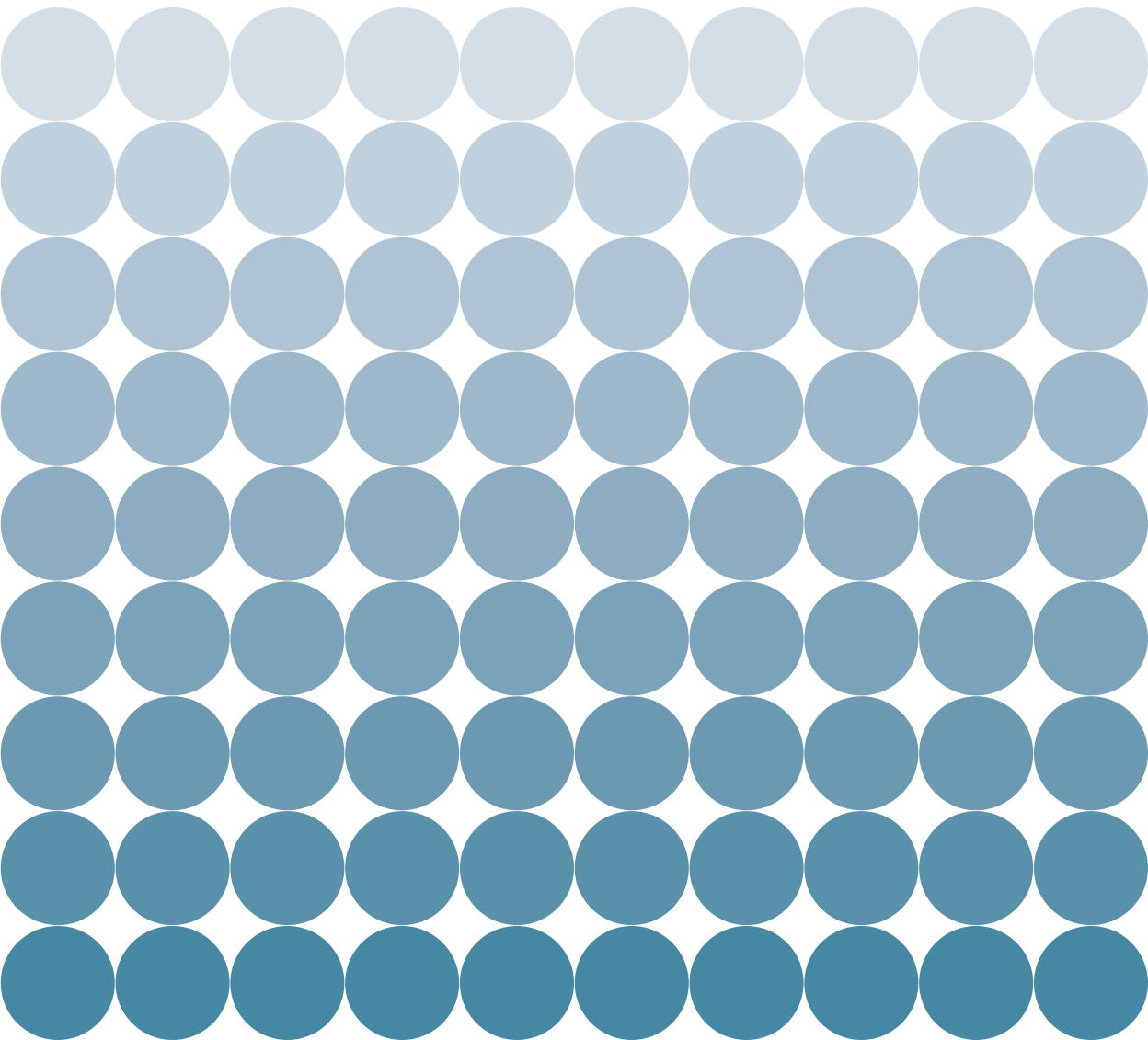
REBUILDING COLLECTIVE SECURITY IN THE BLACK SEA REGION

NEIL J. MELVIN



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Contents

Preface *iv*
Acknowledgements *vi*
Summary *vii*
Abbreviations *ix*
1. Introduction: the Black Sea as a security space 1
Figure 1.1. The wider Black Sea region 2
2. The evolution of the Black Sea as a security space 5
The modern history of Black Sea security 5
The Black Sea in the post-cold war period 6
3. The post-2014 Black Sea security environment 17
Russia's post-2014 approach to Black Sea security 17
The Euro-Atlantic community's post-2014 approach to Black Sea security 26
4. Threat perceptions and security strategies in the Black Sea region 48
Russia's Black Sea threat perceptions and security strategy 48
NATO's Black Sea threat perceptions and security strategy 53
5. The risks of military confrontation in the Black Sea region 59
Key security dynamics of the Black Sea region 59
Conflict risks in the Black Sea region 62
6. Conclusions and steps forward 68

Preface

Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the onset of conflict in eastern Ukraine have moved European security in a dangerous direction. As Neil J. Melvin shows in this SIPRI Policy Paper, following the events of 2014 Russia has continued to build up its military in the Black Sea while the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has committed significant forces to the region. Military exercises have also increased in frequency, intensity and scale.

Tensions remain high, as highlighted by naval clashes between Russia and Ukraine around the Kerch Strait, which intensified in November 2018, and ongoing tense standoffs between NATO and Russian aircraft and ships in the region. While neither side appears ready to countenance direct military action against the other, there are clear risks of escalation stemming from unintended clashes and military accidents, miscalculation and misperception.

At the same time, as the author indicates, the risks of confrontation in the region extend beyond the militaries of Russia and NATO. Since the first years of the post-cold war era, the wider Black Sea region has experienced a set of civil wars that have gradually transformed far beyond their origins to become protracted conflicts and the basis for interstate warfare.

In recent years, the importance of security relations within the Black Sea has grown, particularly as the region is linked to the wars of the Middle East due to the military engagement in the Syrian conflict of Russia, Turkey and the United States. This SIPRI Policy Paper shows, thus, how the wider Black Sea region is today a complex security space in which protracted conflicts, interstate wars and great-power confrontation merge together and overlap in unstable and unpredictable ways.

As the author highlights, given the centrality of developments in the Black Sea for peace and security in Europe, the post-Soviet territories, the Balkans and the Middle East, there is an urgent need to address the sources of confrontation in the region. A priority is to address the risks of escalation to full-scale military struggle between Russia and NATO.

Progress is, however, likely to be slow. The build-up of military forces and the accumulation of unresolved conflicts in the Black Sea are underpinned by the emergence of conflicting world views, threat perceptions and feelings of insecurity. This situation is one of the major factors that is driving the repudiation of major arms agreements, further lowering the threshold for conflicts.

Nevertheless, steps can and should be taken to reverse the spiral of conflict and militarization. A rebuilding of collective security in the Black Sea should be pursued through a number of simultaneous tracks: confidence- and security-building measures; dialogue on mutual threat perceptions; and cooperation on softer security issues (environmental issues) and the management of shared security concerns (Nagorno-Karabakh). These measures should be pursued alongside renewed efforts to promote trust through rebuilding military transparency and exchanges of information.

On behalf of SIPRI, I would like to thank the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs for its generous funding of the Black Sea Regional Security Initiative project. Naturally, the ministry is not responsible for the content or conclusions of the report.

Dan Smith
Director, SIPRI
Stockholm, December 2018

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The information and analysis in this paper builds on past research conducted by SIPRI on foreign and security challenges in the Caucasus region as a part of the European Union Horizon 20/20 'CASCADE' project. SIPRI would like to thank the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs for supporting the research on the wider Black Sea region that made this paper possible. Many of the key themes of the paper were discussed at the workshop 'Shifting Black Sea Security Dynamics' convened at SIPRI on 7–8 December 2017. The author would like to thank all of the participants of the workshop for sharing their expertise and advice. The author is grateful for the detailed comments provided by Dr Michael Cecire and other reviewers, as well as for the work of the SIPRI Editorial Department to finalize the paper.

Neil J. Melvin
Stockholm, December 2018

Summary

The wider Black Sea region—bringing together the six littoral states of Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine and a hinterland stretching across the South Caucasus, Moldova and parts of the Balkans—has emerged as a complex and contested security space. Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the accumulation of unresolved local and interstate conflicts, rising insecurities and threat perceptions, and militarized international geopolitical competition has steadily transformed the Black Sea into an unpredictable and potentially high-risk region.

Instability, violence and armed conflict have been a constant in the region since the end of the cold war. With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, a set of conflicts erupted across the region: in Trans-Dniester in Moldova, Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan, and Chechnya in Russia. Russia became a central actor in the protracted conflicts of the region and has played a leading role in shaping the broader security dynamics of the Black Sea since the early 1990s.

Russia's involvement in the conflicts of the Black Sea region, notably the conflicts of the North and South Caucasus, has been formative in shaping Russian security perceptions. Involvement in the region's conflicts has played a central role in Russia's domestic politics and has been a key driver behind the prominence given to military strength and modernization in Russian foreign and security policy, notably under President Vladimir Putin.

From the early 2000s, the intersection in the wider Black Sea region of the Euro-Atlantic enlargement agenda (notably regarding Georgia and Ukraine), the protracted conflicts and Russia's concerns over encroachment by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) led to an increase in regional tensions. Fighting between Russia and Georgia in South Ossetia in August 2008 highlighted rising instability and insecurity in the region and the failure of European conflict-prevention and -management mechanisms.

In 2014 a domestic political crisis in Ukraine accompanied by geopolitical competition between Russia and the Euro-Atlantic community was the trigger for Russia to annex Crimea and for the onset of an armed conflict in eastern Ukraine. As a result, the wider Black Sea has become a key security interface between Russia and the Euro-Atlantic community (in particular, NATO), together with states aligned with the two competing security communities (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine).

Russia's actions in Ukraine and the subsequent further militarization of Crimea have been met by a new NATO policy of a Tailored Forward Presence in the Black Sea—involving an expansion and intensification of maritime, air and land deployments—to reassure NATO members and partners in the region. NATO and European Union (EU) countries have imposed sanctions on Russia related to developments in Ukraine.

Today, the Black Sea is the site for a steady build-up of military capacities by Russia and NATO, against the backdrop of unresolved conflicts and proxy warfare between states of the region. These developments are increasing insecurity. De facto independent states are insecure in the face of the more powerful rump states. The rump states are insecure since the de facto states are generally aligned with the more powerful Russia. Russia itself is insecure because it perceives that a militarily stronger Euro-Atlantic community is encroaching on its borders. Equally, NATO and the EU feel insecure because Russia commands a dominant military force in the Black Sea region.

A key element of insecurity and instability comes from contrasting threat perceptions. In the post-cold war period, diverging security narratives have emerged between Russia and the Euro-Atlantic community about the Black Sea region, about its sources of insecurity and threat, and about the security intentions of each side. These threat perceptions have now become a key driver for the build-up of military force in the region.

Today, the Black Sea region is thus affected by a set of interlinked negative security developments: a process of long-term conflict transformation is leading to the region's protracted conflicts merging with state-to-state and even internationalized competition; regional geopolitics are being reshaped towards confrontation; and there is a militarization and build-up of arms across the wider region. Regional security management and integration projects have broken down and there is a decline in transparency and confidence, and a growth in uncertainty over mutual security intentions.

In the Black Sea region a further consolidation of the military positions of NATO and Russia can be anticipated, including a further security engagement in the countries caught between the larger powers: Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The protracted conflicts will continue to evolve through their own local dynamics and under the influence of the regional power confrontation. While there appears to be little interest in a direct military confrontation between NATO and Russia, developments in the Black Sea are increasing the danger of unintended clashes through military accidents and incidents, and due to unpredictable escalations and the potential for conflict spillover.

While a comprehensive resolution of the security challenges of the Black Sea will not be achieved in the near future, steps can be taken to prevent the region becoming the site for a full-scale military struggle. A rebuilding of collective security in the Black Sea should be pursued through a number of tracks: confidence- and security-building measures; dialogue on mutual threat perceptions; cooperation on softer security issues (environmental issues) and the management of shared security concerns (Nagorno-Karabakh); and renewed efforts to build trust through military transparency and exchanges of information.

Abbreviations

A2/AD	Anti-access/area-denial
ABM	Anti-ballistic missile (system)
BLACKSEAFOR	Black Sea Naval Cooperation Task Group
BS-AST	Black Sea Area Support Team
BSEC	Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
EAEU	Eurasian Economic Union
EFP	Enhanced Forward Presence
ERI	European Reassurance Initiative
EU	European Union
EUCOM	(US) European Command
HQ MND-SE	Headquarters Multinational Division Southeast
JTFE	Joint Task Force East
MN BDE-SE	Multinational Brigade Southeast
NACC	North Atlantic Cooperation Council
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NFIU	NATO Force Integration Unit
NRF	NATO Response Force
PFP	Partnership for Peace
OAR	Operation Atlantic Resolve
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
SNGP	Substantial NATO–Georgia Package
TFP	Tailored Forward Presence
UN	United Nations
VJTF	Very High Readiness Joint Task Force

1. Introduction: the Black Sea as a security space

The Black Sea region has an intricate history as a security space. It combines a central maritime space with limited access and littoral areas that link it to the regional security complexes of Europe, Eurasia (defined primarily as the post-Soviet space and by Russia's security policies in the area) and the Middle East, which often intersect and overlap.[1] The core Black Sea region conventionally brings together just the six littoral states—Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Turkey, and Ukraine. The boundaries ascribed to the region can, however, vary substantially depending on the particular geographical, historical or cultural perspective. Reflecting current security dynamics, the focus of this report is the wider Black sea region, bringing together the littoral states and a hinterland stretching across the South Caucasus, Moldova and parts of the Balkans (see figure 1.1).[2]

The definition of the Black Sea as a security space has changed through history, reflecting the balance of power in the region, the security actors involved and the military significance of the region for broader struggles. It has frequently been a contested security space, although often as part of wider geopolitical competition linking maritime and land-based struggles in the Caucasus, the Balkans, Central Europe and the Eurasian steppe. The region has also enjoyed periods of relative stability, usually as a result of incorporation into one particular hegemonic order, as was the case when the Black Sea was controlled by the Ottoman or Russian empires or the Soviet Union.

At the end of the cold war there was a pan-European effort to bridge historic divisions around the Black Sea and to forge a new security environment built on cooperation, shared rules and institutions as part of a wider European security order. Instead, today the Black Sea is experiencing militarization and a fragmentation of the political integration project.

While the catalyst for the current military build-up and division in the Black Sea was Russia's annexation of Crimea and the onset of conflict in eastern Ukraine during 2014, tensions have been present in the region from the earliest days of the post-cold war period. In the early 1990s, armed conflict over Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan, and Trans-Dniester in Moldova challenged efforts to forge peace in the wider Europe.[3] By the end of the decade, the transformation of intense armed conflicts into protracted conflicts fed into increasing friction between Russia and the Euro-Atlantic community—the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU).

[1] A regional security complex has been identified as a group of, primarily, states whose national security relations, including perceptions of threat, are 'so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analysed or resolved apart from one another'. Buzan, B. and Wæver, O., *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2003), p. 44.

[2] King, C., 'The wider Black Sea region in the 21st century', eds D. Hamilton and G. Mangott, *The Wider Black Sea Region in the 21st Century: Strategic, Economic and Energy Perspectives* (Center for Transatlantic Relations/Austrian Institute for International Affairs: Washington, DC/Vienna, 2008), pp. 1–5.

[3] On these conflicts see Klimenko, E., 'Protracted armed conflicts in the post-Soviet space and their impact on Black Sea security', SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security no. 2018/8, Dec. 2018.

Figure 1.1. The wider Black Sea region

Credit: Ahlenius, H., Nordpil, 2018.

The enlargement of NATO and the EU to include Bulgaria and Romania further raised tensions with Russia. Fighting between Russia and Georgia in August 2008 highlighted rising instability and insecurity in the Black Sea and the failure of the post-cold war European mechanisms for the prevention and management of conflicts in the region.

Today, as a result of the accumulation of unresolved conflicts, a steady increase in international tensions and a build-up of local military forces, the Black Sea security space has fractured.[4] It now acts simultaneously as a key security interface between Russia and the Euro-Atlantic community involving states variously aligned with the two competing security communities (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) and the location of a set of active and protracted

[4] On the military build-up see Wezeman, S. T. and Kuimova, A., 'Bulgaria and Black Sea security', SIPRI Background Paper, Dec. 2018; Kuimova, A. and Wezeman, S. T., 'Georgia and Black Sea security', SIPRI Background Paper, Dec. 2018; Wezeman, S. T. and Kuimova, A., 'Romania and Black Sea security', SIPRI Background Paper, Dec. 2018; Kuimova, A. and Wezeman, S. T., 'Russia and Black Sea security', SIPRI Background Paper, Dec. 2018; Wezeman, S. T. and Kuimova, A., 'Turkey and Black Sea security', SIPRI Background Paper, Dec. 2018; and Wezeman, S. T. and Kuimova, A., 'Ukraine and Black Sea security', SIPRI Background Paper, Dec. 2018.

conflicts (Crimea and eastern Ukraine, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Trans-Dniester).

At the core of the emergence of the Black Sea region as a fragmented and contested security space is the breakdown of efforts to incorporate Russia into a single European security framework. Instead, for Russia ensuring a leading role in the Black Sea region has become essential to its own regional, and in recent years global, security agenda.

The Black Sea region has, thus, emerged as a distinct security space—one of the two key security regions in Europe, alongside the Baltic Sea. The region is defined by its own local and national dynamics and also the wider rivalry between Russia and NATO. As a result, the region is now the focus for a substantial build-up of local and international military forces with the most advanced weapons, including nuclear-capable systems, in close proximity to each other and to active and protracted conflicts. The risks for conflict in the Black Sea region are magnified by the emergence of competing, and increasingly mutually hostile, security narratives in the region, underpinned by growing threat perceptions.

It is the combination of these various insecurities and threat perceptions that makes the Black Sea region a uniquely unpredictable and potentially high-risk region. At the same time, regional security arrangements designed to defuse and manage tensions are being rejected or ignored.

In this environment, there is an urgent need to explore options to move away from military confrontation and to rebuild confidence and cooperative approaches to security. To help achieve this aim, SIPRI launched the Black Sea Regional Security Initiative to promote understanding of security developments in the region and their drivers, to chart mutual threat perceptions, and to identify where conflict risks exist. By establishing a baseline for understanding security developments in the Black Sea region, the project aims to create a starting point for dialogue on how to rebuild collective security.[5]

This paper provides an overview of the development of the Black Sea as a security space from the 1990s. It charts the emergence of confrontation between Russia and NATO in the Black Sea region and how the relationship between the major military blocs has been shaped by local and regional security dynamics. By setting out a single, comprehensive account of the sources of instability and confrontation, the paper will help to overcome the polarization that has often characterized accounts of the region in recent years and will, thereby, offer a first step towards re-establishing shared understandings of the security of the Black Sea.

This paper continues in chapter 2 by describing the nature of the Black Sea security space, how it has evolved and what approaches to regional insecurity have been sought in the post-cold war period. Chapter 3 outlines the growing military confrontation between NATO and Russia in the Black Sea region following the

[5] As a part of the project SIPRI has published a series of background papers to assess the militarization of the Black Sea over recent years. Wezeman and Kuimova (note 4); and Kuimova and Wezeman (note 4). A further paper analyses the protracted conflicts in the Black Sea region. Klimenko (note 3). In addition, SIPRI hosted a workshop, entitled 'Shifting Black Sea Security Dynamics', 7–8 Dec. 2017.

annexation of Crimea and the start of the conflict in eastern Ukraine in 2014. Chapter 4 charts the mutual security perceptions that inform the approaches of Russia and NATO to the Black Sea region. Chapter 5 describes the nature of the Black Sea security space that has emerged since 2014 by identifying possible areas for risks to peace and security. The paper concludes in chapter 6 by suggesting steps to improve relations around the Black Sea.

2. The evolution of the Black Sea as a security space

The modern history of Black Sea security

Controlling access to and exit from the Black Sea through the Turkish Straits—the Dardanelles, the Sea of Marmara and the Bosporus, which connect the Black Sea to the Aegean and Mediterranean seas—has long been a strategic question.[6] For much of modern history, notably from the 15th century, the Ottoman Empire was the dominant power in the region, ruling most of the surrounding territories, and the Black Sea was regarded as a Turkish 'lake'.[7] The 1568–70 Russo–Turkish War, the first of 12 such wars, signalled the onset of a struggle for domination over the Black Sea region between the Russian and Ottoman empires that lasted until World War I of 1914–18.

A turning point for the Ottomans came in 1783 with the loss of Crimea to the Russian Empire. Further Russian expansion into what are now the territories of Ukraine and Moldova and the North and South Caucasus and growing influence in the Balkans gradually transformed Russia into the leading Black Sea power. For Russia, control of Crimea and wider expansion around the Black Sea provided the foundation for the emergence of the Russian Empire as a global power. From its position on the Black Sea, Russian naval forces extended their reach into the Aegean and Mediterranean seas.

The steady decline of Ottoman power during the 19th century and up to the onset of World War I pushed the Eastern Question—how the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire would affect the balance of power in Europe—to the forefront of Europe's security agenda. The key issue within the Eastern Question was control of entry into and departure from the Black Sea through the Turkish Straits.

The 1936 Montreux Convention gave Turkey control of the Turkish Straits and set out regulations for the transit of warships.[8] The convention established restrictions on the military vessels of non-Black Sea states passing through the straits in terms of the tonnage, number of vessels, the duration of a visit and requirements for pre-notification of any passage.[9] Non-Black Sea states may not pass submarines through the Turkish Straits, while the movement of submarines of Black Sea countries are tightly restricted. Transit constraints also prevent aircraft carriers from passing through the straits.[10]

[6] For an overview of the region's history see King, C., *The Black Sea: A History* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2004).

[7] King (note 6), pp. 125, 133–34.

[8] Convention Regarding the Régime of the Straits, signed at Montreux 20 July 1936, entered into force 9 Nov. 1936, *League of Nations Treaty Series*, vol. 173, nos 4001–32 (1936–37).

[9] No more than 9 non-Black Sea state warships may be in course of transit through the Straits. The maximum aggregate tonnage of non-Black Sea state warships in the Straits may not exceed 15 000 tons (15 240 metric tonnes). In most circumstances, the total aggregate tonnage of warships that non-Black Sea states may have in the Black Sea is limited to no more than 30 000 tons (30 481 metric tonnes) and they are permitted to stay in the Black Sea for no longer than 21 days.

[10] Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Implementation of the Montreux Convention', [n.d.].

With the conclusion of World War II in 1945, the Soviet Union sought to revise the Montreux Convention to its advantage through bilateral negotiations with Turkey and a show of military force: the Turkish Straits crisis of 1946. In part to resist this pressure, Turkey turned to the United States for support and joined NATO in 1952, thereby establishing one of the main pillars of the European security orders in the cold war and post-cold war periods.

With Soviet territorial annexations prior to, during and after World War II, the establishment of pro-Soviet Communist regimes in Central Europe, and the creation of the Warsaw Treaty Organization in 1955, the Black Sea came largely under Soviet control for the duration of the cold war, with the exception of Turkey's coast and the Turkish Straits.

The Black Sea in the post-cold war period

The collapse of the Communist bloc from the late 1980s and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 marked the emergence of independent littoral states—Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine—as the principal means to organize the political and security space of the Black Sea. Subsequently, however, a further fragmentation of the wider Black Sea region occurred as several of the newly independent states were challenged by secessionist conflicts and the establishment of de facto states: Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan, and Trans-Dniester in Moldova. The Russian Government fought two wars against Chechen rebels and Chechnya was a de facto independent state in 1997–99, while the North Caucasus has experienced various nationalist and Islamist-inspired insurgencies. Elsewhere, quasi-separatist regimes—Adjara in Georgia, Gagauzia in Moldova and Crimea in Ukraine—highlighted further potential fault lines across the region.[11]

Despite the conflicts of the early 1990s, the new security arrangements for the Black Sea region continued to be underpinned by the principles and conventions of European security established through the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), later named the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and enshrined in the 1990 Charter of Paris for a New Europe.[12] As such, Black Sea regional security issues were bound within key agreements, notably arms control agreements (and principally the 1990 Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, the CFE Treaty), and the conflict prevention and management mechanisms of the OSCE institutions.[13]

Within the Black Sea region itself, security challenges were to be dealt with according to the principle of 'Common Regional Problems, Cooperative Regional Solutions'.[14] On this basis, the dominant concept to emerge in the 1990s was the

[11] Melvin, N. J., *Building Stability in the North Caucasus*, SIPRI Policy Paper no. 16 (SIPRI: Stockholm, May 2007).

[12] Charter of Paris for a New Europe, signed 21 Nov. 1990.

[13] Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE Treaty), signed 19 Nov. 1990, entered into force 9 Nov. 1992.

[14] Asmus, R. D. and Jackson, B. P., 'The Black Sea and the frontiers of freedom', *Policy Review*, June/July 2004.

forging of a unitary Black Sea through enhanced regional cooperation. Initially, this idea was promoted through a set of regionally led initiatives.

Black Sea regional organizations

The collapse of the Soviet Union removed many of the economic and political barriers that had previously isolated the Black Sea from the neighbouring Mediterranean, Balkan and Caspian regions. Increased regional cooperation was seen as a key means to promote connectivity and, thereby, to enhance trust and confidence through building interdependence.

The central and most inclusive framework to emerge in the Black Sea region was the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC). BSEC was envisioned as a cooperative political and economic initiative to promote regional integration, to serve as a forum for security and stability efforts and, thus, a means to diffuse potential post-cold war crises. It was first launched in 1992 and its 1998 charter formally established it as a regional economic organization.[15] BSEC currently represents an estimated 335 million people in 12 member states across the Black Sea region and the Balkans—Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine.

In the sphere of traditional security, the central regional post-cold war initiative was the Black Sea Naval Cooperation Task Group (BLACKSEAFOR), initiated by Turkey in 2001. The framework promotes maritime cooperation between the six littoral states, focused on preventative measures against terrorism, organized crime and trafficking. Biannual naval exercises with navies of all six states served to improve military interaction, although exercises were limited, in part due to the poor condition of some member states' naval assets.[16] BLACKSEAFOR was effectively suspended following Russia's annexation of Crimea.[17]

In 2004 Turkey initiated Black Sea Harmony, a naval operation that was launched in accordance with a series of United Nations Security Council resolutions aimed at deterring terrorism, asymmetric threats and threats from weapons of mass destruction in the Black Sea, as well as ensuring the security of the Turkish Straits.[18] The operation was closely affiliated with NATO and complemented NATO's Operation Active Endeavour in the Mediterranean Sea. Although it was originally a national operation, Black Sea Harmony broadened to become multinational when Turkey extended invitations to each Black Sea littoral state to join.

Although it is not focused on the Black Sea, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) originally had several members from the wider Black Sea region—Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine—when it was established in 1991. The CIS also has a security dimension: in the 1990s CIS peace operations were deployed in the Black Sea region, although they consisted almost

[15] Charter of the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, signed 5 June 1998, entered into force 1 May 1999.

[16] Gorenburg, D., 'Ten years of BlackSeaFor: a partial assessment', Russian Military Reform, 11 May 2011.

[17] Kucera, J., 'Black Sea naval cooperation another casualty of Ukraine war', Eurasianet, 23 July 2014.

[18] Turkish Naval Forces, 'Operation Black Sea Harmony (OBSH)', 2 Mar. 2016.

exclusively of Russian military personnel.[19] Georgia withdrew from the CIS following the fighting with Russia in 2008, and Ukraine withdrew in May 2018.[20]

The origins of the Russia-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) lie in the 1992 CIS Collective Security Treaty. In 2002 the six remaining members of the treaty—Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan—established the CSTO.[21] On 6 October 2007 the CSTO members agreed to a major expansion of the organization in order to create a CSTO peacekeeping force that could deploy under a UN mandate (but also without one) in its member states. The expansion also allowed members to buy Russian weapons at Russian domestic price levels. Within the wider Black Sea region, the CSTO has been one of the principal means for Russia and Armenia to develop their military cooperation.

In 1997 four states in the Black Sea region—Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova (collectively GUAM)—launched a new forum for cooperation. The grouping enjoyed support from the USA and West European countries, and was widely viewed as an attempt to create a bloc within the CIS to counter perceived Russian attempts to maintain political and military control over its neighbours.[22] A 2001 charter (signed also by Uzbekistan, which later withdrew) established the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development–GUAM. While the grouping splintered as the countries adopted different approaches to their relations with Russia, it revived following the annexation of Crimea, reflecting a renewed convergence of geopolitical purpose among its members.[23]

Russia's approach to Black Sea security before 2014

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia initially followed a strong vector towards Euro-Atlantic integration in its foreign and security policy, while seeking to maintain a leading role in the former territory of the Soviet Union. The onset of a set of localized conflicts in the newly independent states—in Georgia (Abkhazia and South Ossetia), Moldova (Trans-Dniester), Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh) and, critically, Russia itself (Chechnya)—promoted a reorientation of Russia's focus onto its near neighbourhood.

Russia and secessionist conflicts. During the early 1990s, Russia faced security challenges linked to secessionist conflicts in a number of the newly independent states of the wider Black Sea region and within its own borders in the North Caucasus. Russia's strong interest in these conflicts was underlined by the involvement of individual Russian military personnel and units in the conflicts in various capacities, diplomacy by Russia (e.g. in Nagorno-Karabakh) and the eventual deployment of Russia-led CIS peace operations (in Moldova and Georgia), which played a central role in ending active fighting and transforming the

[19] See Klimenko (note 3).

[20] Ponomarenko, I., 'Ukraine withdraws all envoys from CIS bodies', Kyiv Post, 19 May 2018.

[21] Treaty on Collective Security, signed 15 May 1992, entered into force 20 Apr. 1994, *United Nations Treaty Series*, vol. 1894 (1995); and Charter of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, signed 7 Oct. 2002, entered into force 18 Sep. 2003, *United Nations Treaty Series*, vol. 2235 (2005).

[22] Socor, V., 'GUAM at ten', Eurasia Daily Monitor, 20 June 2007.

[23] Shiriyev, Z., 'Is GUAM making a comeback?', Eurasianet, 5 May 2017.

disputes into protracted conflicts. Subsequently, Russia supported negotiations to resolve the conflicts, while maintaining strong Russian interests in respect to the breakaway regions.

At the same time, Russia's presence in the South Caucasus was diminished. In the late 1990s Russia came under international pressure to close its military bases in Georgia, notably at the 1999 OSCE Ministerial Meeting in Istanbul. Russia made a political commitment at that meeting to withdraw its military forces from Georgia and Moldova—the so-called Istanbul commitments.[24] Subsequently, Russia closed its facilities in Georgia by 2007, except at the Gudauta base in Abkhazia, withdrew from its only military facility in Azerbaijan in 2012 but maintained military forces in Moldova.[25]

The wars of the North Caucasus played a particularly important role in the evolution of Russia's approach to security in the Black Sea region. The defeat of Russian forces in the 1994–96 First Chechen War and their subsequent withdrawal from Chechnya was seen as humiliating for Russia and as raising the possibility of a break-up of the country as a whole. The rise to power of Vladimir Putin as president of Russia in 1999–2000 and his subsequent consolidation of political power was closely associated with the fight against separatist and religious extremist forces in the North Caucasus.

The centrepiece of Putin's effort to re-establish federal control in the south of the country was the 1999–2009 Second Chechen War. During this conflict, Russia began to reform its counterterrorism policy and to gradually reorganize its armed forces, including developing many of the military techniques subsequently identified as 'hybrid warfare'—generally understood to mean a combination of conventional warfare with irregular tactics and information and cyberwarfare.[26] At the same time, the Russian Government was reorganized into a centralized system, often in response to terrorist incidents linked to the North Caucasus conflict, notably the attack by militants on a school in Beslan, North Ossetia, in 2004.[27]

During the decade-long Second Chechen War, the southern districts of Russia became increasingly militarized; paramilitary forces were built up from pro-government Chechens and Cossacks, and tensions grew between Russia and Georgia over allegations that Chechen militants were operating from Georgia. At the same time, Russia's external policies, notably in its near neighbourhood, grew more assertive, reflecting Putin's aim to reposition Russia internationally as a great power with security responsibilities in the post-Soviet 'sphere of interest'.[28]

[24] OSCE, 'Istanbul Document 1999', Nov. 1999.

[25] Antidze, M., 'Russia closes last military base in Georgia', Reuters, 13 Nov. 2007; and Sputnik, 'Russia confirms pullout from Gabala Radar in Azerbaijan', 11 Dec. 2012. On the forces in Moldova see below.

[26] Chivvis, C. S., Rand Corporation, 'Understanding Russian "hybrid warfare" and what can be done about it', Testimony to the US House of Representatives Armed Services Committee, 22 Mar. 2017.

[27] Omelicheva, M. Y., 'After Beslan: changes in Russia's counterterrorism policy', E-International Relations, 15 Oct. 2012.

[28] Trenin, D., 'Russia reborn: reimagining Moscow's foreign policy', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 88, no. 6 (Nov./Dec. 2009), pp. 64–78.

Following the 2003 Rose Revolution in Georgia, its protracted conflicts came to dominate the Georgian–Russian bilateral relationship, notably as a means to influence the government of Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili. NATO and EU enlargement in the Black Sea region and the prospect of Ukraine, Moldova and countries in the South Caucasus joining the Euro-Atlantic community fed growing tensions between Russia and its neighbours. As a result, Russia increasingly viewed the protracted conflicts of the Black Sea region as part of its relations with the EU and NATO—as a means to slow and even prevent further Euro-Atlantic expansion.

Tensions rose as a result of the agreement at the NATO summit in Bucharest in April 2008 that Georgia and Ukraine would eventually become NATO members, combined with Georgia's efforts to alter the South Ossetian political situation and a more assertive Russian regional policy. The fighting between Georgia and Russia in August 2008 marked a major shift in the security situation around the Black Sea. Georgia's defeat was followed by recognition by Russia of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and the extension of Russian security guarantees to the de facto states.[29] Subsequently, Russia increased its security forces in the breakaway regions, thereby ensuring its military control over the eastern littoral of the Black Sea. Concerned by significant shortcomings in its combat performance during the conflict, Russia also initiated a process of military modernization.[30]

While Russia was focused on security in the North and South Caucasus, maintaining the military facilities in Crimea, notably Sevastopol as the home base of the Black Sea Fleet, remained a priority. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Soviet Black Sea Fleet was divided between the Russian and Ukrainian navies. The Russian Black Sea Fleet continued to have its headquarters in the Ukrainian port city of Sevastopol in Crimea. Russia abrogated territorial claims to Ukraine in a bilateral 1997 treaty and agreed a long-term lease on land, facilities and resources in Sevastopol and elsewhere in Crimea in a separate but related agreement.[31]

Following the fighting in South Ossetia in 2008, when Russian ships were deployed from Sevastopol to land troops on the Georgian coast, the Ukrainian Government under President Viktor Yushchenko (in office 2005–10) suggested that Russia's lease on military facilities in Crimea might not be extended beyond the original term of the 1997 agreement, and that Russian military forces would then have to leave Sevastopol by 2017.[32] However, with the disintegration of the political movement formed by the 2004–2005 Orange Revolution, Viktor Yanukovych was elected president of Ukraine in February 2010.[33] He was widely

[29] Klimenko (note 3).

[30] Kuimova and Wezeman, 'Russia and Black Sea security' (note 4).

[31] Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership between Ukraine and the Russian Federation, signed 31 May 1997, entered into force 1 Apr. 1999, *United Nations Treaty Series*; and [Agreement between the Russian Federation and Ukraine on the Status and Conditions of Stationing of the Black Sea Fleet of the Russian Federation on Ukrainian Territory], signed 28 May 1997, entered into force 12 July 1999 (in Russian).

[32] McElroy, D., 'Ukraine imposes restrictions on Russian navy', *The Telegraph*, 13 Aug. 2008.

[33] Harding, L., 'Viktor Yanukovych promises Ukraine will embrace Russia', *The Guardian*, 5 Mar. 2010;

viewed in the Euro-Atlantic community as supporting closer relations with Russia. On 27 April 2010 Russia and Ukraine signed an agreement on the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Ukraine: in exchange for lower prices on Russian gas for Ukraine, the agreement extended the Russian Navy's lease on Crimean facilities for 25 years beyond 2017 (to 2042), with an option to prolong the lease in 5-year extensions.[34]

Despite Russia's strategic aim of retaining a military presence in Crimea, the Black Sea Fleet was severely neglected in the two decades after the end of the cold war. Under the terms of the 2010 agreement, any modernization of the Black Sea Fleet and the land-based Russian forces in Crimea was restricted by the need to remain within defined force sizes, in line with 1990 CFE Treaty commitments. These constraints on Russia's ability to update and expand its Black Sea Fleet was an increasing source of friction between Russia and Ukraine in 2013.[35] In part to sidestep some of these restrictions, and in case Ukraine eventually required Russia to leave Crimea, the Russian Government launched a modernization of the military port at Novorossiysk on the Russian Black Sea coast.

Russia consolidates its Black Sea military presence. As Russia's relations with Georgia deteriorated by the mid-2000s, Russia's position shifted towards stronger support for Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Following the fighting in South Ossetia in 2008, Russia recognized the independence of the breakaway regions and during 2009–10 it cemented its military presence in the South Caucasus by signing security agreements with Abkhazia and South Ossetia and modernizing the military equipment deployed to its bases in the region.[36] A 2010 agreement on a joint Russian base in Abkhazia allows Russia to operate a base (the 7th Russian Military Base) for 49 years, with a possibility of automatic extension every 15 years after that.[37] The permanent strength of Russian military forces in Abkhazia following the events of 2008 is estimated at 4000–4500 personnel, with an additional estimated 1300 Russian border guards.[38]

The 2008 Russian–South Ossetian Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance contains a mutual defence guarantee in case of attack.[39] Under a 2010 agreement, Russia can operate a joint military base (the 4th Russian Military Base) in South Ossetia for 49 years, with a possibility of automatic extension

and Levy, C. J., 'Toppled in Ukraine but nearing a comeback', *New York Times*, 15 Jan. 2010.

[34] [Agreement between Ukraine and the Russian Federation on the Stationing of the Black Sea Fleet of the Russian Federation on the Territory of Ukraine], signed 21 Apr. 2010, entered into force 14 May 2010 (in Ukrainian); and Harding, L., 'Ukraine extends lease for Russia's Black Sea Fleet', *The Guardian*, 21 Apr. 2010.

[35] Bugriy, M., 'The future of the Russian Black Sea Fleet's bases: Novorossiysk versus Sevastopol', Eurasia Daily Monitor, 6 Sep. 2013.

[36] Klimenko (note 3).

[37] [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); and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 'Russia gains military base in Abkhazia', 17 Feb. 2010.

[38] Batashvili, D., 'Russia troop deployments menace Georgia,' Civil.ge, 4 April 2017; and Facon, I., *Russian Military Presence in the Eastern Partnership Countries* (European Parliament, Directorate General for External Policies: Brussels, July 2016), p. 29.

[39] [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).

every 15 years after that.[40] The overall permanent strength of the Russian military in South Ossetia is estimated to be about 4000–4500 personnel, although it fluctuates regularly.[41]

Armenia was a founding member of the CSTO and is the only member in the South Caucasus. Since the early 1990s, Russia has maintained a strategic military force in Armenia, located at three bases. The Russian 102nd Military Base at Gyumri, close to the Turkish border, hosts tanks, infantry fighting vehicles and artillery. The Russian 3624th Airbase at Erebuni airport, near Yerevan, hosts MiG-29 and Sukhoi combat aircraft and Mi-24 and Mi-8 helicopters. A base near the city of Meghri, close to the Iranian border, hosts an estimated 200 Russian border guards.[42] In total, an estimated 5000 Russian military personnel are deployed in Armenia.

The 102nd Military Base was established in 1995 from Russian troops already stationed in Armenia under a treaty signed in March that year.[43] The base is a constant combat readiness formation. A joint Armenian–Russian group of forces was formally established in 2000, involving the Russian bases in Armenia and elements of Armenia's 5th Army Corps, deployed along the Armenia–Turkey border.[44]

The 1995 treaty was amended by a 2010 protocol to expanded the Russian mission from the previous aim of protecting the interests of Russia to ensuring the security of Armenia.[45] The protocol also grants Russia the right to use the Gyumri base until 2044, with the option for automatic prolongation every five years after that.[46] As part of the agreement, Russia agreed to provide Armenia with advanced armaments, while a separate agreement provides for military assistance to support the purchase of the new systems. Following the agreement, Russia modernized its military forces in Armenia, notably with an upgraded MiG-29 aircraft squadron and the deployment of a squadron of Mi-24 and Mi-8 helicopters. The ground forces were also rearmed with reconnaissance drones.[47]

Russia was also a key security actor in the protracted conflict that developed in Moldova from the early 1990s. The Soviet 14th Guards Army was originally

[40] [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).

[41] Batashvili (note 38); and Facon (note 38), p. 28.

[42] Facon (note 38), p. 26.

[43] [Treaty between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Armenia on the Russian Military Base on the Territory of the Republic of Armenia], signed 16 Mar. 1995, entered into force 29 Aug. 1997 (in Russian).

[44] Sanamyan, E., '"Joint" Armenian–Russian force: what it is & what it isn't', University of Southern California, Dornsife Institute of Armenian Studies, 1 Dec. 2016.

[45] [Protocol No. 5 between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Armenia on Amending the Agreement between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Armenia on the Russian Military Base on the Territory of the Republic of Armenia of 16 March 1995], signed 20 Aug. 2010, entered into force 6 July 2011 (in Russian); and O'Rourke, B., 'Russia, Armenia sign extended defense pact', Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 20 Aug. 2010.

[46] President of Russia, 'Ratification of Protocol No. 5 between Russia and Armenia', 27 June 2011.

[47] TASS, 'Russia reinforces its military air base in Armenia with 6 helicopters', 21 Dec. 2015; TASS, 'Russian airbase in Armenia to receive MiG-29 aircraft and one Mi-8 helicopter in 2016', 5 Jan. 2016; and TASS, 'Russian military base in Armenia receives modern drones', 11 Jan. 2016.

largely based to the east of the Dniester river in Moldova. Early in 1992 elements of the former Guards Army became the Russian 14th Army. When conflict erupted in 1992 between forces loyal to the Moldovan authorities and the self-declared Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic (also known as Trans-Dniester), elements of the Russian Army defected to the Trans-Dniester side with their equipment.[48] In July the Russian Army entered the conflict directly, bringing fighting quickly to a halt. The conflict was transformed into a protracted conflict, mediated by the OSCE. A separate Russian military unit was moved to the region as part of the Russian–Moldovan–Trans-Dniestrian peace operation. In 1995 the Russian 14th Army became the Operational Group of Russian Forces in Moldova.

According to the Istanbul commitments, Russia undertook to withdraw its forces from Trans-Dniester by the end of 2002. Russia subsequently maintained its forces in Trans-Dniester, arguing that they were essential to prevent a return to violence and to guard a large Soviet-era arms dump.[49] There are an estimated 1500 Russian military personnel in Trans-Dniester, plus several hundred Russian peacekeeping troops, alongside 5000–6000 members in the Trans-Dniestrian defence forces.[50]

Euro-Atlantic enlargement

From the turn of the millennium, an increased engagement by the EU and NATO with states around the Black Sea began to overshadow regional initiatives and introduced a new vector of international security relations. The enlargement programmes of the EU and NATO to include more Black Sea states was seen by influential Western commentators as an opportunity to anchor the Black Sea region in a larger strategy to project stability and democracy into a wider European space, and beyond into the broader Middle East.[51]

The accession of Bulgaria and Romania to NATO in March 2004 and to the EU in January 2007 marked an important shift in the security landscape of the Black Sea. While Tukey, as a NATO member since 1952, had played a key role in respect to the Black Sea, the enlargement to include two more littoral states gave the Euro-Atlantic community a potentially commanding position on the Black Sea. This position was further reinforced by the close relationships that developed with Georgia, notably from 2004, and Ukraine, as they turned towards the EU and NATO.

Full membership of NATO meant that Bulgaria and Romania were integrated into NATO command structures and military exercises.[52] The USA stepped up its bilateral presence in Bulgaria and Romania with the creation of new military

[48] Klimenko (note 3).

[49] Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'State Secretary and Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin's interview with Kommersant newspaper, October 2, 2017', 3 Oct. 2017.

[50] Facon (note 38), p. 15; Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 'Russia objects to Moldovan call for removing troops from Transdniester', 24 Aug. 2017; and Conley, H. A. and Ruy, D., 'The Kremlin playbook: Moldova', Center for Strategic and International Studies, 19 July 2018.

[51] Asmus and Jackson (note 14).

[52] See Wezeman and Kuimova, 'Bulgaria and Black Sea security' (note 4); and Wezeman and Kuimova, 'Romania and Black Sea security' (note 4).

infrastructure, facilities and bilateral exercises. With the Joint Task Force East (JTFE) framework agreement, the USA established a long-term presence (10-year agreements signed in 2005 and 2006) in the region through the shared used of some military bases in Bulgaria and Romania and the deployment of rotational forces.[53]

The decision by the USA to deploy an anti-ballistic missile (ABM) system in Romania and the fighting in South Ossetia in August 2008 led to an increased security focus by the USA on the region.[54] At the same time, despite the integration of Bulgaria and Romania into the Euro-Atlantic community and tensions between Russia and the West stemming from the fighting in South Ossetia, territorial defence and deterrence in the Black Sea region were not a priority for the Euro-Atlantic community until 2014. Before then, there was little indication that the NATO countries were ready to engage in collective defence in the Black Sea region.

In Georgia and Ukraine the 'colour revolutions' (the 2003 Rose Revolution and 2004–2005 Orange Revolution, respectively) brought to power governments that sought closer cooperation with the Euro-Atlantic community, including eventual membership of NATO and the EU. At the 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest, the members stopped short of granting Membership Action Plans to the two countries, but the summit declaration stated that 'NATO welcomes Ukraine's and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO. We agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO.'[55]

Following the EU's expansion to the Black Sea in 2007, it took a more active role in the region and, reflecting the new geography of the EU following enlargement, sought to add a regional dimension to its policies on South Eastern Europe. At this stage, EU expansion—unlike NATO enlargement—was not seen as threatening by Russia. The German EU Presidency of 2007, in particular, gave priority to stability and security in the Black Sea with the initiation of the EU Black Sea Synergy programme.[56] The programme was designed to promote regional cooperation between Black Sea littoral countries in 13 target areas, including democracy and good governance, the environment, movement and maritime policy, trade, transportation, energy, and security initiatives.

The EU had conceived the European Neighbourhood Policy after its round of enlargement in 2004 to promote stability in the regions surrounding the EU through greater integration short of full membership. Enlargement to the shores of the Black Sea also saw a further shift east in the ambitions of the Euro-Atlantic

[53] Moldovan, D., Pantev, P. and Rhodes, M., *Joint Task Force East and Shared Military Basing in Romania and Bulgaria*, Occasional Paper Series no. 21 (George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies: Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Aug. 2009); Agreement between the United States of America and Romania Regarding the Activities of United States Forces Located on the Territory of Romania, 6 Dec. 2005; and Agreement between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Republic of Bulgaria in Defense Cooperation, 28 Apr. 2006.

[54] Rozoff, R., 'US and NATO accelerate military build-up in Black Sea region', Global Research, 20 May 2010.

[55] NATO, 'Bucharest summit declaration', 3 Apr. 2008.

[56] European Commission, 'Black Sea Synergy: a new regional cooperation initiative', Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, 1 Apr. 2007.

community: the EU aimed to further enhance its influence on its eastern borders with the launch of its Strategy for Central Asia in 2007 and the development of the Eastern Partnership for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine in 2008.[57]

With the re-election of Vladimir Putin as president of Russia in 2012, the Russian authorities launched the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), an economic and political project designed to promote integration in the former Soviet space and to counter Euro-Atlantic initiatives. Tensions emerged between the Russia-led project and the EU, notably over closer relations with Armenia and Ukraine.[58] Armenia indicated in September 2013 that it favoured joining the EAEU, rather than concluding a free trade agreement with the EU. The decision followed discussions with President Putin in which security issues reportedly took a leading place.[59]

In November 2013, following a prolonged period of jockeying between the EU and Russia, Ukrainian President Yanukovych rejected an EU association agreement and accepted an offer from Russia of loans and closer relations.[60] This decision sparked popular protests across Ukraine, notably in Independence Square (Maidan Nezalezhnosti) in the centre of Kyiv. These 'Euromaidan' protests led to violent confrontations between protesters and security forces in Kyiv and other cities and towns in early 2014. In February Yanukovych fled to Russia.

Following a covert Russian military intervention in the Ukrainian territory of Crimea, the region was annexed by Russia in March 2014. Russia's actions were widely condemned, notably by the EU, NATO and the other members of the Group of Eight (G8). It was seen as a major blow to European security agreements, in particular the 1975 Helsinki Accords and the 1994 Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances—a political agreement entered into by Russia, the USA and the United Kingdom that provided security assurances against threats or use of force against Ukraine when it abandoned the nuclear weapons inherited from the Soviet Union and joined the 1968 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.[61]

From the beginning of March 2014 protests in support of Russia and against the new government in Kyiv emerged in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine. Soon afterwards, armed violence began in

[57] European Commission, 'European Neighbourhood Policy: strategy paper', Communication for the Commission, COM(2004) 373 final, 12 May 2004; Council of the European Union, 'The EU and Central Asia: strategy for a new partnership', 31 May 2007; and European Commission, 'Eastern Partnership', Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council, COM(2008) 823 final, 3 Dec. 2008.

[58] Peter, L., 'Armenia rift over trade deal fuels EU–Russia tension', BBC News, 5 Sep. 2013; and Silke, A., 'EU embrace of Ukraine fuels Russia tensions' BBC News, 15 Oct. 2013.

[59] Grigoryan, A., 'Armenia chooses customs union over EU association agreement', *CACI Analyst*, 18 Sep. 2013.

[60] Traynor, I. and Grytsenko, O., 'Ukraine suspends talks on EU trade pact as Putin wins tug of war', *The Guardian*, 21 Nov. 2013.

[61] [Memorandum on Security Guarantees in Connection with the Accession of Ukraine to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons], signed and entered into force 5 Dec. 1994 (in Ukrainian).

these regions and quickly escalated into an armed conflict between the Ukrainian armed forces and military units of the self-declared Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic.[62] NATO has offered evidence that Russian military forces and equipment are closely involved in the conflict.[63]

[62] Klimenko (note 3).
[63] NATO, 'NATO releases satellite imagery showing Russian combat troops inside Ukraine', Aug. 2014.

3. The post-2014 Black Sea security environment

Following Russia's annexation of Crimea, the political and security environment in the Black Sea shifted rapidly. Relations between the Euro-Atlantic community and Russia deteriorated further when the EU and the USA imposed sanctions on Russia for its actions. Regional cooperation in the Black Sea has been severely hampered and in many cases has broken down. The conflicts between Russia and Ukraine and Russia and Georgia and tensions between Russia and Turkey effectively paralysed BLACKSEAFOR, and Russia suspended its participation in the initiative in November 2015.

In place of the 1990s focus on promoting regional cooperation, militarization has become the dominant security paradigm.[64] Russia was the first major military power to modernize its forces in the region, following the fighting in South Ossetia in 2008. This has been a far reaching and substantial process involving considerable expenditure.[65] Georgia has also sought to update its military, but its military spending has not increased substantially.[66] Following the loss of Crimea and with the ongoing conflict in the Donbas, Ukraine substantially increased its military spending, focusing notably on land warfare.[67] Since 2014, NATO countries, led by the USA, have increased their air, land and sea military deployments to the Black Sea region and have prepared to reinforce the region in a crisis.[68] The new focus on building up military force in the Black Sea follows a build-up of arms in the South Caucasus from the mid-2000s as a result of an arms race between Armenia and Azerbaijan.[69]

Russia's post-2014 approach to Black Sea security

The annexation of the Crimean peninsula marked a transformation of Russia's political and security position on the Black Sea. However, the change occurred against a background of the evolution of the country's military and security policies in the wider Black Sea region: indeed, Russia's policy of military modernization was launched, in significant part, in response to earlier local developments in the region. However, Russia's efforts to strengthen its military forces around the Black Sea have increasingly focused on NATO, notably through a substantial increase in military forces in Crimea, a strengthening of the Black Sea Fleet, a consolidation of its military presence in the South Caucasus and military alliance with Armenia, and improving political relations with Turkey.

[64] In charting the growing militarization of the Black Sea, this section analyses data from Jan. 2014 to Apr. 2018.

[65] Kuimova and Wezeman, 'Russia and Black Sea security' (note 4).

[66] Kuimova and Wezeman, 'Georgia and Black Sea security' (note 4).

[67] Wezeman and Kuimova, 'Ukraine and Black Sea security' (note 4).

[68] Wezeman and Kuimova, 'Bulgaria and Black Sea security' (note 4); and Wezeman and Kuimova, 'Romania and Black Sea security' (note 4).

[69] Roblin, S., 'This is the arms race from hell (and Russia is adding fuel to the fire)', *National Interest*, 21 Nov. 2016; and Kuchera, J., 'Azerbaijan acquires new missiles in escalating arms race with Armenia', Eurasianet, 12 June 2018.

The Black Sea has also emerged as the basis for Russian power projection beyond the region. As a result, the Southern Military District, headquartered in Rostov-on-Don in southern Russia, has become the locus of Russia's military power for three increasingly interlinked security zones: the Black Sea, the South Caucasus and the Middle East. Crimea has become the centrepiece of Russia's military force in the Black Sea region: it is the pivot for Russia's strategy of countering NATO in the immediate neighbourhood and has a leading role in the Middle East.

Russia's military modernization and deployment to Crimea

The fighting in South Ossetia in 2008 highlighted to Russia the need to modernize its armed forces, which had performed poorly in some areas during the conflict.[70] While Russia achieved its aims in South Ossetia in the absence of serious military opposition, Russian planners nonetheless felt that the Black Sea Fleet should be upgraded and expanded, and this became part of the broader naval modernization programme contained in the state armaments programme (gosudarstvennaia programma vooruzhenii) for 2011–20.[71]

Following the annexation of Crimea, Russia invalidated the 1997 Russian–Ukrainian agreements on the basing of the Black Sea Fleet and the 2010 deal that extended Russia's lease of naval facilities in Crimea until 2042.[72] In Moscow's view, this step freed the Russian Black Sea Fleet from the restraints placed on it under those agreements. In June 2014 President Putin instructed senior officials to work out a development plan for the Black Sea Fleet, which quickly led to increased investment.[73]

By early 2018 the Black Sea Fleet had received eight new combat ships: six submarines and two frigates. A further 3 frigates, at least 13 corvettes and 2 landing ships are in production for the Black Sea Fleet. The delivery of most of these has been delayed due to problems in production of the engines but all new ships are planned to be in service by 2020. Thus, by early 2018 the Black Sea Fleet is estimated to have consisted of 21 surface combat ships and 7 submarines. Most of these (80 per cent of the fleet tonnage) are based in Sevastopol, Crimea, with others at the smaller bases of Novorossiysk and Feodosiya (which is also in Crimea). In addition, there were over 200 support vessels. Most were Soviet-era ships, some of which have been upgraded.[74]

The Russian Government has also allocated funding to upgrade facilities of the Sevastopol and Novorossiysk naval bases for greater operational readiness. Major

[70] Vendil Pallin, C. and Westerlund, F., 'Russia's war in Georgia: lessons and consequences', *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, vol. 20, no. 2 (2009), p. 401.

[71] Schneider, A., 'Russia's Black Sea Fleet build-up and modernisation', Center for International Maritime Security, 28 Mar. 2017; and Kuimova and Wezeman, 'Russia and Black Sea security' (note 4).

[72] President of Russia, 'Termination of agreements on the presence of Russia's Black Sea Fleet in Ukraine', 2 Apr. 2014.

[73] Sputnik, 'Russia to draft Black Sea Fleet development program by June', 25 Apr. 2014; and Bodner, M., 'Black Sea rising: rebirth of a Russian fleet', *Moscow Times*, 17 Mar. 2016.

[74] Kuimova and Wezeman, 'Russia and Black Sea security' (note 4).

new military facilities will be completed by 2020 at Novorossiysk, which will become the headquarters of the Black Sea Fleet once completed.[75]

As the Black Sea Fleet has been modernized, Russia has also upgraded the defences of Crimea as a whole. S-300 anti-aircraft missiles were reportedly deployed in 2014, supplementing systems already present in Crimea.[76] In March 2015 President Putin announced that Bastion mobile coastal defence missile systems had been moved to Crimea.[77] The Bal anti-ship missile system is also reportedly deployed in Crimea.[78] In 2016 Russia is reported to have deployed its most advanced air defence system, the S-400, to Crimea, as well as Pantsir gun-missile systems.[79] In early 2017 it was reported that BUK missiles were to be deployed to Crimea, supplementing the existing shorter-range Osa missile system.[80] In December 2017 the Russian Ministry of Defence indicated that Russia had transferred a second S-400 battalion to Crimea.[81]

To supplement the new missile systems, Russia has also deployed Su-30SM and Su-24M aircraft and Ka-27M and Mi-24 attack helicopters to Crimea. The military infrastructure of Crimea has been upgraded with the refurbishment of Soviet-era bunkers, early warning stations, airfields, electronic warfare systems and new military units.[82] It is estimated that there are 20 000 Russian troops in Crimea, with plans to increase this number to as many as 40 000.

Speaking on 9 November 2017, Chief of the General Staff of the Russian armed forces, General Valery Gerasimov, claimed that Russia has installed a self-contained military formation in Crimea consisting of a naval base, an army corps, and an aviation and air defence division.[83] Taken together, these measures have been assessed as transforming Crimea into a 'nearly impenetrable' anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) zone in the Black Sea.[84]

The militarization of Crimea has involved the large-scale deployment of conventional forces but some of the systems are also considered to be nuclear-capable. In fact, Russia has deployed nuclear-capable tactical forces in Crimea for decades: for example, the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol includes cruisers, destroyers, frigates, corvettes and submarines capable of carrying nuclear-armed cruise missiles and torpedoes. However, the proliferation of such systems,

[75] Safronov, S., [Kasatonov named the terms of construction of the Novorossiysk base of the Black Sea Fleet], RIA Novosti, 28 July 2016 (in Russian).

[76] Sputnik, 'Russian military in Crimea receives S-300PMU surface-to-air missile systems', 3 Dec. 2014.

[77] Sputnik, 'Putin reveals details of Russia-Crimea reunification, Maidan in documentary', 15 Mar. 2015.

[78] Sputnik, 'Sentinels of peace: Crimeans resting easy with Bal and Bastion missiles on duty', 5 Nov. 2016.

[79] RT, 'Russian military in Crimea get advanced S-400 missile defense system, same as deployed in Syria', 12 Aug. 2016; Majumdar, D., 'Russia's scary S-400 air defense system is now protecting the skies above Crimea', *National Interest*, 14 Jan. 2017; and UAWire, 'Russia transferred new S-400 and Pantsir-S missile systems to Crimea', 9 Oct. 2016.

[80] Sputnik, 'On alert: Crimea to get BUK missile systems', 27 Feb. 2017.

[81] Sputnik, 'S-400 deployment in Crimea aiming to ensure Russia's security—Kremlin', 10 Jan. 2018.

[82] Reuters, 'In Crimea, Russia signals military resolve with new and revamped bases', 1 Nov. 2016.

[83] Rosbalt, [The Russian General Staff report the establishment of a self-contained group of forces in the Crimea], 7 Nov. 2017 (in Russian). See also Litovkin, N., 'What weapons has Crimea received after reunification with Russia?', Russia Beyond, 21 Mar. 2017.

[84] Kurtdarcan, B. and Kayaoğlu, B., 'Russia, Turkey and the Black Sea A2/AD arms race', *National Interest*, 5 Mar. 2017.

possibly including the deployment of nuclear weapons in Crimea, has raised serious concerns in Ukraine and the Euro-Atlantic community.[85]

President Putin has indicated that he would have been prepared to put Russia's nuclear forces on alert over the annexation of Crimea 2014.[86] In recent years, Russian military exercises, including those conducted in the Russian Southern Military District and focused on the Black Sea region, have reportedly involved the launch of nuclear-capable missile systems.[87] Some analysts have interpreted these actions as indicating that Russia has revised its position on the threshold for nuclear warfare.[88]

Russia's annexation of Crimea has had a profound impact on the military balance in the Black Sea region. With the Crimean peninsula, Russia now controls the second most important geographical point in the Black Sea, after the Turkish Straits. Russia has created an 'unsinkable aircraft carrier' in Crimea for its military. It is now able to dominate militarily Ukraine's remaining Black Sea littoral and, by taking full control of the Kerch Strait, has cut off access to and from the Azov Sea and Ukraine's coast there.

General Gerasimov, the chief of the Russian General Staff, has claimed that Russia has regained military supremacy over the Black Sea, which was lost to Turkey in the late 1990s.[89] Russian commentators generally present the increased military forces in Crimea as a counter to NATO, to prevent it from making advances in the region.[90] Dmitry Safonov, a Russian military analyst, has noted that:

> Crimea is a strategic element of Russia's defense capability. Who controls the peninsula controls all the waters of the Black Sea and whatever is happening on the territory of adjacent states. Russia will be able at any moment to dispatch its fleet and put a stop to any possible intervention.[91]

Western analysts, in contrast, have seen in the militarization of the peninsula an effort to create an A2/AD zone on the shores of the Black Sea.[92]

The annexation and militarization of Crimea has provided Russia with a regional power-projection platform. From the peninsula, Russia is able to extend its military reach over much of the Black Sea maritime domain, the South Caucasus littoral, Ukraine and Moldova, and, possibly, as far as Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey. In recent years, Russia has used Crimea to practice sea assaults,

[85] Sputnik, 'Moscow may deploy nuclear arms anywhere in Russia, including Crimea', 1 June 2015; Keck, Z., 'Russia threatens to deploy nuclear weapons in Crimea', *National Interest*, 1 June 2015; and NATO, 'Joint statement of the NATO–Ukraine Commission', 13 May 2015.

[86] Reuters, 'Putin says Russia was ready for nuclear confrontation over Crimea', 15 Mar. 2015.

[87] Sputnik, 'Watch launch of Iskander-M cruise missile during Russian military drills', 11 Sep. 2016.

[88] Schneider, M. B., 'Escalate to de-escalate', *Proceedings*, vol. 143, no. 2 (Feb. 2017); and Tertrais, B., 'Does Russia really include limited nuclear strikes in its large-scale military exercises?', Survival Editors Blog, International Institute for Strategic Studies, 15 Feb. 2018.

[89] TASS, 'General Staff: Russia–Turkey balance of force in Black Sea has changed over years', 14 Sep. 2016.

[90] Petrov, A., ['RF limits any enemies' illusion': the expert talks about the importance of groups of troops in Crimea], *Ekonomika Segodiya*, 7 Nov. 2017 (in Russian).

[91] Quoted Litovkin (note 83).

[92] Sukhankin, S., 'Russia pours more military hardware into "fortress Crimea"', Eurasia Daily Monitor, 14 Nov. 2017.

indicating a capability for assault along the Black Sea littoral, although probably in relatively small numbers (1–2 battalions).[93] In this way, Russia has achieved a major aim of creating a credible military deterrent to NATO forces entering the Black Sea.

Russia's power-projection capabilities also extend beyond the Black Sea. For Russia's military intervention in Syria, both the Black Sea Fleet and the Southern Military District have served as the primary base for deploying military units and resources to the Middle East and for enhancing Russia's presence in the eastern Mediterranean Sea. The Russian naval doctrine of July 2017 identifies strengthening the Black Sea Fleet and Russian forces in Crimea and ensuring a permanent naval presence in the Mediterranean Sea as priorities.[94] If the Black Sea Fleet receives the planned new ships in the next decade, Russia will also be in a position to rebuild its naval presence in the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and the Gulf, and has already signalled expansion plans in the region.[95]

Integration of the South Caucasus into the Russian military security system

The fighting in South Ossetia in 2008 created a new military logic for Russia in the South Caucasus. Russia subsequently extended security guarantees to Abkhazia and South Ossetia and its consistent policy ever since has been to recognize the independence of the two breakaway regions while simultaneously embracing them in ever closer integration, notably in the security dimension.[96] Russia has also sought to deepen its security alliance with Armenia. The annexation of Crimea added a new urgency to Russia's process of military consolidation that began after 2008 by linking the South Caucasus to an increasingly integrated security space that stretches from the Caspian Sea to the Black Sea and into the Middle East.[97]

From 2014, Russia has sought to extend military control over the Black Sea littoral along the Georgian coast and in the airspace of the South Caucasus in order to block potential efforts by NATO to challenge Russia's new military position of superiority around Crimea. To achieve these aims, Russia has enhanced its military cooperation with Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

The already close security relations between Abkhazia and Russia were deepened in November 2015 with the signing of a military agreement on creating a combined Abkhazian–Russian armed forces group.[98] According to the agreement, a combined group under unified military command will be formed from the 7th Russian Military Base and its forces and two Abkhazian motor rifle battalions

[93] TASS, 'Russian Black Sea Fleet warships land troops on Crimean coast in large-scale drills', 21 Mar. 2017.

[94] Gorenburg, D., 'Russia's new and unrealistic naval doctrine', War on the Rocks, 26 July 2017.

[95] Gorenburg, D., 'Is a new Russian Black Sea Fleet coming? Or is it here?', War on the Rocks, 31 July 2018; and Reuters, 'Russia in talks with Eritrea to set up port project—RIA', 31 Aug. 2018.

[96] Klimenko (note 3).

[97] Abrahamyan, E., 'Russia's newest A2/AD sphere: the South Caucasus?', *National Interest*, 19 June 2016.

[98] [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).

plus artillery, air force and special forces formations. The agreement also gives the Russian Ministry of Defence command over the joint force 'in times of war'.[99]

On 18 March 2015 Russia and South Ossetia signed a Treaty on Alliance and Integration to form 'a united defence and security space'.[100] The collective security approach in the agreement is based on a commitment that Russia will provide for the security and defence of South Ossetia, including constant protection of its borders. In return, South Ossetia will allow for its military to integrate into Russian forces. The procedure was to be financed with 1 billion roubles (*c.* US$14 million) allocated from the Russian budget for 2016 for this purpose.

As part of Russia's increased security presence in the South Caucasus, its military relations with Armenia have continued to strengthen. Initially, in the 1990s, formal military relations focused on securing Armenia's border with Turkey. Since then, however, the centrality of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in Armenian security policy and the regional interlinkages of this conflict have meant that the Russian military presence has been difficult to separate, in practice, from ongoing tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

In recent years, as the Armenian–Russian military relationship has deepened, notably with the supply of significant amounts of Russian weapons, the regional role of Russian forces has been further strengthened. Since 2014 the integration of Russian forces into the emerging Black Sea security space and Russia's military engagement in Syria have meant that the Armenian–Russian security relationship has taken on an even more significant regional role.

Following a visit to the Russian military base at Gyumri in late November 2013, President Putin announced that Russia would intensify its presence in the South Caucasus.[101] Subsequently, Russia developed three initiatives closely involving Armenia to promote closer regional military integration: the 2015 Joint Air Defence Agreement, new supplies of Russian weapons to Armenia and the development of a joint defence system with Armenia.

According to the 2015 Armenian–Russian agreement that created a joint regional air defence system, the commander of Russia's Southern Military District has overall command of the system, while a separate air defence zone created in Armenia is to be managed by the commander of Armenia's Air Defence Force.[102] Armenian officials noted that the joint regional air defence system will be able to include the full range of capabilities of the Russian Air Force, including multifunction combat aircraft.[103] The system does not extend to Nagorno-Karabakh.

[99] Agenda.ge, 'Georgia condemns ratification of Russia–Abkhazia military deal', 3 Nov. 2016.

[100] [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 (author's translation); and Civil Georgia, 'Moscow, Tskhinvali sign "integration treaty"', 18 Mar. 2015.

[101] Civil Georgia, President of Russia, 'Speech at meeting of the Russian–Armenian Interregional Forum', 2 Dec. 2013.

[102] [Agreement between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Armenia on the Creation of the Joint Regional Air Defence System in the Caucasus Collective Security Region], signed 23 Dec. 2015, entered into force 11 Jan. 2017 (in Russian).

[103] Reuters, 'Armenia ratifies agreement on joint air-defense system with Russia', 30 June 2016.

In early 2016 the Russian Government announced that it would provide a $200 million credit line to Armenia to purchase advanced weapon systems from Russia.[104] In late 2017 a new loan from Russia of $100 million was provided to purchase further arms to enable Armenia to modernize its armed forces, notably in the areas of mobile artillery, air defence and aviation.[105] At the same time, Armenia increased its military budget for 2018 by 17 per cent.[106] These military sales have fed into the arms race between Armenia and Azerbaijan, which has grown more acute as result of a serious armed clash between the two sides in April 2016.[107]

In November 2016 Russia and Armenia signed an agreement on a joint military force, based on a joint command to operate from Russia's Southern Military District in wartime.[108] Under the agreement, the joint force is tasked with 'ensuring military security in the region' and thwarting or repelling possible foreign aggression against Armenia or Russia. While the agreement simply reflected the existing reality of cooperation, it provided a stronger legal basis for the Armenian–Russian military alliance and strengthened the perception of Armenia as a staging area for Russian military force in the region. This idea was further strengthened by Russian efforts to bolster the CSTO as a power-projection organization, notably into the Middle East.[109]

There were reports in January 2017 that Russia had deployed an advanced radar system to its military base in Armenia. Nebo-M radar systems were reportedly deployed to counter any threat stemming from NATO's ABM system in Romania and stealth aircraft that might attempt to penetrate Russian air defences in Crimea or the Caucasus.[110]

At the same time, the politics of Russian engagement around the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict have been complex. While seeking to retain Armenia as a client state from the security point of view, Russia's relations with Azerbaijan have warmed since 2012, notably as a result of Azerbaijan's extensive programme of arms purchases from Russia.[111] Russia has also sought to prevent the outbreak of

[104] Interfax, 'Russia grants $200 million loan to Armenia for purchasing weapons', Russia Beyond, 19 Feb. 2016.

[105] Abrahamyan, E., 'Russian loan allows Armenia to upgrade military capabilities', *CACI Analyst*, 8 Jan. 2018.

[106] Hikari Cecire, M., 'Armenia announces big military spending increase', Eurasianet, 18 Oct. 2017.

[107] Broers, L., *The Nagorny Karabakh Conflict: Defaulting to War*, Research Paper (Chatham House–Royal Institute of International Affairs: London, July 2016); Klimenko, E., 'Conflicts in the post-Soviet space: recent developments', *SIPRI Yearbook 2017: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2017); and Klimenko (note 3).

[108] [Agreement between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Armenia on the United Group of Troops of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Armenia and the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation], signed 30 Nov. 2016, entered into force 4 Nov. 2017 (in Russian); and Zemlianichenko, A., 'Russia and Armenia to create joint military forces', *Moscow Times*, 15 Nov. 2016.

[109] Kucera, J., 'As Russian military exercises in Armenia, is Syria on its mind?', Eurasianet, 10 Oct. 2017.

[110] News.am, 'Military Review Monthly: deployment of Nebo-M radar complex at Russia military base in Gyumri would be logical', 20 Jan. 2017.

[111] Komakhia, M., 'Growth of military spending and relations with Russia: Azerbaijan trying to gain advantage over Armenia', Rondelli Blog, Rondelli Foundation, 6 Oct. 2017.

war between Armenia and Azerbaijan through its role in the OSCE Minsk Group, which mediates in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

The integrated security arrangements in the South Caucasus established by Russia following the annexation of Crimea have been tested through a series of military training exercises, the biggest of which to date was the Kavkaz (Caucasus) exercise in September 2016. The focus of Kavkaz-2016 was Crimea as the central security point in the southern military zone, highlighting the military integration of southern Russia, the Black Sea and the South Caucasus (as well as Caspian naval forces).

During the exercise, the mobilized forces of the Southern Military District (including the Russian troops based in Abkhazia and South Ossetia) were reinforced with combat units from the Western and Central military districts moved by air and land from as far as Siberia and the Urals. Some estimates suggested the exercise involved the mobilization of up to 120 000 military and civilians, but no more than 12 500 were engaged simultaneously.[112] The end of the 2016 exercise is reported to have coincided with the Russian military test-firing a modernized intercontinental ballistic missile, highlighting the growing integration of nuclear capabilities into Russia's military positions in the region.[113]

Russia has also instigated intensified military exercises in the breakaway regions of Georgia. For example, over 1000 motor rifle troops from the Russian military base in Abkhazia undertook large-scale field exercises in mid-2017.[114] In March 2018 Russian military forces conducted large-scale exercises involving 8000 troops and heavy weapons across southern Russia, Crimea, Abkhazia and South Ossetia.[115] Russia has continued to use large-scale military exercises to develop the territories of Crimea, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and southern Russia as an integrated military-security space.[116]

Joint military exercises with Armenia have also been stepped up. In October 2017 the Combat Brotherhood 2017 exercises, following the Zapad 2017 exercise in western and northern Russia, were organized in the CSTO members Armenia, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan and under the command of the CSTO Southern Joint Strategic Command. The exercises were designed to rehearse military intervention in conflicts erupting in the South Caucasus and Central Asia and underlined the multilateral aspect of military action, even if Russia is the overwhelming leader of the CSTO alliance.[117]

While the military integration of the Caucasus region has significantly advanced since 2014, Russia has faced some challenges. In relations with Georgia's breakaway

[112] TASS, 'More than 120,000 people take part in Kavkaz-2016 exercise', 9 Sep. 2016.

[113] Felgenhauer, P., 'Russian military resists proposed budget cuts, prepares for major ground war', Eurasia Daily Monitor, 15 Sep. 2016.

[114] TASS, 'Over 1,000 Russian troops complete large-scale field exercise in Abkhazia', 7 Aug. 2017.

[115] Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 'Russia launches military exercises in Crimea, Abkhazia, day after presidential vote', 20 Mar. 2018.

[116] Radio Svoboda, [Russia has begun exercises in Crimea and the south of the country], 19 Mar. 2018 (in Russian).

[117] McDermott, R. N., 'Russia rehearses military intervention in Central Asia and the Caucasus', *CACI Analyst*, 17 Nov. 2017.

regions, Russia has been required to balance local national sensitivities with the push for integration. For example, the Russian and South Ossetian authorities had different interpretations of the agreement that 'the separate units of the armed forces and security agencies of the Republic of South Ossetian will become part of the armed forces and security agencies of the Russian Federation' in the 2015 Russian–South Ossetian Treaty on Alliance and Integration.[118] After prolonged discussions, it was agreed that South Ossetia's armed forces (an estimated 800–3000 troops) will become part of the Russian armed forces but will retain separate units.[119]

Russian forces in Trans-Dniester

In recent years, the position of Russian forces in Moldova has shifted. The original significance of the Russian military in Trans-Dniester related to the protracted conflict and as an obstacle to Moldova's integration into the Euro-Atlantic community. However, the annexation of Crimea and the onset of the conflict in eastern Ukraine altered the strategic importance of the Russian forces.

In April 2014, as the fighting flared in eastern Ukraine, President Putin announced his support for a Novorossiya (New Russia) project, which raised the prospect of Russia linking up territories across southern Ukraine as far as Trans-Dniester.[120] The subsequent and rapid abandonment of the Novorossiya project has been seen as marking a return by Russia to a 'status quo ante' approach in which separatist forces in breakaway regions supported by Russia no longer serve as a means for territorial expansion but instead provide political leverage against their origin countries.[121]

Subsequently, Ukraine has viewed the Russian forces in Trans-Dniester as a potential military threat. To mitigate the threat, Ukraine closed off resupply routes to the Russian troops in Trans-Dniester in 2015.[122] The Moldovan authorities, who have regularly called for the withdrawal of Russian forces, requested in August 2017 that the issue be included in the agenda of the UN General Assembly.[123] In June 2018 the General Assembly duly adopted a resolution urging Russia to withdraw its troops from Trans-Dniester.[124] Meanwhile, in May 2017 Moldova's Constitutional Court ruled that the Russian troops are an 'occupational force'.[125]

[118] Treaty on Alliance and Integration (note 100), Article 2(2) (author's translation).

[119] Civil Georgia, 'De facto South Ossetian leader on new defense agreement with Russia', 15 Jan. 2017; and TASS, [An agreement was signed on the accession of units of the army of South Ossetia to the RF armed forces], 31 Mar. 2017 (in Russian).

[120] Herszenhorn, D. M., 'What is Putin's "New Russia"?', *New York Times*, 4 Apr. 2014.

[121] Hikari Cecire, M., 'Shifting Russian policies towards allied separatist regions', *CACI Analyst*, 6 Oct. 2015.

[122] Leonard, P., 'Ukrainian lawmakers suspend military cooperation', Associated Press, 21 May 2015.

[123] Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 'Moldova's PM asks UN for support in withdrawal of Russian troops', 22 Sep. 2017.

[124] UN General Assembly Resolution 72/282, 'Complete and unconditional withdrawal of foreign military forces from the territory of the Republic of Moldova', 22 June 2018, A/RES/72/282, 26 June 2018.

[125] Vlas, C., 'Moldova Constitutional Court: neutrality status prohibits deployment of foreign troops on Moldova's territory', Moldova.org, 3 May 2017.

Local observers have reported that the tempo of military exercises involving Russian and Trans-Dniestrian forces significantly increased during 2017 and early 2018.[126]

Wider Black Sea security and power projection into the Middle East

The integration of the South Caucasus into the Russian military security system is not simply about the rising confrontation with NATO in the Black Sea: it is also about Russia's ambition to deploy military forces to the Middle East. With the military intervention in Syria from 2015, the Black Sea Fleet has become a central element of Russian power projection, further underlining Russia's need to ensure the defence of the north and east of the Black Sea region.

In January 2017 Russia agreed with the Syrian Government on a long-term lease on two military facilities in Syria. The agreement stipulated that naval facilities at Tartus will be expanded and the deployment at Hmeimim Airbase will become permanent.[127] The new agreement allowed for a doubling of the space available for Russian warships in the port city of Tartus, taking the number of berths available up to 11, and providing Russian forces with an airbase, which may be expanded to include a second runway.[128] The agreement is reported to involve 49 year leases on the military bases.[129] The Black Sea Fleet will be the main naval resource supporting Russia's engagement in Syria.[130]

The Euro-Atlantic community's post-2014 approach to Black Sea security

Since 2014 NATO has developed a new approach to Black Sea security, including beginning a process of transformation to enable the Organisation to rapidly deploy significant military forces to the region. The EU has also responded to developments in the region through its multiple regional strategies.[131] The EU's Global Strategy, introduced in 2016, identifies protracted conflict in the Black Sea region as a challenge to 'the European security order'.[132] Following Russia's actions in Ukraine and more widely, the EU and NATO have, for the first time, sought to develop security cooperation with each other.[133]

[126] Vlas, C., 'Operative group of Russian troops conducted another shooting exercise in Transnistria', Moldova.org, 1 Feb. 2018.

[127] McKernan, B., 'While the world was watching Trump, Russia just quietly enlarged its military presence in Syria', *The Independent,* 23 Jan. 2017.

[128] Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 'Russia, Syria sign agreement on expanding Tartus naval base', 20 Jan. 2017.

[129] Reuters, 'Russia establishing permanent presence at its Syrian bases: RIA', 26 Dec. 2017.

[130] Kuimova and Wezeman, 'Russia and Black Sea security' (note 4).

[131] European Commission, 'Sea basin strategy: Black Sea', [n.d.]; European External Action Service, 'Black Sea Synergy', [n.d.]; European Commission (note 56); European Commission, COM(2004) 373 final (note 57); Council of the European Union (note 57); and European Commission, COM(2008) 823 final (note 57).

[132] European Union, *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe—A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy* (European Union: Brussels, June 2016), p. 33.

[133] European External Action Service, 'EU–NATO cooperation', Fact sheet, 9 July 2018.

At the same time, both NATO and the EU have maintained a strategic ambivalence about their commitment to the Black Sea region as a whole: while increasing support to member states and partners in the region, they are holding back on implementing further enlargement into the region while conflicts remain unresolved.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization

The first sign that NATO was taking a new approach to Black Sea security came at its summit in Newport, Wales, in September 2014—the first NATO summit to take place following the onset of the Ukraine crisis. There was a consensus at the summit that NATO's eastern flank, including the Black Sea region, had to be defended.

While the 2014 summit provided the first official opportunity to respond to the changed security situation in Eastern Europe, it did not produce an immediate security response to the developments in the Black Sea region. For NATO, the initial priority was the Baltic Sea region, and it took another two years and another summit—in Warsaw in July 2016—for the Black Sea to come into sharper focus for the alliance and for the adoption of more robust measures.[134] In the absence of an overall NATO response, starting from mid-2014 warships from the USA and other non-Black Sea members of NATO began to patrol the Black Sea on a rotational basis.[135]

Between the 2014 and 2016 summits, NATO's secretariat and military staff at its headquarters began to improve situational awareness of developments in the Black Sea through regular political-military assessments. Meetings of the North Atlantic Council—NATO's political decision-making body—also began an ongoing monitoring of force postures in the region.[136]

At the 2016 Warsaw summit, the NATO members renewed their commitment to the security of the NATO states and partners around the Black Sea and reiterated their solidarity in not recognizing Russia's 'illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea'. In the summit communiqué, NATO declared its support for 'regional efforts by the Black Sea littoral states aimed at ensuring security and stability' and committed to 'Appropriate measures' to develop a 'tailored forward presence in the southeast part of the Alliance territory', including a multinational brigade for training purposes in the region.[137]

The Tailored Forward Presence (TFP) in the Black Sea encompasses air, land and maritime components. The TFP is primarily a regional presence, in contrast to NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP) in the Baltic states—Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania—and Poland, which employs an 'all alliance approach' with various NATO members taking the lead (including the USA, the UK, Canada and Germany). Thus, while NATO maintains combat-ready, battalion-size battle

[134] Bechev, D., 'NATO summit: focus will be on Black Sea security', Al Jazeera, 5 July 2016.

[135] LaGrone, S., 'Four NATO ships due in Black Sea ahead of maritime exercise', US Naval Institute News, 3 Sep. 2014.

[136] NATO officials, author interviews, Brussels, Jan.–Feb. 2017.

[137] NATO, 'Warsaw summit communiqué', Press Release no. (2016) 100, 9 July 2016.

groups around the Baltic Sea that operate alongside national defence forces, NATO efforts in the Black Sea focus on training and reassurance.[138]

The land-based component of the TFP is concentrated in Romania, where a multinational framework brigade—Multinational Brigade Southeast (MN BDE-SE)—was established in October 2017. MN BDE-SE is led by Romania with a brigade of up to 4000 soldiers based in Craiova, supported by troops from nine other NATO countries. It complements a separate deployment of 900 US troops, who were already in place in Romania.[139] The MN BDE-SE will train together regularly at exercise facilities in Romania.

The TFP's Enhance Air Policing Mission consists of rotational deployments of combat aircraft to create a combat air patrol similar to the NATO mission launched for the Baltic states.[140] Canada, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Turkey, the UK and the USA have committed to contribute to air patrols in the region.[141]

The maritime element of the TFP involves the use of Bulgarian and Romanian ports for NATO naval vessels, notably from Standing NATO Maritime Group 2 and Standing NATO Mine Countermeasures Group 2, and visits to ports in Georgia and Ukraine.[142] The frequency with which NATO naval vessels enter the Black Sea significantly increased after the annexation of Crimea, and the presence in the Black Sea of NATO's standing maritime groups is planned to increase from approximately 80 days in 2017 to 120 days in 2018.[143]

At the Warsaw summit, a compromise emerged between Romania's proposal to establish a permanent NATO military presence and joint NATO military patrols in the Black Sea, and the more cautious position of Bulgaria, which was concerned about the risks of escalation triggered by a more substantial NATO commitment to the region.[144] Subsequently, Bulgaria and Turkey have adopted a more cautious threat assessment on Russia in the Black Sea than Romania.[145]

In support of the TFP, NATO has undertaken work to establish command-and-control arrangements to conduct operations in the Black Sea. This has included the deployment of NATO personnel to the region to create local capacities to accept reinforcements and coordinate the increased tempo and scale of exercises. In February 2017 a meeting of NATO defence ministers that addressed the security situation in the Black Sea agreed two additional maritime measures: an increased NATO naval presence for training, exercises and situational awareness; and a maritime 'coordination function' for NATO when operating with other NATO forces in the Black Sea region.[146]

[138] NATO, 'Boosting NATO's presence in the east and southeast', 10 Sep. 2018.

[139] Emmott, R., 'NATO launches Black Sea force as latest counter to Russia', Reuters, 9 Oct. 2017.

[140] NATO, 'NATO jets start air patrols over Romania', 24 Apr. 2017.

[141] Schmidt, U., 'Advancing stability in the Black Sea region', Special report 159 CDS 17 E rev. 1 fin, NATO Parliamentary Assembly, Committee on the Civil Dimension of Security, 7 Oct. 2017, p. 3.

[142] Toucas, B., 'NATO and Russia in the Black Sea: a new confrontation?', Center for Strategic and International Studies, 6 Mar. 2017.

[143] NATO, Allied Maritime Command, 'NATO groups exercise in the Black Sea', 17 July 2018.

[144] Chiriac, M., 'Romania calls for permanent NATO Black Sea force', Balkans Insight, 2 Feb. 2016.

[145] Socor, V., 'NATO summit puts Black Sea strategy on hold for another year (part one)', Eurasian Daily Monitor, 30 July 2018.

[146] NATO, 'NATO to enhance its presence in the Black Sea region', 16 Feb. 2017.

Following the defence ministers' meeting, the NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, announced that NATO was modernizing its command structure in response to the new security challenges on NATO's eastern flank.[147] He also indicated that NATO's regional posture would be strengthened through the commitment of eight member states to provide brigade staff to support MN BDE-SE in Romania, with others to provide land and air forces for training and air policing.

NATO plays a coordinating role in regional multinational military exercises in the Black Sea, which are designed to bolster the credibility of a NATO presence, such as the annual USA-led Sea Breeze. In 2017 NATO's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF)—which was established by the 2014 NATO summit as part of the earlier NATO Response Force (NRF)—was deployed to the Black Sea region for the Noble Jump exercise. Two thousand troops and as many as 500 vehicles were sent to training areas in Bulgaria, Greece and Romania.[148] Noble Jump was designed to test the core elements of NATO's Readiness Action Plan—which was also initiated at the 2014 summit—by testing the VJTF through rapid deployment to the Black Sea while overcoming logistical challenges.

Non-Black Sea NATO member states

While three members of NATO are located in the Black Sea (see below), much of the Alliance's military strength lies with states outside the region, notably the USA. For this reason, a key component of NATO's new posture in the Black Sea has come from a strengthened military presence by non-Black Sea countries.

The United States. The increased NATO commitment to the Black Sea has been underpinned by the USA's broader European security initiative, Operation Atlantic Resolve (OAR). OAR, which began in April 2014, consists of a variety of initiatives to demonstrate the USA's capacity to respond to threats, principally from Russia, against its European allies.[149]

Most activities within OAR are funded through the USA's European Reassurance Initiative (ERI), which was initiated in June 2014. The ERI provided the resources for the USA to increase the tempo of military exercises and deploy new capabilities in the European theatre and allowed the start of 'heel-to-toe' (i.e. continuous) rotations of US forces to Europe.

OAR and the ERI were introduced by the US administration of President Barack Obama, with strong backing from the US Congress, as a response to Russia's annexation of Crimea and the resultant shifting European security environment.[150] The initial aim of the new US approach was to replenish US forces and equipment

[147] NATO, 'Press conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg following the meeting of the North Atlantic Council at the level of defence ministers', 16 Feb. 2017.

[148] Marcus, I., 'NATO Operation Noble Jump: thousands of troops assemble in South-Eastern Europe', *Sofia Globe*, 31 May 2017.

[149] US Army Europe, 'Operation Atlantic Resolve', [n.d.].

[150] White House, 'European Reassurance Initiative and other US efforts in support of NATO allies and partners', Fact sheet, 3 June 2014; and Traynor, I., 'Obama pledges $1bn to boost military in Europe in wake of Ukraine crisis', *The Guardian*, 3 June 2014.

along NATO's eastern flank, which were substantially reduced in the decades after the cold war, and to thereby demonstrate to NATO members in Europe that the USA had a renewed commitment to defending Europe from Russia. From 2016 the emphasis of US military engagement shifted from 'reassurance' to 'deterrence'.[151]

The funds available for the ERI grew quickly, from $985 million in 2015 to $3.4 billion in 2017, and are planned to reach nearly $4.8 billion in 2018.[152] Almost half of the expenditure for 2018—$2.2 billion—will be used to support US strategic pre-positioning in Europe, that is, the forward positioning of weapons to allow for the rapid deployment of forces into a potential theatre of war. Investments will also be made to develop infrastructure in military bases throughout Europe to 'increase the capability and readiness of US action' and to enable military exercises and training to enhance the readiness and interoperability of NATO forces.[153]

From its outset, OAR identified the maintenance of 'persistent deployments' to the Black Sea as one of its goals.[154] Thus, in January 2017 under the umbrella of OAR, the US 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team of the 4th Infantry Division (consisting of more than 4000 troops and 2000 vehicles, including tanks, armoured personnel carriers, supply trucks and trailers) was moved to Poland from Fort Carson, Colorado.[155] From there, units were transferred for training and drills to other countries in Central Europe, mainly the Baltic states and Bulgaria and Romania. This type of operation aims to ensure that NATO units are continuously being lined up at or close to the Russian border.

The USA has also sought to deploy advanced military aircraft to the Black Sea region. In April 2017 it deployed a so-called Theater Security Package consisting of 300 US Air Force personnel and 12 F-15 combat aircraft to Graf Ignatievo Airbase in central Bulgaria.[156] The most advanced 'stealth' (low radar, infrared and visual signature) US combat aircraft have also been deployed to the region: two F-35A aircraft were forward deployed to Graf Ignatievo Airbase for a short period in April 2017.[157] As part of the 2017 Sea Breeze exercise, two P-8 Poseidon aircraft were deployed to the region (near Ukraine) for the first time, providing NATO with advanced anti-submarine and electronic intelligence capabilities in the Black Sea.[158]

In July 2017, 15 UH-60 helicopters were deployed from the 10th Combat Aviation Brigade in Germany to Romania. This task force operation was designed to demonstrate the ability to mass battalion-size aviation in the Black Sea region

[151] Moon Cronk, T., 'European Reassurance Initiative shifts to deterrence', US Department of Defense, 14 July 2016.

[152] Pellerin, C., '2018 budget request for European Reassurance Initiative grows to $4.7 billion', US Department of Defense, 1 June 2017.

[153] Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), 'European Reassurance Initiative: Department of Defense budget fiscal year (FY) 2018', US Department of Defense, May 2017.

[154] US European Command, 'Operation Atlantic Resolve', Fact sheet, 19 Feb. 2015.

[155] US Department of Defense, '3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division "Iron Brigade" Fort Carson, Colorado', Media kit, Aug. 2017.

[156] *Sofia Globe,* 'US Air Force deploys F-15 fighters to Graf Ignatievo Air Base in Bulgaria', 26 Apr. 2017.

[157] Cenciotti, D., 'Two F-35s have been deployed to Bulgaria', The Aviationist, 28 Apr. 2017.

[158] Interfax-Ukraine, 'US Poseidon aircraft arrive for Sea Breeze 2017 drills in Odesa', *Kyiv Post*, 12 July 2017.

and marked the onset of a continuous rotation of UH-60s to Mihail Kogălniceanu Airbase in south-eastern Romania, near the Black Sea coast.[159]

The frequency of deployment of advanced US warships to the Black Sea has increased, drawn from the US Sixth Fleet.[160] The USS *Carney* entered the Black Sea in early January 2018, the third US destroyer to patrol the region since August 2017.[161] In February 2018 the USA further increased its naval engagement in the region with the simultaneous deployment of two destroyers (USS *Ross* and USS *Carney*) to the Black Sea. A US military official was reported to indicate that the deployment was to 'desensitize Russia' to the presence of the US military there through a 'proactive' mission.[162]

Alongside strengthened conventional forces in the region, US special forces have expanded operations along NATO's eastern flank, including in the NATO Black Sea countries and in Georgia and Ukraine.[163]

The US European Command (EUCOM) supports the Black Sea Area Support Team (BS-AST, formerly the JTFE) to strengthen military relationships between the USA and its allies in Central and Eastern Europe. BS-AST focuses on enhancing the capacity of the USA's partners and fostering regional cooperation. It provides the USA, Bulgaria and Romania with training facilities and integrated combined staff to support combined arms training.[164]

The USA has maintained the Black Sea Rotational Force at the Mihail Kogălniceanu Airbase since 2010. This is a semi-annual rotation of US marines and sailors able to respond to a broad range of military operations in the EUCOM area of responsibility. The force is designed to provide the capacity for rapid crisis response in the Black Sea, Caucasus and Balkan regions.

From 2014 the USA increased its deployments of marines to the Black Sea region. In 2015, for example, the US Marines Combined Arms Company was deployed to Bulgaria together with heavy weapons.[165] The US Marine Corp holds regular regional exercises in the Black Sea involving Bulgarian and Romanian forces and also Ukrainian marine units.[166] Some exercises, such as Spring Storm 2018, have involved the deployment of US amphibious assault ships to the Black Sea.[167] The Georgia Deployment Program–Resolute Support involves heel-to-toe deployment of US marines to Georgia to train Georgian personnel for deployment

[159] Geiger, J., 'Task Force Knighthawk positions aviation assets in Romania', US Army, 25 July 2017.

[160] Wyland, S., 'US Navy boosts patrols in Black Sea amid tensions in region', *Stars and Stripes,* 29 Nov. 2017.

[161] Wyland, S., 'USS Carney enters Black Sea as navy ups patrols', *Stars and Stripes,* 8 Jan. 2018.

[162] Downs, R., 'US Navy sends two missile-guided destroyers to Black Sea', UPI, 20 Feb. 2018.

[163] Turse, N., 'US special-operations forces have quietly moved onto the Russian border', *The Nation (New York)*, 30 Oct. 2017.

[164] Vergun, D., 'US soldiers in Bulgaria, Romania deter aggression, assure allies', US Army, 26 Sep. 2017.

[165] Ulsh, R., 'New Bulgaria-based marine unit to deter Russian aggression with tanks, artillery', US Marine Corps, 18 Aug. 2015.

[166] Interfax-Ukraine, 'Ukrainian marines participate in Platinum Lion 2017 exercise', *Kyiv Post,* 11 Aug. 2017.

[167] US Naval Forces Europe–Africa/US 6th Fleet, 'Oak Hill/26th MEU en route to Black Sea to participate in exercise Spring Storm', 7 Mar. 2018.

to Afghanistan.[168] In 2018 the USA announced that it would end the rotation of marines to the Black Sea and instead concentrate its forces in the arctic high north of Europe. In place of the marine rotational force, the USA will increase its presence in the joint rotational forces in Romania. US marines will, however, continue to participate in exercises in the Black Sea.[169]

As well as supporting rotational deployments, the ERI has been used to fund defence infrastructure projects in the Black Sea region, with a focus on the Mihail Kogălniceanu base in Romania and the Novo Selo training area in Bulgaria.[170] The Romanian base grew rapidly following its designation as the centralized operations and mission command centre for the US Army throughout the Black Sea region. The new infrastructure is intended to provide the facilities (maintenance, storage and supply) needed to sustain an increase in US rotational troops and the massing of multinational forces, as demonstrated ahead of the Saber Guardian 2017 exercise.[171] In January 2018 the USA announced a $3 million upgrade of the Câmpia Turzii Airbase in Romania, also as part of the ERI.[172]

The USA has also extended its support for the development of new military infrastructure to NATO partners in the region. Thus, in 2017 the construction of a maritime operations centre at Ochakiv Naval Base in Ukraine was undertaken by US forces with support from the ERI.[173]

The USA takes the lead in two major, regular multinational military training exercises in the Black Sea region: Sea Breeze and Saber Guardian. The July 2017 Sea Breeze exercise involved more than 3000 military personnel from 17 states, including approximately 800 US personnel from various branches of the US military. The USA deployed new capabilities to the region in the form of the P-8A maritime patrol plane, as well as sending both the destroyer USS *Carney* and the cruiser USS *Hue City*.[174] A particular focus of Sea Breeze 2017 was building interoperability with Ukraine.[175] Most of the $4.5 million cost of the 2017 exercise, not including the cost of operating the two US warships, came from the ERI.

Saber Guardian is an annual USA-led multinational military exercise that rotates between Romania, Bulgaria and Ukraine as host and is designed to 'demonstrate the United States and NATO's superior joint and combined capabilities and highlight [their] collective will to defend against regional aggression' in the Black Sea region.[176] In 2017 the third iteration of the exercise took place in Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary, with 25 000 troops from more than 20 states, primarily

[168] US Marine Corps, 'Marine Forces Europe and Africa: Command information', [n.d.].

[169] Snow, S., 'No more Marine rotations to the Black Sea. The Corps is focusing here instead', *Marine Corps Times*, 29 Nov. 2018.

[170] Pennoyer, J., 'Ribbon-cutting ceremony recognizes importance of ERI projects in Romania', US Army, 17 July 2017.

[171] Pennoyer (note 170).

[172] Romania Insider, 'US to invest USD 3 mln in Romanian military air base', 5 Jan. 2018.

[173] Deugan, B., 'Seabees break ground on maritime operations center in Ukraine', US Navy, 7 Aug. 2017.

[174] Mari, W., 'Sea Breeze 2017 takes anti-submarine warfare training to advanced level', US European Command, 24 July 2017.

[175] Trevithick, J., 'US Navy kicks off biggest ever "Sea Breeze" exercise in the Black Sea', *The Drive*, 11 July 2017.

[176] US Army Europe, 'Saber Guardian', [n.d.].

NATO members, including for live fire at the Cincu training grounds in Romania.[177] The USA contributed heavy armour (Bradley troop carriers and M1 Abrams tanks) from the 3rd Armored Brigade Combat Team of its 4th Infantry Division. In addition, an armoured cavalry unit (with Stryker armoured vehicles) from the 2nd Cavalry Regiment, based in Germany, and a field artillery battalion (with self-propelled M109 Paladin howitzers) were deployed for the exercise.[178]

As well as multilateral exercises, the USA supports bilateral military exercises in the region. Spring Storm is a regular Romanian–US bilateral exercise that focuses on amphibious warfare.[179] In recent years there has been a growing number of bilateral Ukrainian–US military exercises.[180]

One of the most significant US security commitments to the Black Sea, within the NATO framework, has been the basing of elements of an ABM shield for Europe in Romania. The basing decision predated the events of 2014 in Ukraine. In 2016 the USA initiated the first land-based element of the ABM system at Deveselu Airbase in Romania.[181] When complete the system will cover the European members of NATO. According to NATO, the system is designed to protect its members against short- and medium-range ballistic missiles originating from the Middle East, principally Iran, and is not aimed at Russia.[182] Despite this, some NATO member states have called for the ballistic missile defence shield to be part of NATO's posture towards Russia.[183]

Russia has protested against the creation of the NATO ABM system, suggesting that it is aimed at undermining Russia's ability to retaliate against an attack.[184] In 2016 President Putin indicated that Russia could strike the land-based ABM sites in Poland and Romania.[185]

The sale of advanced weapon systems, notably by the USA, to countries of the region is growing in significance for the military balance in the Black Sea region. Efforts by Romania to modernize its armed forces following the events in Ukraine in 2014 are projected to involved large-scale new US weapon systems. In 2017 Romania announced that it would purchase a Patriot missile defence system from the USA as part of its efforts to develop an integrated air defence.[186] As well as the Patriot system, Romania has already agreed to purchase rocket artillery from

[177] Welna, D., 'In Russia's shadow, US military bulks up European presence', National Public Radio, 27 July 2017.

[178] US Army Europe, 'Saber Guardian 2017', Media information kit, 10 July 2017; and Desinor, A., 'Iron Brigade tanks roll into Romania for Getica Saber', US Army, 1 July 2017.

[179] Moore, D., 'USS Carter Hall arrives in Black Sea', US Naval Forces Europe–Africa/US 6th Fleet, 18 Mar. 2017.

[180] UNIAN, 'Ukraine naval aviation, US Navy ship hold joint training in Black Sea', 12 Jan. 2018.

[181] Emmott, R., 'US activates Romanian missile defense site, angering Russia', Reuters, 12 May 2016.

[182] Ferdinando, L., 'Work helps to inaugurate ballistic missile defense site in Romania', US Department of Defense, 12 May 2016.

[183] Voice of America, 'NATO to launch Black Sea force as latest counter to Russia', 9 Oct. 2017.

[184] RT, '5 reasons why US antimissiles in Europe threaten Russia', 12 May 2016.

[185] RT, 'Putin: Romania "in crosshairs" after opening NATO missile defense base', 27 May 2016.

[186] Marinas, R.-S., 'Romania intends to buy Patriot missiles from US to boost defenses', Reuters, 20 Apr. 2017.

the USA.[187] The planned sale of US weapon systems to the key NATO partner countries Georgia and Ukraine may also have a significant impact on the local conflicts in the Black Sea region (see below).

Other non-Black Sea NATO member states. While the USA is making by far the largest contribution of non-Black Sea NATO member states, NATO's approach to the region is premised on multinational engagement.

MN BDE-SE, the multinational force in Romania launched in October 2017, is designed to signal a broad NATO commitment to the defence of Black Sea member states, even if the overall posture and commitment is far lower than in the Baltic Sea region. After Romania, Poland is the largest troop contributor, with Bulgaria, Germany, Italy and Portugal also supplying troops to train with the force in Craiova.[188]

A number of non-Black Sea NATO member states have deployed aircraft to the Black Sea region in support of the TFP's Enhanced Air Policing Mission. In 2017 the UK deployed Eurofighter Typhoon aircraft to Romania.[189] These were subsequently replaced by Canadian F-18 combat aircraft.[190] British aircraft returned in 2018.[191] In October 2017 Portugal deployed F-16 combat aircraft to Romania for two months as part of the Falcon Defence 2017 exercise.[192] Italy has operated air patrols covering Bulgarian airspace from Graf Ignatievo Airbase.[193]

In early 2017 the UK announced that it would send its most advanced destroyers, the Type 45, into the Black Sea.[194] HMS *Daring* visited Romania in April and HMS *Duncan* participated in various exercises in the region in July.[195] HMS *Duncan* returned to the Black Sea in January 2018.[196] France has also deployed advanced ships to the region.[197] Other non-Black Sea NATO states have participated in naval exercises in the Black Sea. For example, in 2017 Spain and Canada sent ships that were already deployed to Standing NATO Maritime Group 2 to participate in the Sea Shield exercise.[198]

[187] Allison, G., 'Romania in $1.25 billion deal for High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems', UK Defence Journal, 22 Aug. 2017.

[188] Emmott (note 139).

[189] Allison, G., 'Typhoon supports Romanian Air Force in Black Sea policing role', UK Defence Journal, 11 Aug. 2017.

[190] Riess, K.-A., 'Cold Lake fighters wrap up tour in Romania', *Cold Lake Sun*, 8 Jan. 2018.

[191] Allison, G., 'Typhoons return to Black Sea NATO air policing mission', UK Defence Journal, 25 Apr. 2018.

[192] NATO, '"Falcon Defence 2017" brings Portuguese F-16s to Romania', 4 Oct. 2017.

[193] Cenciotti, D., 'Up close and personal with the Italian Typhoon jets deployed to Bulgaria under NATO's Enhanced Air Policing', The Aviationist, 9 July 2017; and *Sofia Globe*, 'Italian Air Force to continue assisting guarding Bulgarian air space for a further two weeks', 11 Oct. 2017.

[194] Peck, M., 'Get ready, Russia: Britain is sending warships to the Black Sea', *National Interest*, 11 Feb. 2017.

[195] British Royal Navy, 'HMS Daring trains with Romanian allies as Black Sea visit continues', 27 Apr. 2017; and British Royal Navy, 'Type 45 destroyer HMS Duncan leads NATO task force in large Black Sea exercise', 25 July 2017.

[196] Allison, G., 'Royal Navy destroyer HMS Duncan enters Black Sea', UK Defence Journal, 31 Jan. 2018.

[197] Sputnik, 'French stealth frigate La Fayette arrives in Ukraine's Odessa', 31 Mar. 2017; and Agenda.ge, 'French warship to make port visit in Batumi, Georgia', 21 Nov. 2017.

[198] Interfax-Ukraine, 'NATO's Sea Shield drills start in Black Sea', *Kyiv Post*, 1 Feb. 2017.

Black Sea NATO member states

Turkey.[199] For much of the past 30 years Turkey operated as the largest Black Sea military power. It also took the lead in the region in seeking to promote multilateral cooperation, including in the military sphere, to overcome the legacies of division and mistrust from the cold war and to institutionalize Turkey's regional leadership.[200] Despite leading on regional initiatives, most often Turkey has adopted a cautious position on the Black Sea, seeming to prefer to maintain the post-Soviet status quo.

While pursuing its own EU integration agenda and being a long-standing member of NATO, Turkey has sought to discourage extra-regional powers from entering the Black Sea. With NATO enlargement to include Bulgaria and Romania, Turkey's traditional role as gatekeeper to the Black Sea was diluted, even while it remained by far the largest NATO military force in the region.

From the late 2000s, Turkey's foreign and security policy focused on building good relations with neighbours on all sides (a policy branded 'zero problems'). This led to a diminishment of the Black Sea's position in Turkish policy as other regions, notably the Middle East, gained in importance. Despite the reduced significance of the Black Sea, Turkey continued to resist initiatives that challenged its primacy in the Black Sea region, especially those involving a greater US presence.[201] At the same time, Turkey lobbied for an increased US and NATO involvement in Syria in the early years of the civil war there.

Developments surrounding the fighting between Russia and Georgia in August 2008 highlighted the weaknesses of the regional institutions that Turkey had created in the Black Sea region and halted many of the regional cooperation schemes. Turkey adopted a largely neutral position during the conflict. Subsequently, it sought to assert a stronger role in the South Caucasus with the initiation of the Caucasus Stability and Cooperation Platform (CSCP), but the proposal did not gain support and was later abandoned.[202] Following the failure of the CSCP, Turkey sought to build trilateral defence cooperation with Azerbaijan and Georgia along energy and transport corridors in the Caucasus.[203]

The annexation of Crimea and subsequent Russian regional military build-up marked a change for Turkey in the Black Sea. Turkey lost its clear lead as the largest regional military power as Russia consolidated its maritime supremacy, although the Turkish Navy as a whole (which is in or near the Black Sea) remains larger than the Russian Black Sea Fleet.[204] Despite this shift, Turkey sought

[199] On Turkey see also Wezeman and Kuimova, 'Turkey and Black Sea security' (note 4).

[200] Koru, S., 'Turkey's Black Sea policy: navigating between Russia and the West', Eurasianet, 20 July 2017.

[201] Aydin, M., 'Turkish policy towards the wider Black Sea and the EU connection', *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, vol. 16, no. 3 (2014), pp. 391–93.

[202] Babacan, A., 'Calming the Caucasus', *New York Times*, 23 Sep. 2008.

[203] Agenda.ge, 'Georgia hosts first trilateral meeting of heads of general staff of Georgia–Turkey–Azerbaijan', 17 Oct. 2017; and Cecire, M., 'A new partnership for co-operation in the Black Sea', Open Democracy, 18 May 2015.

[204] Aydin, M., 'Power struggle in the Black Sea', *Hürriyet Daily News*, 30 Mar. 2017; and Wezeman and Kuimova, 'Turkey and Black Sea security' (note 4).

initially to avoid confrontation with Russia. This position reflected Turkey's long-standing interests to maintain a regional power balance with Russia and to prevent the entry of larger powers into the Black Sea region. Turkey did not follow the USA and EU in imposing sanctions on Russia for its actions in Ukraine from 2014 and has voiced criticism of EU sanctions.[205]

Turkey's subsequent response to Russia's military moves in the Black Sea was shaped by shifting regional security interests and domestic politics. Russia's 2015 intervention in Syria led to growing tensions with Turkey, notably following the shooting down of a Russian fighter that crossed into Turkish airspace from Syria in November 2015. Reflecting the poor state of Russian–Turkish relations at the time, ahead of the 2016 NATO summit in Warsaw, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan called for a greater NATO presence in the Black Sea to counter Russia, commenting that the Black Sea had become a 'Russian lake'.[206]

While relations with Russia deteriorated from 2015, relationships with the USA and the EU also suffered. Following a failed military coup against Erdoğan in July 2016, relations with the USA were harmed when Washington refused to extradite the alleged instigator of the coup, Fethullah Gülen, a Turkish cleric and business person based in the USA. Turkish–US relations hit a low in August 2018 as the USA imposed sanctions on Turkey in a dispute over the detention of a US citizen. At the same time, EU–Turkey relations were hurt by concerns over a deterioration of democracy and human rights in Turkey and long-running frustrations about the stagnation of its EU integration process. Significant differences between Turkey on the one hand and the USA and Europe on the other over the war in Syria further clouded ties.

Against this background and reflecting strong commercial ties (notably the supply of Russian gas) and a new shared interest in the Syria conflict, Turkey rebuilt its relations with Russia from mid-2016.[207] The growing political distance between NATO and Turkey appeared to be confirmed in 2017 when Turkey agreed to buy the S-400 air defence system from Russia for $2.5 billion. While Turkey cited the price and advantageous technology transfer terms as reasons for its choice, the purchase was widely seen as a rebuff to NATO.[208]

Although Turkey has supported the creation of NATO's TFP in the Black Sea, it has played down the extent of Russia's militarization of Crimea and has sought to curtail initiatives to expand the TFP. Turkey advocates to ensure that the Montreux Convention is fully observed, which has the effect of restricting NATO's naval access to the Black Sea.[209]

[205] *Hürriyet Daily News*, 'Turkey says it is against EU sanctions on Russia', 11 Aug. 2017.

[206] Kucera, J., 'Erdogan, in plea to NATO, says Black Sea has become "Russian Lake"', Eurasianet, 12 May 2016.

[207] Mankoff, J., 'Russia and Turkey's rapprochement', *Foreign Affairs*, 20 July 2016; and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 'Putin, Erdogan pledge to closely cooperate on Syria, increase trade', 29 Sep. 2017.

[208] BBC News, 'Turkey signs deal to get Russian S-400 air defence missiles', 12 Sep. 2017.

[209] Kogan, E., 'NATO's Black Sea allies look divided and vulnerable', Balkan Insight, 25 Aug. 2017; and Socor, V., 'Turkey stalls NATO, clings to defunct status quo in the Black Sea', Eurasia Daily Monitor, 2 Aug. 2018.

Despite its poor bilateral relations with the USA and with the EU, Turkey has maintained its involvement in NATO military exercises in the Black Sea, notably in the maritime dimension through participation in NATO standing maritime forces.[210] Turkey has offered to supply troops to MN BDE-SE in Romania, deployed as part of the TFP, while it has resisted efforts to create a dedicated NATO maritime force in the Black Sea. In response to Russia's new posture in the Black Sea, the USA and other NATO members have shifted their security focus in the region to Romania and away from Turkey.

With the rapprochement with Russia, Turkey has returned to its traditional position on the Black Sea—that states in the region should take the lead on deciding Black Sea issues—while accepting a stronger, but limited, NATO presence to help to balance Russia.

While Turkey still has close ties to Russia, there are also areas of tension, notably over the Syrian conflict and the Russian military presence in the eastern Mediterranean Sea. Turkey is also a firm supporter of Georgia, reflecting in part its key role as a transit route for energy to reach Turkey. At the July 2018 NATO summit in Brussels, after NATO invited the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to begin membership talks, the Turkish foreign minister, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, is reported to have argued that NATO should also admit Georgia along with Bosnia and Herzegovina.[211]

Turkey seeks a balance between Russia, its membership of NATO and maintaining the dialogue about eventual membership of the EU.[212] Turkey's shift to balancing and hedging its international political and security relations reflects its position at the intersection of the Middle Eastern, European and Eurasian regional security complexes, all of which have become increasingly unstable and interlinked in recent years. As a result, Turkey's foreign and security policy has become more complex.

The emergence of Ukraine as a security actor in its own right in the region (although without a significant maritime capacity) and growing NATO military engagement in the region have created a new security focus in the Black Sea beyond the long-standing Russian–Turkish leadership role.[213]In October 2017, at a meeting with Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, President Erdoğan declared that 'Turkey recognizes the territorial integrity of Ukraine' and 'will not recognize the illegitimate annexation of Crimea by Russia'.[214]

Since October 2017, Turkey has maintained a trading ban on ships operating from Crimea.[215] Turkey has agreed to supply military aid to Ukraine and cooperate

[210] US Department of Defense, 'NATO groups exercise with allies in the Black Sea', 8 Feb. 2018.

[211] Bechev, D., 'Turkey and Black Sea security: ten years after the war in Georgia', Atlantic Council, 8 Aug. 2018.

[212] Koru (note 200).

[213] Yalinkiliçli, E., 'Turkey's "near abroad" in the Black Sea: Ankara's predicament between Kiev and Moscow', *Daily Sabah*, 16 Oct. 2017.

[214] Gafarli, O., 'S-400 dispute highlights ongoing difficulties in Turkey's rapprochement with Russia', Eurasia Daily Monitor, 6 Nov. 2017.

[215] Vorotnikov, V., 'Turkish sanctions threaten to disrupt Crimea shipping', *Fairplay*, 26 Oct. 2017.

on defence industrial projects. It has also reportedly concluded a deal valued at $43.6 million to equip Ukraine's armed forces with Turkish-made military radios.[216]

Turkey's position on Russia's actions in the Black Sea has been complicated by its support for Turkic minorities in the region, notably the Crimean Tatars, who have been a focal point in Turkey's relations with Ukraine since the early 1990s. In 2018 Turkey indicated its decision not to recognize Russia's annexation of Crimea was linked to its support of the Crimean Tatars.[217]

Turkey has launched a broad modernization of its military capabilities supported by a significant increase in military spending. As a result, it continues to be a major Black Sea military force (notably in the south of the Black Sea along its littoral), balancing and in some cases superseding Russian capabilities, despite the significant increase of Russian regional capabilities following the annexation of Crimea.[218] While still part of the Euro-Atlantic community as a result of its membership of NATO, Turkey's economic, security and political interests have shifted in key areas to now tie it to partners and policies that often appear at odds with European and North American states.[219] The contradictions created by Turkey's need to maintain relations across these different arenas with a wide diversity of international actors has led one observer to conclude that 'Turkey has no allies in the Black Sea, only interests'.[220]

Romania.[221] Romania has been a leading exponent of Euro-Atlantic integration in the Black Sea since the 1990s and in 2010 it agreed to host a US base contributing to the NATO ABM system. It has also hosted US military forces since the early 2000s, initially in connection with the deployment of forces to Afghanistan and Iraq.

Since 2014 Romania has emerged as the main focus for the NATO military response to the annexation of Crimea. Romania has also promoted a strong NATO response to Russian moves in the Black Sea region. Based on the geographical closeness of Romania to Ukraine and the lack of NATO military forces in close proximity, NATO assessed that Romania's national security was at risk.[222]

In December 2015 NATO and Romania activated the national Headquarters Multinational Division Southeast (HQ MND-SE) in Bucharest. Attached to it is a NATO Force Integration Unit (NFIU)—a logistics coordination unit that the 2014 NATO summit agreed should be formed on NATO's eastern flank—and, from October 2017, MN BDE-SE. Land forces have been supplemented by the

[216] Gafarli (note 214).

[217] Anadolu Agency, 'Turkey will not recognize annexation of Crimea: Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu', *Hürriyet Daily News*, 8 June 2018.

[218] Wezeman and Kuimova, 'Turkey and Black Sea security' (note 4).

[219] Magri, P., 'Introduction'; Larrabee, F. S., 'Turkey's main security drivers in Eurasia'; Frappi, C., 'The Russo-Turkish entente: a tactical embrace along strategic and geopolitical convergences'; and Talbot, V., 'Turkey and China: towards a stronger partnership?', ed. V. Talbot, *Turkey: Towards a Eurasian Shift?*, Italian Institute for International Political Studies (Ledizioni LediPublishing: Milan, Apr. 2018).

[220] Toucas, B., 'Turkey has no allies in the Black Sea, only interests', Center for Strategic and International Studies, 13 Feb. 2018.

[221] On Romania see also Wezeman and Kuimova, 'Romania and Black Sea security' (note 4).

[222] NATO officials (note 136).

commitment by NATO states to maintain the Enhanced Air Policing Mission operating from Romania. At the same time, Romania has been closely involved in the increased NATO naval activity in the Black Sea.[223]

Following the annexation of Crimea, Romania developed a new national defence strategy with a strong focus on the Black Sea.[224] It has also indicated that it will increase its military expenditure in order to modernize its armed forces and provide new capabilities.[225] Romania has sought to reorient its armed forces from expeditionary activities to territorial defence.[226] The country's defence infrastructure is being upgraded in part to support the rapid deployment of NATO forces to Romania in a crisis.[227] While Romania has advanced ambitious plans for its military and has announced some equipment acquisitions, its armed forces currently rely on outdated equipment and the modernization process is moving only slowly.[228]

Romania is playing an active role in military exercises in the Black Sea region with its NATO allies. Close cooperation with the USA's Black Sea Rotational Force is a particular priority.[229] Together with its neighbour Bulgaria, Romania has become a focus for NATO naval exercises in the Black Sea.[230] In 2015 Romania initiated and has subsequently led an annual anti-submarine exercise for NATO members and partners, Sea Shield. In 2017 the USA deployed anti-submarine aircraft to the exercise, together with ships from Standing NATO Maritime Group 2 Task Unit 2.[231] The anti-mine warfare exercise Poseidon began in 2015 as a bilateral Romanian–Bulgarian naval exercise.[232]

Within NATO, Romania has been a leading advocate for an increased military commitment to the Black Sea. It has maintained that the TFP should be strengthened and become a genuine multinational NATO force, in place of the current regional status. In particular, Romania has sought to build stronger political and defence ties with its NATO allies on NATO's eastern flank, with a focus on closer defence and security links to Poland.[233] Poland and Romania together initiated the Bucharest 9 format—involving Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia—to promote coordination and consultation within NATO among its eastern members and have

[223] Touma, A. M., 'NATO inaugurates new Black Sea force in Romania', Balkan Insight, 9 Oct. 2017.

[224] Romanian Presidential Administration, *National Defense Strategy 2015–2019: A Strong Romania within Europe and the World* (Presidential Administration: Bucharest, 2015); and Wezeman and Kuimova, 'Romania and Black Sea security' (note 4).

[225] Wezeman and Kuimova, 'Romania and Black Sea security' (note 4).

[226] Joja, I.-S., 'Dealing with the Russian lake next door: Romania and Black Sea security', War on the Rocks, 15 Aug. 2018.

[227] Luca, A. M., 'US plans to upgrade military bases in Romania, Bulgaria', Balkan Insight, 15 Aug. 2018.

[228] Wezeman and Kuimova, 'Romania and Black Sea security' (note 4).

[229] *Nine O'clock*, 'One hundred Romanian troops to participate in Platinum Eagle 18.1 exercise', 11 Feb. 2018.

[230] Romania Insider, 'NATO navy drills with Romania in the Black Sea this week', 9 Feb. 2018.

[231] Williams, F., 'USS Porter commences at-sea portion of exercise Sea Shield 2017', US Naval Forces Europe–Africa /US 6th Fleet, 8 Feb. 2017.

[232] Bosphorus Naval News, 'Poseidon 2017 naval exercise', 11 Mar. 2017.

[233] ACTMedia, 'New round of Romanian–Polish strategic dialogue on security matters', 17 Jan. 2018.

sought to extent it to other states.[234] In February 2017 Romania committed troops (the 81st Mechanized Brigade) to the Germany-led Rapid Forces Division within the NRF.[235]

Romania has become a key part of NATO efforts to build a stronger security relationship with Moldova, building on the historic and cultural ties between the two countries.[236] The unresolved conflict in Trans-Dniester and the presence of Russian armed forces there are viewed by NATO as a security challenge on its southern flank and in Ukraine's hinterland. Since 2015 Romania and Moldova have been discussing the creation of a joint military battalion for deployment in emergencies.[237]

Bulgaria.[238] In response to Russia's annexation of Crimea, Bulgaria has committed military forces to NATO initiatives such as MN BDE-SE in Romania. Bulgaria has also been an active participant in NATO military exercises and has hosted NATO forces as part of the broader commitment to deterrence in the Black Sea. This has included rotational forces from the USA.[239] Bulgaria is participating alongside Romania in NATO naval operations in the Black Sea and its ports are regularly visited by NATO naval forces.[240]

The direction of Bulgarian defence policy has at times been ambiguous, reflecting the national political divide over relations with Russia and the diverse priorities of its national security.[241] Leading Bulgarian political figures have generally sought to avoid a military build-up targeted at Russia, believing that it does not represent a direct threat and that militarization of the Black Sea will promote escalation and possible conflict. Bulgaria has sought to dilute measures to strengthen the NATO presence in the Black Sea, notably Romania's 2017 proposal that NATO establish a Black Sea naval force.[242]

Following the annexation of Crimea, Bulgaria has been confronted by the challenge of modernizing its armed forces, which continue to rely heavily on Soviet-era equipment, and to redress the capability shortfalls created by the drastic reduction of the scale of its armed forces.[243] While Bulgarian has announced some

[234] Terlikowski, M. et al., 'The Bucharest 9: delivering on the promise to become the voice of the eastern flank', Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM) Policy Paper no. 4 (164), June 2018; and Lupitu, R., 'Romania extends B9 format and will host in Bucharest the first defence ministers meeting of the eastern flank of NATO', Caleaeuropeana.ro, 20 Oct. 2017.

[235] NATO, 'Germany, Romania and the Czech Republic deepen defence ties', 15 Feb. 2017.

[236] Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 'Moldova says troops to join military maneuvers in Romania', 10 Feb. 2018.

[237] Popșoi, M., 'Moldova hopes to boost military ties with Romania amid tensions with Russia', Eurasian Daily Monitor, 21 Feb. 2018.

[238] On Bulgaria see also Wezeman and Kuimova, 'Bulgaria and Black Sea security' (note 4).

[239] Gigova, R., 'US troops deploy to Bulgaria as part of NATO operation to support Eastern European allies', CNN, 17 Feb. 2017.

[240] *Sofia Globe*, 'Three NATO ships conducting Black Sea patrols visit Bulgaria's Bourgas', 10 Feb. 2018.

[241] Williams, M. and Tsolova, T., 'Bulgaria torn between old friends and new partners over Crimea', Reuters, 10 Apr. 2014; and Petrova, M., 'Bulgaria and the Ukrainian conflict—at crossroads with the Russian Federation and the EU', Future Foreign Policy, 10 May 2015.

[242] Bozhilov, Y., 'The brief life of the idea for the creation of NATO black sea fleet', *New Europe,* 8 Jan. 2017.

[243] BulgarianPresidency.eu, 'The Bulgarian army is facing collapse due to lack of equipment and

plans for new defence purchases, it lacks the economic resources for substantial modernization and the political consensus on Russia that would be required to devote large-scale resources to defence.[244]

Those in Bulgaria who see Russia as a threat are balanced by those who point to other challenges facing the country from destabilization in the Balkans, large-scale migration, terrorism from the south, and uncertainty about Turkey's future political orientation and security role.[245]

Black Sea NATO partners

Ukraine.[246] NATO established relations with Ukraine in the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC, the predecessor of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council) in 1992 and through NATO's Partnership for Peace (PFP) programme from 1994. In 1997 they agreed the Charter on a Distinctive Partnership, which established the NATO–Ukraine Commission, and in 2002 agreed a NATO–Ukraine Action Plan.[247] From April 2005 Ukraine entered an intensified dialogue with NATO about the possibility of eventual membership.[248]

Ukraine applied for a NATO Membership Action Plan in 2008, but at its summit in Bucharest in April 2008 NATO decided against offering immediate membership to Georgia and Ukraine; nevertheless, the then NATO Secretary General, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, indicated that both countries would eventually become members.[249]

After the 2010 presidential election—which was won by Viktor Yanukovych, who supported maintaining Ukraine as a non-aligned country—Ukraine abandoned its plans for NATO membership. Following Russia's annexation of Crimea and the onset of the war in eastern Ukraine in 2014, and the parliamentary elections in October, the new government under President Petro Poroshenko made joining NATO a goal. On 8 June 2017 the Ukrainian Parliament passed a law that made integration with NATO a foreign policy priority, and Poroshenko soon announced that he would seek the opening of negotiations on a Membership Action Plan with NATO.[250]

Following the events of 2014, NATO has provided strong political support for Ukraine and its territorial integrity and has condemned what it terms the 'deliberate destabilisation' of eastern Ukraine by Russia, including its military intervention and support for the militants.[251] The NATO–Ukraine Commission

funding', 23 May 2018.

[244] Wezeman and Kuimova, 'Bulgaria and Black Sea security' (note 4).

[245] Gotev, G., 'Bulgaria reacts to disturbing statement by Turkey's Erdogan', Euractiv, 14 Mar. 2018.

[246] On Ukraine see also Wezeman and Kuimova, 'Ukraine and Black Sea security' (note 4).

[247] Charter on a Distinctive Partnership between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and Ukraine, signed and entered into force 9 July 1997; and NATO–Ukraine Commission, 'NATO–Ukraine Action Plan', 22 Nov. 2002.

[248] NATO, 'NATO launches "intensified dialogue" with Ukraine', 21 Apr. 2005.

[249] NATO (note 55); and 'NATO says Ukraine and Georgia eventually members', Reuters, 3 Apr. 2008.

[250] Ukrainian Law on Amendments to Some Ukrainian Laws on the Foreign Policy of Ukraine, No. 2091-VIII, 8 June 2017; and Polityuk, P. and Zinets, N., 'Pledging reforms by 2020, Ukraine seeks route into NATO', Reuters, 10 July 2017.

[251] NATO, 'Relations with Ukraine', [n.d.].

has become a forum for regular consultations since 2014, while the conflict in eastern Ukraine has been discussed at the NATO–Russia Council.[252]

NATO–Ukraine cooperation has intensified in critical areas, with NATO providing assistance to enhance Ukraine's ability to provide for its own security, including through a joint working group on defence reform, which had been established in 1998.[253] Measures have included strengthening defence education, professional development, security sector governance and security-related scientific cooperation channelled through six NATO trust funds for the support of Ukraine.[254] NATO has also reinforced its advisory presence at its offices in Kyiv.

At the NATO summit in Warsaw in July 2016, the NATO heads of state and governments and the Ukrainian president endorsed a comprehensive assistance package for Ukraine. The package was designed to support Ukraine's ability to provide for its own security and to implement wide-ranging reforms, including strengthened civilian control of the armed forces.[255] The USA, the UK and Canada have made major individual commitments to support training of the Ukrainian armed forces. In the US case, this has involved a 'near-constant rotation of US troops into Ukraine'.[256]

Since 2014, NATO countries have significantly stepped up the complexity and tempo of military exercises with Ukraine to improve interoperability and readiness.[257] Sea Breeze 2017 was the largest maritime exercise involving NATO members in the Black Sea to-date and included a focus on anti-submarine operations.[258] Rapid Trident is a multinational training exercise conducted by Ukraine, other members of the PFP, the USA and other NATO members. In 2017 about 2500 troops from 15 countries participated in the exercise in western Ukraine.[259] Ukraine also participates in other NATO multinational military exercises in the Black Sea, such as Sea Shield.[260]

In January 2018 Ukraine passed a law allowing up to 3000 foreign troops to enter the country for exercises and training. For 2018, Ukraine announced a series of exercises with NATO partners: Rapid Trident 2018, the Ukrainian–US exercise Sea Breeze 2018, the multinational exercise Light Avalanche 2018, the multinational exercise Clear Sky 2018, and the Romanian–Ukrainian exercise Riverian 2018.[261]

[252] Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, '"Fundamental differences" remain after NATO–Russia Council meeting', 26 Oct. 2017.

[253] NATO, 'NATO–Ukraine Joint Working Group on Defence Reform', 9 Apr. 2015.

[254] NATO, 'NATO's support to Ukraine', Fact sheet, July 2016.

[255] NATO, 'NATO steps up support for Ukraine with Comprehensive Package of Assistance', 15 June 2016.

[256] Panzino, C., 'Amid Russia tensions, US Army continues to build up Ukrainian forces, training center', *Army Times*, 8 June 2017.

[257] Margolin, J., 'NATO heightens maritime readiness with Ukraine, Black Sea allies', *Kyiv Post*, 18 Mar. 2017.

[258] Holmov, N., 'Ukraine and NATO partners conclude most ambitious "Sea Breeze" Black Sea naval exercise to date', Eurasia Daily Monitor, 26 July 2017.

[259] Interfax-Ukraine, 'Rapid Trident 2017 exercise begins in Ukraine', *Kyiv Post*, 12 Sep. 2017.

[260] Interfax-Ukraine (note 198).

[261] Interfax-Ukraine, 'Poroshenko signs law allowing foreign troops into Ukraine for drills in 2018', 29 Jan. 2018.

Following the onset of the conflict in eastern Ukraine, NATO member states initially refrained from supplying lethal weapons to Ukraine.[262] They have, however, provided military supplies. One notable area has been the supply of electronic systems for defence purposes by the USA, the UK and Poland.[263] Canada has also been involved in the provision of defence materials to Ukraine. In April 2017 the two countries signed a defence cooperation arrangement that permits increased cooperation on defence-related issues. The arrangement opened the way to sales of modern communications, electronics and night-vision equipment, precision guided munitions, and target-identification and -acquisition systems.[264] At the end of 2017 Canada permitted weapon sales to Ukraine.[265]

The USA has provided financial aid to Ukraine to support the security relationship. Between 2014 and 2018 it allocated over $1 billion to Ukraine for security sector assistance.[266] It has allocated $421 million to support training, equipment and advisory work in 2018, including support to develop the Ochakiv Naval Base.[267] In September 2017 the chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Joseph Dunford, recommended providing Ukraine with 'lethal defensive aid'.[268] In December US President Donald J. Trump approved the sale by US companies of lethal weapons to Ukraine, reversing the position of the Obama administration, and agreed the sale of sniper rifles.[269] In February 2018 the USA approved the sale of Javelin anti-tank missiles to Ukraine.[270] Some reports in Ukraine, citing a Ukrainian ministerial source, indicate that the USA has stipulated that the Javelins are not to be used on the line of contact in eastern Ukraine.[271]

Georgia.[272] Georgia joined the NACC in 1992 and the PFP in 1994. In 2002 Georgia declared its aspirations to achieve NATO membership. In 2004, it became the first country to agree an Individual Partnership Action Plan with NATO, which was designed to sharpen the focus of cooperation on defence reform efforts. Dialogue and cooperation deepened after the 2003 Rose Revolution, when the new Georgian Government pursued a policy of Euro-Atlantic integration. In 2006

[262] Lithuania was an exception to the NATO position. Medium, '#MinskMonitor: Lithuania's lethal aid to Ukraine', 25 Jan. 2018.

[263] EurAsia Daily, 'Royal pain: the West strengthens Ukraine's army let alone lethal weapons', 15 Nov. 2017.

[264] Sevunts, L., 'Canadian–Ukrainian defence deal could open doors to weapons sales to Kyiv', Radio Canada International, 5 Apr. 2017.

[265] Sevunts, L., 'Liberals clear way for weapons sales to Ukraine', Radio Canada International, 14 Dec. 2017.

[266] UNIAN, [The total amount of US assistance to Ukraine in recent years is about $ 750 million: Mattis], 24 Aug. 2017 (in Russian).

[267] US Department of Defense, 'DOD announces $200M to Ukraine', News Release no. NR-222-18, 20 July 2018.

[268] Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 'US military chief says recommends providing Ukraine with lethal defensive aid' 27 Sep. 2017.

[269] Rogin, J., 'Trump administration approves lethal arms sales to Ukraine', *Washington Post*, 20 Dec. 2017.

[270] Olearchyk, R., 'US approves sale of Javelin anti-tank missiles to Ukraine', *Financial Times*, 2 Mar. 2018.

[271] UAWire, 'US forbids Ukraine from using Javelin missile systems in Donbas', 7 May 2018.

[272] On Georgia see also Kuimova and Wezeman, 'Georgia and Black Sea security' (note 4).

NATO offered an intensified dialogue to Georgia on its aspirations to become a member.[273] Georgia made significant contributions to the NATO-led operations in Kosovo and Afghanistan.

At its summit in Bucharest in April 2008, NATO agreed that Georgia would become a NATO member, provided that it met all necessary requirements.[274] Following the fighting over South Ossetia in August 2008, the NATO–Georgia Commission was established in September and NATO established a liaison office in Tbilisi in 2010.[275] Politically, NATO has supported Georgian territorial integrity and has called on Russia to reverse its recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. NATO reaffirmed its decision to offer membership at its summits in 2009, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016 and 2018. However, progress on membership now appears to be frozen.

Following the fighting over South Ossetia in August 2008, the EU also made a substantial security commitment to Georgia and the region with the creation in October 2008 of the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM), an unarmed peace operation.

NATO's relationship with Georgia has evolved significantly since 2014. At the 2014 NATO summit in Newport, the Substantial NATO–Georgia Package (SNGP) was launched to strengthen Georgia's ability to defend itself and advance its preparations for membership. The SNGP involves a programme of support for defence reform, training and advice. In August 2015 the NATO-wide Joint Training and Evaluation Centre (JTEC) was established at Krtsanisi, near Tbilisi, as part of the SNGP.[276]

Further steps to strengthen Georgia's defence capabilities were taken at the NATO summit in Warsaw in July 2016. The close relationship has allowed for joint NATO–Georgia exercises to be conducted.[277] The JTEC will host the 2019 NATO–Georgia joint military exercise and a new command and staff training centre is being constructed.[278]

In parallel with the development of its relationship with NATO, Georgia has established significant bilateral security arrangements with NATO member states, notably the USA. Since 2009 the USA has supported the stationing of around 80 US marines in Georgia to train Georgian troops ahead of deployment to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan and the follow-on mission, Resolute Support, under the Georgia Deployment Program.[279]

[273] Georgian Ministry of Defence, 'NATO–Georgia cooperation', [n.d.]; and NATO, 'NATO offers intensified dialogue to Georgia', NATO Update, 21 Sep. 2006.

[274] NATO (note 55).

[275] Framework Document on the Establishment of the NATO–Georgia Commission, signed and entered into force 15 Sep. 2008; and NATO, 'NATO–Georgia Commission', 4 Dec. 2012.

[276] NATO, 'JTEC: NATO–Georgia Joint Training and Evaluation Centre', [Feb. 2017].

[277] Agenda.ge, 'First NATO–Georgia joint multinational brigade-level military exercise starts', 10 Nov. 2016.

[278] NATO, 'NATO–Georgia relations', Media backgrounder, Dec. 2017.

[279] Lyman, M., 'US marines observe, train Georgia's 33rd Light Infantry Battlion [sic] during Georgia Deployment Program', US Marine Forces Europe and Africa, 25 Feb. 2011.

Following the events of 2014 in Ukraine, the USA has sought to strengthen its bilateral security relationship with Georgia. In July 2016 the US secretary of state, John Kerry, visited Tbilisi and signed a new military cooperation agreement up to 2019.[280] On the basis of the agreement, the USA launched its Georgia Defense Readiness Program (GDRP). The aim of the programme is to train Georgian forces for territorial defence and combat, rather than as previously to prepare them for participation in peace operations.[281]

While the shift in US strategy towards Georgia began during the last months of the Obama administration, it gathered momentum under the Trump administration through the allocation of more military aid and support.[282] The USA has also increased the number of US troops conducting training in Georgia by 40–50, to supplement the 80 marines originally involved with the Georgia Deployment Program.[283] In mid-2017 US Vice President Mike Pence visited Georgia to offer strong support for the country, and at the end of the year the USA indicated that it was prepared to supply Georgia with advanced Javelin anti-tank missiles, a long-standing request from the Georgian Government.[284]

Military exercises are a key part of the Georgian–US relationship. The USA-led Noble Partner exercise takes place at the Vaziani and Camp Norio training areas in Georgia. Georgian–US exercises have become increasingly multilateral in character and their scale and capabilities have grown. Thus, in 2016 the USA for the first time shipped heavy armour, including M1 tanks, across the Black Sea from Bulgaria for the Noble Partner exercise.[285] The bilateral Georgian–US exercise Agile Spirit has been running since 2011. The 2017 exercise also involved the transfer of heavy armour to Georgia.[286]

Since 2014 there has been a growing involvement of other NATO members, notably Bulgaria, Germany, Romania, Turkey and the UK, and NATO partner countries Armenia, Azerbaijan, Sweden and Ukraine in security relations with Georgia. Georgian troops have also participated in NATO exercises in the Black Sea region, for example in 2017 in Saber Guardian in Bulgaria and Romania.[287]

As NATO has sought to strengthen its presence in the Black Sea after 2014, efforts have been made to link Georgia more closely with the NATO framework on Black Sea security, including the coastguard service.[288] Georgia has indicated its

[280] Memorandum on Deepening the Defense and Security Partnership Between the United States of America and Georgia, US Embassy in Georgia, 6 July 2016.

[281] Georgian Ministry of Defence, 'Cooperation with the United States', [n.d.].

[282] Kucera, J., 'Georgia: Trump administration boosting military aid', Eurasianet, 14 Nov. 2017.

[283] Kucera (note 282).

[284] Agenda.ge, 'PM thanks US Gov't for "very vocal" support to Georgia', 3 Aug. 2017; and US Defense Security Cooperation Agency, 'Georgia—Javelin missiles and command launch units', Transmittal no. 17-59, 20 Nov. 2017.

[285] Civil Georgia, 'US Army Abrams tanks shipped to Georgia for joint drills', 5 May 2016.

[286] Rukhadze, V., 'Georgia hosts large-scale, multinational military drills', Eurasia Daily Monitor, 18 Sep. 2017; and RT, 'M1 Abrams tanks, heavy armor arrive in Georgian port for Agile Spirit drills', 3 Sep. 2017.

[287] Agenda,ge, 'Georgian soldiers participate in Saber Guardian drill', 4 July 2017.

[288] NATO, 'Press conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg following the meeting of the NATO–Georgia Commission at the level of defence ministers', 16 Feb. 2017; and NATO, 'Press conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg following the meeting of the NATO–Georgia Commission at the level of NATO foreign ministers', 7 Dec. 2017.

readiness to further contribute to the NATO Black Sea operations and to develop interoperability and cooperation.[289]

As well as military exercises, NATO has sought to demonstrate a close security relationship to Georgia through military and political visits. NATO warships have made regular calls to Georgian ports and conducted naval exercises.[290] There has also been an increase in visits by senior NATO officials, including the secretary general, and by the North Atlantic Council and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly.[291] In October 2017 the NATO Parliamentary Assembly passed a resolution condemning

> Russia's illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea, its continuing aggression against Ukraine, continuous illegal occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions of Georgia by Russia, and its military build-up as well as stated plans for further expansion of its anti-access/area denial capabilities in the Black Sea.[292]

In December 2017 the NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, expressed the alliance's 'strong commitment' to Georgia's security and called on Russia to withdraw its forces from Abkhazia and South Ossetia. He noted that 'NATO continues to benefit from Georgia's advice on security issues relating to the Black Sea. And we are engaged in increasingly close dialogue on the Black Sea region and cooperation in the region.'[293]

Georgia has played a leading role in a trilateral intergovernmental military cooperation format with Turkey and Azerbaijan. This has involved field training with special forces from each of the three countries in the annual Caucasian Eagle military exercise.[294]

Georgia has launched a modernization of its military forces and has acquired significant new NATO standard equipment in the form of air defence and anti-tank systems. The focus of the modernization and the arms acquisitions is on land-based territorial defence. Georgia maintains its military spending at the level that NATO requires of its members: 2 per cent of gross domestic product. However, the size of the Georgian national economy means that this provides only modest capabilities, notably relative to its northern neighbour, Russia.[295]

Moldova. Moldova's relationship with NATO began in 1992 when the country joined the NACC. It joined the PFP in 1994. Moldova–NATO cooperation is managed through an Individual Partnership Action Plan, which was first launched

[289] Agenda.ge, 'Georgia ready to boost contribution for NATO naval operations', 3 Nov. 2017.

[290] Agenda.ge, 'NATO vessels enter Batumi to participate in joint exercises with Georgia', 3 Nov. 2017.

[291] Office of the State Minister of Georgia on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, 'Chronology', [n.d.].

[292] NATO Parliamentary Assembly, Resolution 437 on Stability and Security in the Black Sea Region, 9 Oct. 2017.

[293] Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 'Stoltenberg expresses NATO support for Georgia, urges Russian troop pullout', 6 Dec. 2017.

[294] Gurbanov, I., 'Revitalizing the military dimension of the Azerbaijan–Georgia–Turkey tripartite partnership', *CACI Analyst*, 24 July 2017.

[295] Kuimova and Wezeman, 'Georgia and Black Sea security' (note 4).

in 2006 and is agreed every two years. Since 2014 Moldova has contributed troops to the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR).[296]

Following its independence in 1991, and notably as a result of the Trans-Dniester conflict, Moldova has been politically polarized between parties oriented towards Russia and those oriented towards the Euro-Atlantic community. This is in part the result of geopolitical competition between Russia and the Euro-Atlantic community over the country. As a consequence, Moldova's geopolitical vector has been characterized by a pattern of oscillations between Russia and the Euro-Atlantic community, which has restricted the emergence of a closer relationship with NATO.[297] While Moldova is constitutionally neutral, it has pursued relations with NATO and the EU. However, unlike Georgia and Ukraine, Moldova remains a member of the CIS.

At their summit in Newport in September 2014, NATO leaders offered to strengthen support, advice and assistance to Moldova through the new Defence and Related Security Capacity Building (DCB) initiative.[298] In June 2015 the NATO defence ministers adopted a 'tailored package of measures' aimed to strengthen and modernize Moldova's armed forces and reform its national security structures.[299] At the NATO summit in Warsaw in July 2016, the member states underlined their support for the 'territorial integrity, independence and sovereignty' of Moldova, together with those of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia.[300] Later in 2016 Moldova and NATO agreed on the establishment of a NATO liaison office in Chisinau with the aim of promoting practical cooperation and support for reforms and capacity building. The liaison office opened in December 2017.[301]

NATO and Moldova have thus built a broad range of cooperation in recent years.[302] However, much of this cooperation is primarily symbolic and technical, reflecting the constraints imposed by the Trans-Dniester conflict and the deep domestic political divisions regarding the country's foreign and security policy.[303]

[296] NATO, 'Relations with the Republic of Moldova', 2 July 2018.

[297] Popșoi, M., 'Moldova's foreign and security policy vulnerabilities', Moldovan Politics, 25 June 2018.

[298] NATO, 'Defence and Related Security Capacity Building initiative', 12 July 2018.

[299] NATO, 'Milestones in NATO's deepening cooperation with Moldova', 24 June 2015.

[300] NATO (note 137).

[301] NATO, 'NATO Deputy Secretary General inaugurates new NATO liaison office in Moldova', 8 Dec. 2017.

[302] Gottemoeller, R., NATO Deputy Secretary General, Speech at a conference on NATO–Moldova cooperation, 8 Dec. 2017.

[303] Popșoi, M., 'Moldova's cooperation with NATO—strategic choice or political tactic', Eurasian Daily Monitor, 7 Feb. 2018.

4. Threat perceptions and security strategies in the Black Sea region

A key element of insecurity and instability comes from mutual threat perceptions. The Black Sea has played a central role in the emergence of a growing sense of threat for Russia and for the Euro-Atlantic community. The sources of rising threat perceptions in the Black Sea lie in the region's protracted conflicts, the inability of the post-cold war European security institutions—principally the OSCE—to overcome these problems, state-to-state and proxy wars, increasing militarization, and the re-emergence of military confrontation between leading powers. Re-establishing collective security in the Black Sea will require efforts to build trust through increased transparency and the exchange of information, and dialogue about mutual threat perceptions.

Russia's Black Sea threat perceptions and security strategy

Since the earliest days of the post-cold war period, concerns that disorder and localized conflicts around Russia's periphery (notably the North and South Caucasus) might spillover and spread through Russia has been a persistent element of Russian threat perceptions. There was also a rising sense of anxiety about the increasing influence and, later, enlargement of the Euro-Atlantic community. From the turn of the century, Russia's leadership viewed these two issues as intersecting in the Black Sea region, a development seen as central to national security.

Developments in the Black Sea region have, thus, been at the core of Russia's perceptions of threat and of the strategic challenges facing the country. In response to these perceptions, the Russian leadership has developed a security approach in which the Black Sea has become the pivot of an effort to rebuild a powerful position in the former Soviet space, to counter perceived Euro-Atlantic expansion and threats, and, in recent years, to re-establish Russia as a global actor.

Initially, Russian security concerns in the Black Sea region were dominated by the civil wars on or near Russia's borders—in Georgia's breakaway regions, Nagorno-Karabakh, Trans-Dniester and, most importantly, the North Caucasus within Russia's borders. As a result, Russia has been involved in the security and politics of these key regions for nearly 30 years.

The experience of fighting in these areas has strongly shaped Russian perceptions of being surrounded by disorder on its borders, which threatens to spill over into Russia and to fragment the country. The sense of a country facing existential threats has been compounded by concerns that localized violent instability has been inspired and directed from abroad, for example in terms of support from international Islamist networks for the separatist fighters in Chechnya and the belief that the Euro-Atlantic community was behind the colour revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine.

Since the late 1990s, under Putin, the Russian state has been refashioned in fundamental ways—notably in regard to the centralization of power, the prominence accorded to national security and military modernization. The Caucasus region was, in many ways, a laboratory for experimenting with strategies of hybrid warfare—information and cyberwarfare, and the use of proxy forces—well before the events that took place in Ukraine in 2014.[304]

In the 2000s the emergence of governments that Russia saw as hostile in Georgia and Ukraine and the orientation of these governments towards Euro-Atlantic integration led Russia to focus more on the USA and NATO, and later the EU, as competitors and then adversaries. From this perspective, Russia views the expansion of NATO along its southern flank as an effort by the USA and its allies to encircle it and neutralize its strategic forces in the Black Sea region, notably the Black Sea Fleet. For this reason, NATO enlargement to bring in Bulgaria and Romania and the subsequent establishment of US military facilities in these countries produced a strong Russian reaction.

Putin denounced 'the so-called flexible frontline [US] bases' during a key speech at the Munich Security Conference in February 2007.[305] In December of that year, the Russian foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, argued that the establishment of US military bases in Bulgaria and Romania 'only complicate arms control in Europe' and thereby justified Russia's suspension of participation in the CFE Treaty.[306]

Ahead of the fighting in South Ossetia in 2008, Russia continued to criticize the USA's basing agreements with Bulgaria and Romania. In a televised address to the Russian State Council in February, Putin highlighted that 'NATO itself is expanding and is bringing its military infrastructure ever closer to our borders' which has 'forced [Russia] into a situation where we have to take measures in response', namely the development of new types of weapons.[307] Putin continued by warning that Russia could aim nuclear missiles at Ukraine if it joined NATO and were to host elements of the NATO ABM system.[308]

Russia has also argued that the principle of territorial integrity, a cornerstone of the post-cold war European security order, was violated when NATO forcefully separated Kosovo from Serbia in 1999 and then when most EU members recognized Kosovo's independence in 2008 without the agreement of Serbia. In his 2014 speech to the Russian Federal Assembly, Putin referred to the 'Kosovo precedent' as providing the justification for Crimea 'reuniting' with Russian.[309]

[304] Lambert, M., 'Tracing the roots of Russia's hybrid warfare tactics', Eurasianet, 11 Oct. 2017; and Cohen, A., *Russia's Counterinsurgency in North Caucasus: Performance and Consequences* (US Army War College Press: Carlisle, PA, Mar. 2014), pp. 40–75.

[305] President of Russia, 'Speech and the following discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy', 10 Feb. 2007.

[306] Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 'NATO, Russia enter "challenging phase"', Newsline, 10 Dec.2007.

[307] President of Russia, 'Speech at expanded meeting of the State Council on Russia's development strategy through to 2020', 8 Feb. 2008; and Stott, M., 'Russia's Putin lashes out at West's "new arms race"', Reuters, 8 Feb. 2008.

[308] Finn, P., 'Putin threatens Ukraine on NATO', *Washington Post*, 13 Feb. 2008.

[309] President of Russia, 'Address by president of the Russian Federation', 18 Mar. 2014.

Following the decision by the 2008 NATO summit that Georgia and Ukraine could eventually join NATO, senior Russian officials including Putin, Lavrov and leading military figures responded with threats of a hardening of Russia's military posture if NATO were to spread further east—a step presented as a direct threat to Russian security and to the balance of forces in Europe.[310]

Seeking to deflect criticism of Russian military action in South Ossetia in August 2008, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev (who took office in May 2008) argued that it was NATO, not Russia, that was 'broadening the borders of military presence' by 'creating new bases'.[311] Russia specifically seeks to prevent NATO from moving forward into former Soviet territory, particularly Ukraine, which is seen by the Russian leadership as a 'buffer'.[312]

The security footprint of non-Black Sea NATO countries—the USA and larger European military powers—is of special concern for Russia, since they bring military capabilities that match or exceed those of Russia. Speaking in response to the inauguration of the ABM system in Romania in 2016, a senior official of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs is reported to have described it as 'part of the military and political containment of Russia'.[313]

As the prospect of Russian membership of the EU and NATO faded from the early 2000s, Russia's focus on acting as an independent international actor with special responsibilities in its near neighbourhood grew stronger. The colour revolutions, concern in the Russian Government that this model of regime change was being prepared for Russia, and efforts to integrate Georgia and Ukraine into the EU and NATO further magnified this approach. The belief that the Euro-Atlantic community ferments colour revolutions, including ahead of the Russian presidential elections in March 2018, continues to animate Russian threat perceptions.[314]

Given the widespread changes that have occurred in recent decades, including in the Black Sea region, Russia argues that the European security order agreed during the cold war and in the years following its end is no longer effective and needs modernizing. Following the fighting in South Ossetia in 2008, Russian officials indicated that there was a need to reconsider Europe's post-cold war security architecture, arguing that the conflict, together with other failings, highlighted that NATO could not manage European security on its own.[315]

In 2009 President Medvedev proposed a new European security treaty designed to address the perceived failings of the existing order.[316] The proposal's failure to gain the support that Russia had hoped for, along with the ongoing security

[310] Deutsche Welle, 'Russia talks tough in response to NATO's eastward expansion', 11 Apr. 2008.

[311] Barry, E., 'Russia President dismisses Georgia's leader as a "political corpse"', *New York Times*, 2 Sep. 2008.

[312] Trenin, D., 'Avoiding US–Russia military escalation during the hybrid war', Carnegie Moscow Center, 25 Jan. 2018.

[313] Emmott (note 181).

[314] O'Connor, T., 'Russia says US wars for democracy in Middle East and Europe could soon come to Moscow', *Newsweek*, 6 Mar. 2018.

[315] Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Transcript of remarks and response to media questions by Russian minister of foreign affairs Sergey Lavrov at joint press conference with minister of foreign affairs Radosław Sikorski, Warsaw, September 11, 2008', 12 Sep. 2008.

[316] President of Russia, 'The draft of the European Security Treaty', 29 Nov. 2009.

problems (principally in the Black Sea region) and Russia's growing ambitions subsequently led Russia to withdrawn from principal European security agreements, notably the CFE Treaty, while other agreements such as the 1992 Open Skies Treaty and the 2011 Vienna Document have increasingly been ignored or subverted.[317]

When Putin returned to office as president in May 2012, Russia's foreign policy gained a new vector: defending Russia's sovereignty.[318] A key theme has been patriotism derived from Russia's role in the defeat of Nazism in World War II, highlighted by an increased prominence for ceremonies to commemorate that victory.[319] In a speech to mark the accession of Crimea to the Russian Federation, President Putin evoked the idea of reclaiming historically Russian lands in opposition to those described as heirs to Stepan Bandera, the controversial leader of the Ukrainian nationalist and independence movement during the 1930s and 1940s.[320]

For the Russian authorities, NATO involvement close to Russia's borders has, thus, come to be seen as a key security threat that challenges the country's very survival as a sovereign state. For policymakers and officials, this presence should be countered by a clear signalling of core national interests with military force and the maintenance of local military superiority in key theatres, notably the Black Sea region. Thus, Russia has been assertive in the interception of NATO air patrols in the Black Sea.[321]

Russia's position of strength in the Black Sea is also used to challenge the Euro-Atlantic community and support allies through power projection into the Caucasus, the Middle East, the Mediterranean Sea and the Balkans.

In recent years Russia has supplemented resistance to the advance of the Euro-Atlantic community close to its borders with a drive to re-establish Russia as a great power. This is presented as being central to ensuring Russian sovereignty and security and to countering the unilateralism of the USA. Russia has, thus, established strategic objectives outside Europe, notably to become a key security actor in the Middle East.

Russia has been waging a military campaign in Syria since September 2015. A main purpose of the intervention—beyond the need to prevent a major victory for Islamist extremists and to protect its ally, the regime of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad—was to return Russia to the regional and global stage as an active geopolitical player with considerable military capabilities.

[317] Hille, K. and Buckley, N., 'Russia quits arms pact as estrangement with Nato grows', *Financial Times*, 10 Mar. 2015; Treaty on Open Skies, opened for signature 24 Mar. 1992, entered into force 1 Jan. 2002; and Vienna Document 2011 on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures, adopted 30 Nov. 2011, entered into force 1 Dec. 2011.

[318] Trenin, D., *Russia's Breakout from the Post-Cold War System: The Drivers of Putin's Course* (Carnegie Moscow Center: Moscow, Dec. 2014); and UN News, 'Russia's Lavrov backs view on primacy of sovereignty in international relations', 22 Sep. 2017.

[319] *The Economist*, 'Great patriotic war, again', 2 May 2015.

[320] President of Russia, 'Address by President of the Russian Federation', 18 Mar. 2014.

[321] Sharkov, D., 'US military jets have "no business" in Black Sea, says Russian general after "unsafe" intercept', *Newsweek*, 28 Nov. 2017; and TASS, 'Russian diplomat dismisses US claims of "irresponsible" behavior in Black Sea airspace', 9 Nov. 2018.

Ensuring that Russian military forces can operate from the Black Sea to support military operations in the Middle East, and not be prevented by NATO from this mission, has therefore become an important part of Russia's security assessment. As a result, Crimea has become not just one of Russia's 'vital interests' in the Black Sea but a crucial part of its broader global ambitions.[322]

A key component of Russia's assertion of its great-power status rests on its nuclear capabilities. In recent years, Russia has financed a wholesale modernization of its nuclear force. The deployment of a US ABM facility to Romania, as part of the broader NATO ABM system, is thus presented by Russian officials as imperilling Russia's nuclear force, notably its second-strike capacity, and, thereby, its security.[323] Russian officials have claimed that the ABM missiles located in Romania violate the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty), which banned land-based cruise and ballistic missiles with a range of 500–5500 kilometres.[324]

For Russia, the Black Sea thus brings together a variety of security imperatives involving ensuring territorial integrity, intervening in instability and civil wars along its borders and in neighbouring countries, countering governments seen as hostile to Russian interests, resisting the enlargement of the Euro-Atlantic security community into Russia's neighbourhood, and using its position in the region to project influence and power into other global regions.

To address the perceived threats and advance the priorities identified as Russian national interests in the Black Sea, the Russian authorities have developed a complex engagement that brings together measures to prevent colour revolutions, to influence, pressurize and coerce neighbouring countries, and to counter Euro-Atlantic soft and hard power. The build-up of substantial conventional military forces in the Black Sea has taken on an increasing significance in recent years as Russia has sought to consolidate its security position.[325]

Despite the large build-up of military forces and evidence that Russian military forces have regularly been covertly operating inside Ukraine (notably in mid-2014), Russia has not sought direct, open military confrontation in the region, except in the case of South Ossetia in 2008.[326] Instead, the Black Sea has become the venue for a more complex and opaque security challenge involving hybrid forms of warfare, proxy conflict in Ukraine, a significant conventional build-up, and an ambiguous nuclear policy. Military power, therefore, forms part of a broader struggle with the Euro-Atlantic community and its regional allies that involves new technologies such a cyber capabilities and traditional policies of political destabilization and information warfare.[327]

The conventional military standoff that has developed along Russia's borders in the Black Sea region is simultaneously linked to a far wider and multidimensional

[322] Orr, R., 'Why Crimea matters to Russia', *Financial Times*, 3 Mar. 2014.

[323] Kramer, A. E., 'Russia calls new US missile defense system a "direct threat"', *New York Times*, 12 May 2016.

[324] Soviet–US Treaty on the Elimination of Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Missiles (INF Treaty), signed 8 Dec. 1987, entered into force 1 June 1988.

[325] Delanoe, I., 'Russia has a deadly plan to defend the Black Sea', *National Interest*, 27 Feb. 2018.

[326] Croft, A., 'More than 1,000 Russian troops operating in Ukraine: NATO', Reuters, 28 Aug. 2014.

[327] Trenin (note 312).

security environment, including the Middle East and eastern Mediterranean, the Balkans, Eastern and Northern Europe, and even North America. For the Russian Government, and probably for important parts of the Russian public and elite, consolidating and even strengthening Russia's position in the Black Sea region is viewed as a battle for survival—to ensure Russia's status as an independent player capable of defining and defending its interests.

While the broader NATO–Russia confrontation is asymmetrical in favour of the overall military and economic strength of the Euro-Atlantic community, in the Black Sea region Russia enjoys a military advantage. In this context, Russia has also identified that it has an advantage at key moments by acting first to address a perceived threat and then presenting NATO with a fait accompli. Russia has, thus, reacted strongly to suggestions that NATO countries will supply weapons to Georgia and Ukraine, warning that such a step would be likely to lead to an escalation of conflict in the region.[328]

NATO's Black Sea threat perceptions and security strategy

NATO's approach to Black Sea security underwent a far-reaching shift after the annexation of Crimea and onset of the conflict in eastern Ukraine, reflecting a transformation in its threat perceptions regarding Russia in the region. NATO's subsequent approach to the Black Sea has been guided by its overall dual-track strategy in regard to Russia, which involves 'meaningful dialogue on the basis of a strong deterrence and defence posture'.[329]

Russia's annexation of Crimea came as a shock to many in NATO. This reflected the widespread assumption among its members that, despite the fighting in South Ossetia in 2008 and Russia's subsequent recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Russia would not violate the principle of territorial integrity, a central tenet of the European security order. In response to Russia's action, NATO's initial priority was the defence of the Baltic Sea region from the possibility of a Russian invasion.[330] However, Russia's rapid militarization of Crimea following 2014 led NATO to pay growing attention to the Black Sea.

For NATO, the importance of the Black Sea derives from a twin imperative. First, the region lies at 'a key strategic intersection linking NATO's Eastern and Southern flanks and the Balkans' role as a gateway to Europe from the Southern Caucuses, the Eastern Mediterranean and the broader Middle East'.[331] Second, for the NATO alliance (with some important differences among member states) Russia's 'revisionist' actions to alter the status quo in the Black Sea region and the

[328] Reuters, 'Putin warns US not to supply Ukraine with defensive weapons', 5 Sep. 2017; and NATO officials (note 136).

[329] NATO, 'Relations with Russia', 6 Sep. 2018.

[330] Watt, N., 'Nato to bolster defences of Baltic states amid Ukraine crisis', *The Guardian*, 24 Mar. 2014.

[331] Broeks, J. (Lieut. Gen.), Director General of the NATO International Military Staff, quoted in Allison, G., 'Director general of NATO international military staff addresses Black Sea and Balkans security forum', UK Defence Journal, 14 June 2017.

ongoing unresolved conflicts in the region critically threaten the post-cold war European security order.[332]

These developments risk having a negative impact not only on NATO and the EU directly, but also on the enlargement agendas of both organizations, which have focused on post-Soviet states in the wider Black Sea region (i.e. Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine).[333] NATO and the EU have thus reaffirmed their commitment to the right of states in the region to make sovereign choices about their security alignments as a core democratic and international legal principle.

The Black Sea region is viewed by NATO as having become the central focus of Russia's larger global strategic ambitions and agenda, notably as the platform for rebuilding influence in the Middle East and North Africa.[334] This has made the region a potential flashpoint for future conflicts on NATO's borders. Russia's strategic shift towards the Black Sea is now often viewed as predating the intervention in Crimea: from the 2000s, Russia 'changed its attitude towards the region and the Black Sea Fleet; it engage[d] in systematic efforts to maintain control over the "near abroad," and prevent the westward drift of Georgia and Ukraine'.[335]

NATO, thus, views the Black Sea region as an integrated political, economic and security arena for Russia that links the protracted conflicts of Georgia and Moldova with the new conflict in Ukraine, energy geopolitics and conventional military force projection.[336] NATO sees Russia's approach, as expressed in its 2014 military doctrine and 2015 national security strategy, as one of 'fragmentation' and 'subversion', notably in the Black Sea and Caucasus regions, with no clear distinctions between internal and external borders, all with a view to recreate a buffer zone against Western 'expansionism'.[337]

With the annexation of Crimea, NATO sees Russia as taking measures to strengthen its military position in the Black Sea—naval modernization with modern surface ships, new submarines and advanced cruise missiles, integrated air defence and amphibious landing capacities—to allow power projection around the Black Sea.[338] Crimea has become a 'platform for escalation', with new land- and sea-based weapon systems, including some with both conventional and nuclear capabilities.[339]

[332] Krastev, I., 'Russian revisionism: Putin's plan for overturning the European order', *Foreign Affairs*, 3 Mar. 2014.

[333] Rumer, E., *Russia and the Security of Europe* (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace: Washington, DC, June 2016).

[334] Anastasov, P., 'The Black Sea region: a critical intersection', *NATO Review*, 25 May 2018.

[335] Schmidt (note 141), para. 6.

[336] Horrell, S., 'A NATO strategy for security in the Black Sea region', Issue brief, Atlantic Council, Oct. 2016, pp. 2–3.

[337] Toucas, B., 'Russia's design in the Black Sea: extending the buffer zone', Center for Strategic and International Studies, 28 June 2017; President of Russia, [Military doctrine of the Russian Federation], 19 Dec. 2014 (in Russian); and President of Russia, [National security strategy of the Russian Federation], 31 Dec. 2015 (in Russian).

[338] Larrabee, F. S. and Flanagan, S. J., 'The growing importance of Black Sea security', RAND Blog, 11 July 2016.

[339] Bugajski, J. and Doran, P. B., *Black Sea Defended: NATO Responses to Russia's Black Sea Offensive*, Strategic Report no. 2 (Center for European Policy Analysis: Washington, DC, 2016), p. 2.

In 2015 General Philip Breedlove, a former NATO supreme allied commander Europe, made the assessment that 'Russia has developed a very strong A2/AD capability in the Black Sea' and 'Essentially their [anti-ship] cruise missiles range the entire Black Sea, and their air defense missiles range [over] about 40 to 50 percent of the Black Sea'.[340] As a result of subsequent further significant Russian missile deployments to Crimea, Russia is assessed within NATO to have extended its A2/AD umbrella from the eastern half of the Black Sea to cover nearly the entirety of the sea.[341]

NATO views the Russian annexation of Crimea and build-up of military power as creating the conditions under which Russia could prevent NATO forces from entering the Black Sea and so isolate the Black Sea basin from the rest of the NATO alliance.[342] Such a capability would undercut the security of the three NATO members on the Black Sea littoral, isolate the NATO partner countries Georgia and Ukraine, and disrupt the energy corridor through the Caucasus and Turkey to Europe. Moreover, the move into Crimea is seen as just a first step to gradually extend Russia's position in the region, including through the enclosure of the Azov Sea and restriction of access through the Kerch Strait.[343]

As well as a means to dominate the Black Sea, NATO sees Russia's annexation of Crimea and its subsequent modernization and expansion of the Black Sea Fleet as the basis for power projection into the Mediterranean Sea and Middle East, as well as the Balkans.[344] As a result of its military position in Crimea, the South Caucasus and Syria, Russia has developed 'operational military links along the Black Sea, the eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East'.[345] These steps have led some strategic thinkers to suggest that the Black Sea should be a 'strategic zone of focus' for NATO in response to the perceived geopolitical aims of Russia in the region.[346]

Russia is thus seen as seeking supremacy in the Black Sea as part of a much larger project to restore its dominion in the post-Soviet territories, to project power into neighbouring regions and, thereby, to rebuild Russia as a great power in world politics.[347] While strengthening military power has been a key means to achieve this aim, in order to project power beyond the Black Sea it has been critical for Russia to build a positive political and economic relationship with Turkey.

[340] Gibbons-Neff, T., 'Top NATO general: Russians starting to build air defense bubble over Syria', *Washington Post*, 29 Sep. 2015.

[341] Horrell (note 336), p. 3.

[342] Blank, S., 'Memo to NATO: wake up before Putin turns the Black Sea into a Russian lake', UkraineAlert, Atlantic Council, 28 June 2016; and Tsolova, T., 'NATO's new deterrent may include bigger Black Sea presence', Reuters, 22 Apr. 2016.

[343] Gvosdev, N., 'Russia's strategy in the Black Sea basin', War on the Rocks, 2 Aug. 2018; and NATO, 'Press conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg following the meeting of the NATO–Georgia Commission (NGC) in defence ministers' session', 3 Oct. 2018.

[344] Stavridis, J., 'Crimea isn't the end of Russia's Black Sea ambitions', Bloomberg, 11 Oct. 2017.

[345] Bugajski and Doran (note 339), p. 2.

[346] Stavridis (note 344).

[347] Weber, Y., 'Russia's Black Sea strategy: restoring great power status', Foreign Policy Research Institute, 12 Apr. 2017.

In response to these threat perceptions, from 2014 NATO developed an approach designed to reassure NATO members in the Black Sea and to assist its key partners, principally Georgia and Ukraine, to strengthen their territorial integrity.[348] The core of the response has been the TFP. While the aim of the EFP in Poland and the Baltic states has been to create a military 'trip wire' to deter an attack by Russia or the use of hybrid warfare in a NATO country, the aim of the TFP, at least as initially developed, is to reaffirm NATO's presence and commitment in the Black Sea region, while monitoring Russia's A2/AD capabilities and deployments.

NATO's approach also reflects its initial perception that it lacked an adequate force structure and command-and-control system in the Black Sea region, such that the regional forces were neither in a position to offer deterrence nor in a position to effectively defend the Black Sea countries in the event of a Russian attack.[349] Critically, NATO lacked key capabilities—notably naval and A2/AD resources—in the Black Sea theatre and the ability to quickly bring such capabilities to the region if necessary.[350]

NATO views the approach it has adopted to Black Sea security as measured and to be primarily defensive in nature, and thus unlikely to provoke conflict or an escalation of tensions. The policy of 'reassurance through readiness' emerged in 2014 from the NATO summit in Newport and involved the idea that the security of frontline NATO states could be guaranteed by signalling that there are forces in a high state of readiness that can, in the event of a crisis, move easily into theatre from reserve forces in Western and Central Europe.[351]

In 2017 NATO adapted is military presence in the Black Sea and shifted the focus from the initial position of reassurance to creating a 'trip wire' in the region with the creation of the TFP. The relatively light, regionally led but multinational model currently in place for the Black Sea is akin to the support for West Berlin provided in the 1950s, when British, French and US forces ensured that the Soviet Union could not control all of the city without triggering a wider conflict.[352]

There is, thus, a qualitative difference between the 'trip wires' in the Baltic Sea and Black Sea regions, as indicated by the terminology of the 'enhanced' and 'tailored' forward presences. The NATO forces in the Baltic Sea region consist of combat-ready, battalion-sized battle groups, led by the USA, the UK, Germany and Canada, that can operate together with national forces, backed by aircraft and forces for reinforcement from across NATO. The Black Sea 'trip wire' rests on the MN BDE-SE—the multinational framework brigade for training NATO forces led by Romania.[353]

NATO is, however, continuing to develop its position in the Black Sea with a view to establishing eventually deterrence based upon a growing presence, even

[348] NATO, 'Speech by NATO Deputy Secretary General Ambassador Alexander Vershbow at the Atlantic Club of Bulgaria conference on Black Sea security, Sofia, Bulgaria', 22 Apr. 2016.

[349] NATO officials (note 136).

[350] NATO officials (note 136).

[351] Manea, O., 'The A2/AD predicament challenges NATO's paradigm of "reassurance through readiness"', *Small Wars Journal*, 9 June 2016.

[352] NATO officials (note 136).

[353] Socor (note 145).

if through rotation, of military forces in the Black Sea. A stronger posture is also emerging from the modernization of the armed forces in NATO countries of the region, more substantial capabilities for rapid reinforcement, new capabilities being deployed to the region and stockpiled there, more frequent exercises, investment in military infrastructure, the Enhanced Air Policing Mission, regular naval visits, and an intensification of regional cooperation.

NATO has steadily drawn its partners Georgia and Ukraine into its expanding military presence in the region. This has involved an intensification of exercises, military assistance and the small-scale supply of weapons, the presence of NATO troops in the two countries in training capacities, the construction of military infrastructure, and consultation and intelligence sharing. NATO is also developing closer ties with Moldova, including exchanges on countering hybrid warfare, especially cyberwarfare, and sharing assessments on Russia's military posture and aims.

Despite all this, NATO's Russia posture remains incomplete. As NATO has moved towards deterrence, it has had to contemplate moving large numbers of troops and equipment quickly to the Black Sea. In this context, access to the Black Sea region has emerged as a primary constraint. NATO is required, not least since Turkey is a member, to follow the Montreux Convention, which greatly limits the access of warships of non-Black Sea states. At the same time, land access to the Black Sea region is hampered by the poor communications there and NATO's weakly developed logistics capabilities.[354]

The technical ability for NATO to complete the transition to a full deterrence posture in the Black Sea will, thus, depend on a significant modernization of the armed forces of the littoral states, increased capabilities in Ukraine and the creation of infrastructure to receive rapid NATO reinforcements. NATO also suffers from significant equipment shortfalls that will make challenging Russia difficult, notably in the areas of anti-submarine warfare and missile defence.[355]

To help address the logistics challenges in the Baltic Sea and Black Sea regions, in February 2018 NATO ministers agreed to establish a new support command for logistics, reinforcement and military mobility.[356] In part to circumvent the limitations of the Montreux Convention, but also because of deteriorating relations with Turkey, Romania has taken Turkey's place as the focus of the NATO presence on its southern flank.[357]

While NATO faces significant practical challenges to creating a deterrence posture in the Black Sea, the bigger challenge is a political one. A key issue is differences in member states' assessments of the nature of the Russian threat to the Black Sea region, notably in relation to other NATO areas and other security challenges that NATO faces.

[354] NATO, 'NATO defence ministers take decisions to strengthen the Alliance', 15 Feb. 2018.

[355] Freeberg, S. J., 'Outgunned allies must contest Baltic, Black Seas: NATO admiral', Breaking Defense, 19 Jan. 2018.

[356] NATO (note 354); and Reuters, 'Echoes of cold war as NATO mulls new North Atlantic command', Voice of America, 6 Nov. 2017.

[357] Rambler News Service, [NATO came close to Crimea through Romania], Russian Institute of Strategic Research, 9 Nov. 2017 (in Russian).

Thus, while NATO as a whole has made a significant combat-capable commitment to the Baltic Sea region, the Black Sea lacks an equal engagement, with a small group of member states (notably the USA) taking a disproportionate role in the region. As its 2018 summit communiqué indicates, NATO appears to be making slow progress in achieving its existing, limited goals around the creation of the TFP, whereas the more substantial EFP around the Baltic Sea has been fully established.[358]

Some NATO member states have been forceful in calling for a restrained build-up of forces so as not to provoke a response from Russia. Thus, while some members have supported the stationing of NATO troops in the Black Sea region, NATO has avoided establishing permanent military bases in Central Europe so as not to undermine the commitments made by NATO to Russia in 1997.[359]

NATO must also navigate the important political differences among its Black Sea members. Thus, in the immediate period after the annexation of Crimea, Romania championed the idea that NATO should build a permanent presence in the Black Sea, notably in the form of a NATO Black Sea fleet.[360] Initially, Romania found an ally in Turkey, which faced poor relations with Russia. Subsequently, Bulgarian opposition and Turkish scepticism ended the initiative. Bulgaria and Turkey have since acted to restrain initiatives to enhance NATO's presence in the Black Sea, including its naval dimension.

Turkey has a particularly complex position in regard to NATO's role in the Black Sea. It is committed to the alliance as a key part of its national security and also as a means to strengthen its role in the region; it thus supports Georgian membership of NATO. Turkey also supports a limited increase in NATO forces in the region to balance Russia. At the same time, as a leading Black Sea power in its own right, Turkey has been anxious to guard its position through constraining the build-up of military forces in the region from non-Black Sea states (especially the USA) through the framework of NATO. Turkey has insisted on the observation of the Montreux Convention and has opposed proposals for even stronger NATO forces in the region.

While the main focus of NATO in the Black Sea is on Russia, other security factors are also important for the alliance. As one NATO official has noted:

> Significantly, we face strategic threats from two different directions at the same time. On the one hand, a more assertive Russia is challenging international law and the sovereignty of its neighbours, with its illegal annexation of Crimea and destabilization of Eastern Ukraine[.] On the other hand[,] instability and violence in our southern doorstep risks spilling over into Allied territory in the form of terrorism and uncontrolled migration.[361]

[358] NATO, 'Brussels summit declaration', Press Release no. (2018)074, 11 July 2018.

[359] Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation, signed and entered into force 27 May 1997, Section IV.

[360] Bozhilov (note 242); Kucera, J., 'Romania pushing for permanent NATO presence in Black Sea', Eurasianet, 18 Jan. 2016; and Chiriac (note 144).

[361] NATO, 'NATO Deputy Secretary General: stability in the Black Sea is an important component of Euro-Atlantic security', 22 Apr. 2016.

5. The risks of military confrontation in the Black Sea region

Russia's annexation of Crimea and the onset of the conflict in eastern Ukraine in 2014 triggered a substantial deterioration in relations between the Euro-Atlantic community and Russia. The international security confrontation in the Black Sea region that has followed events in Ukraine is, however, only part of the shifting security landscape of the Black Sea.

The current military build-up by NATO and Russia around the Black Sea is taking place against the background of long-standing tensions and unresolved conflicts in the region that have accumulated over decades. At the same time, the Black Sea is experiencing far-reaching shifts in its international politics, as Black Sea states—Russia and Turkey in particular—have become directly involved in the conflicts and instability outside the region.

The dynamic character of Black Sea security and the growing risks of military confrontation, conflict and escalation in the region make it necessary to better understand and identify the main security challenges there.

Key security dynamics of the Black Sea region

While there is considerable focus on the tensions between Russia and the Euro-Atlantic community in the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea region is a far more volatile and unpredictable security environment. The Black Sea brings together militarized confrontations involving multiple actors and complex security and conflict dynamics, including those that stretch beyond the region to the Middle East and to different theatres in Europe. In this environment, three particular challenges are threatening the stability and security of the region: conflict transformation, shifting regional geopolitics and militarization.

Long-term conflict transformation

Almost from the end of the cold war, the Black Sea region has been at the centre of conflict processes that have fragmented and undermined efforts to build multilateral, cooperative security arrangements in the region. In the early 1990s the eruption of violent separatist struggles and the inability of European security mechanisms to resolve the violence led to the emergence of a set of protracted conflicts around the Black Sea.

In subsequent decades, these conflicts have gradually transformed, often shifting away from the original sources of violence. What originally began as armed movements between breakaway regions and the political authorities of the newly independent states have become, in effect, state-to-state conflicts as the breakaway regions have become de facto independent states.

At the same time, the region's conflicts have spilled across national borders, drawing in other state actors. In the case of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, Armenia and Azerbaijan have operated in a state of war with each other for over

25 years. In 2008 the dispute between Georgia and its breakaway regions mutated into fighting between Georgia and Russia. In other cases, protracted conflicts exist in a grey zone on the verge of becoming fully fledged state-to-state wars, notably in the case of eastern Ukraine, where Russian and Ukrainian military forces have, at least for several periods, been in direct confrontation.

Russia is an important actor, although to varying degrees, in all of the Black Sea protracted conflicts. It has both felt threatened by the conflicts and seen opportunities to initiate and influence protracted conflicts to its advantage. These two dimensions of policy have played a key role in shaping Russia's drive to become the dominant country in the post-Soviet space, and its focus on security policy as the central tool to achieve this aim.

The failure to resolve the Black Sea protracted conflicts and intensifying competition between Russia and the Euro-Atlantic community in the region have also led to the growth of the external dimension of these conflicts. Not only have the conflicts become a source for political dispute between the Euro-Atlantic community and Russia, but there has also been increasing military engagement and support for the differing sides in conflicts.

Thus, the crisis in Ukraine from 2014 represents both an intensification of long-term regional problems and the creation of a new situation with the formal annexation of territory. Subsequent actions by Russia and the response by NATO have added a further dimension to the regional security environment as two major global actors have moved closer to confronting each other militarily.

As a result of the long-term security transformation process in the Black Sea, the contemporary region involves the interaction of three distinct levels of conflict—local, interstate and extra regional powers—although the pattern that emerges across the region is complex. Different sets of actors and constellations of factors affect the set of protracted conflicts and are involved in military confrontation at different times, promoting uncertainty and insecurity.

The conflicts of the Black Sea region have, thus, shown themselves to be dynamic and transformative in character, rather than frozen around a fixed set of issues. Conflict across the region has regularly remade security realities, altering the interests, actors and nature of violence in the conflicts. The current build-up of military force by Russia and NATO in the region is, therefore, taking place in an unpredictable and fragmented security environment that challenges traditional concepts of deterrence inherited from the cold war.

A reshaped regional geopolitics

Historically, the Black Sea region has existed as a fault line between Europe, Eurasia and the Middle East—although powerful security actors (the Ottoman and Russian empires and the Soviet Union) have been able to extend effective control over the region for prolonged periods of time. The borders of Black Sea security have, thus, not been fixed but have rather been the product of regional power balances.

In the post-cold war period, the Black Sea was to be part of the European security complex and was to be subject to European institutions and agreements.

This offered a relatively clear definition of the region, its principal actors, and challenges and solutions, while integration into the Euro-Atlantic community was seen as the means to ensure regional stability. However, already from the early 1990s the initiative to incorporate the Black Sea within European security faced serious challenges.

First, a fault line developed between Russia and the Euro-Atlantic community. In place of a common European security, Russia has instead championed Eurasia—meaning primarily the post-Soviet territories—as a distinct economic and security space. In the future, China's Belt and Road Initiative is also likely to play a key role in shaping developments in the Eurasian region.[362] Second, with the Arab Spring, the boundaries between the Middle East and Black Sea security spaces have blurred, notably as a result of the involvement of Russia and Turkey in the conflict in Syria.

Turkey, as a NATO member and technically still a candidate to join the EU, has served as a central pillar of European security in the Black Sea in the post-cold war period. Currently, Turkey is at the centre of the broad regional changes taking place and has, as a result, adopted multivector security policies to balance Europe, Russia and the Middle East.

As a result of these changes, the Black Sea region is increasingly contested by a variety of actors and Black Sea security overlaps with geopolitical competition in neighbouring regions—the Caucasus, Ukraine, Moldova, the Balkans and the Middle East. In this context, the idea that European security will remain the dominant framework for organizing the Black Sea region and addressing its problems is being eroded.

Militarization and arms build-ups

The intersection of security spaces and the process of conflict transformation have been closely interlinked with the issues of militarization and arms races in the Black Sea region. The militarization of the Black Sea region has been under way for more than a decade. The build-up of military forces as a result of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the militarization of southern Russia to combat insurgents in the North Caucasus, the deployment of Russian military forces to the breakaway regions of Georgia and the build-up of Russian forces forward deployed to Armenia all occurred before the annexation of Crimea. Since 2014 there has been a concentration of military forces in Ukraine (both Russian-backed separatist and the modernized Ukrainian military forces) while Russian and NATO military capabilities, force size and intensity of military exercises in the region have all increased.

The process of transformation of the protracted conflicts has also involved a shift in the nature of warfare and military forces. The conflicts that once comprised incidents of armed violence involving largely irregular forces, often engaged in guerrilla warfare with light weapons, today involve substantial conventional

[362] President of Russia, 'Plenary session of St Petersburg International Economic Forum', 17 June 2016; and Ghiasy, R. and Zhou, J., *The Silk Road Economic Belt: Considering Security Implications and EU–China Cooperation Prospects* (SIPRI: Stockholm, Feb. 2017).

armies equipped with modern weapon systems and with a battle space that spreads over thousands of square kilometres. Reflecting this new context, pre-emptive strikes are increasingly displacing the approach of previous decades that focused on preserving the status quo.[363]

The militarization of the Black Sea region thus takes place on two levels. First, substantial conventional military capabilities have built up around a series of grey zones—the de facto but unrecognized breakaway regions that have emerged around the protracted conflicts of the Black Sea and generally exist in a state between peace and war.[364] Second, these clusters of militarization are now overlain by competitive integration projects across the region, in the form of Russia's assertion of its leading regional role and the economic and political, but now increasingly military, Euro-Atlantic project.

The arms race is not confined to conventional forces in the region but also involves nuclear-capable weapons. The deployment of the NATO ABM system in Romania along with systems to protect it from attack, including the new Romanian Patriot missiles, illustrates an escalation of strategic capabilities in the Black Sea. In response to the development of the NATO ABM shield, President Putin has spoken of new generations of weapons designed to overcome US anti-missile systems. The first example of the new systems has reportedly already been deployed to southern Russia, possibly to target the ABM facilities in Romania.[365]

Conflict risks in the Black Sea region

The intersection of the processes of conflict transformation, shifting regional geopolitics and militarization of the Black Sea have increased the risks in the region in four areas: military incidents; spillover and escalation; intentions, transparency and confidence; and the breakdown of regional security management and integration.

Military incidents

In the absence of clarity about mutual intentions, with poor direct communications and the decay or even collapse of long-standing military agreements, the build-up of military forces in the region brings with it considerable risks. The Black Sea has already been the location of a series of serious incidents involving opposing forces brought into an uncontrolled and, therefore, dangerous proximity to each other.

In April 2014 a Russian Su-24 combat aircraft buzzed the US destroyer USS *Donald Cook* in the Black Sea. Five months later, Russian aircraft made similar passes near the Canadian frigate HMCS *Toronto* as it made its way to Odessa, Ukraine, for the start of the Sea Breeze 2014 military exercise. In 2016 a

[363] Poghosyan, B., 'Analysis: Armenia's Karabakh strategy, from status quo to preemption', University of Southern California, Dornsife Institute of Armenian Studies, 19 Mar. 2018.

[364] Pugsley, S. and Wesslau, F., 'Life in the grey zones: reports from Europe's breakaway regions', European Council on Foreign Relations, 15 Jan. 2016.

[365] Felgenhauer, P., 'Russia seeks total military domination over West', Eurasia Daily Monitor, 8 Mar. 2018.

Russian combat aircraft was reported to have flown within 3 metres of a US Navy P-8A anti-submarine aircraft operating in the Black Sea.[366] A similar incident occurred in November 2017.[367] In January 2018 a US Navy EP-3 reconnaissance aircraft was reported to have had a near encounter with a Russian combat aircraft in the region with a further incident in November 2018.[368] In May 2018 a British warship was reportedly 'buzzed' by 17 Russian aircraft close to Crimea.[369] With Russia arguing that the presence of NATO forces in the region is 'provocative' and the USA conducting missions to 'desensitize' Russia to NATO, there is a risk of further incidents, including a serious accident (such as a collision), which might trigger a military escalation.[370]

The risk of accidental military clashes occurring is not confined to Russian and NATO forces. The high level of tension and build-up of military forces around Nagorno-Karabakh, in eastern Ukraine and in the breakaway regions of Georgia represent further areas of risk in the Black Sea region, as highlighted by the naval clashes between Russia and Ukraine in the Kerch Strait in November 2018.[371] Among these, the violence in Nagorno-Karabakh has perhaps the greatest potential to spiral into a multiregional conflagration under the right circumstances.

Spillover and escalation

The significance of accidents involving military forces in the Black Sea region is magnified because of the escalation risks in the region. Underpinning the build-up of military force in the Black Sea is a set of insecurities that affect the multiplicity of security actors in the region.

The de facto independent states are insecure in the face of the generally more powerful rump states. The rump states are insecure since the de facto states are aligned with the more powerful Russia. Russia itself is insecure because it perceives that a militarily stronger Euro-Atlantic community is encroaching on its borders. Equally, NATO and the EU feel insecure because Russia commands a dominant military force in the Black Sea region.

With the main military forces in the region feeling insecure, an arms build-up is under way as the Black Sea states and their allies seek to modernize their military forces and deploy ever more capabilities to the Black Sea to gain advantage.[372] The increasingly close proximity of weapon systems, notably advanced short-range missile systems, is shortening early-warning and reaction times.

[366] BBC News, 'US says Russian jet flew 10ft from plane over Black Sea', 7 Sep. 2016.

[367] Browne, R., 'Russian jet makes "unsafe" intercept of US Navy aircraft', CNN, 27 Nov. 2017.

[368] Lamothe, D., 'From several angles, a new look at how a Russian jet buzzed a Navy aircraft', *Washington Post*, 31 Jan. 2018; and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 'Russian jet intercepts US Navy plane over Black Sea', 6 Nov. 2018.

[369] Sky News, 'Royal Navy ship buzzed by 17 "hostile" Russian jets off the coast of Crimea', 26 Nov. 2018.

[370] Downs (note 162); and Polygraph.info, 'Russia calls US warship deployments in the Black Sea "provocative"', 2 Mar. 2018.

[371] BBC News, 'Russia-Ukraine tensions rise after Kerch Strait ship capture', 26 Nov. 2018.

[372] Kabanenko, I., 'The growing threat to Ukraine of naval mines in the Black Sea', Eurasia Daily Monitor, 3 Aug. 2017.

The escalation of capabilities that is being generated by the regional arms race can clearly have destabilizing effects that further accentuate insecurities. At present, however, while there are risks of escalation, the arms build-up is not affecting underlying power balances across the region. Russia remains the predominant regional military power, with NATO's actions remaining between reassurance and deterrence.

Military exercises in the region are another source of potential instability. While military exercises are presented as enhancing deterrence, and thereby promoting stability, the increasing scale and intensity of Russia and NATO exercises, the lack of shared information about them, and their close proximity to each other increases threat perceptions, risks of escalation and misunderstanding.[373] Russia used exercises to pre-position military forces ahead of the fighting in South Ossetia in 2008 and ahead of the annexation of Crimea.[374] The element of surprise, stealth and deception are key elements of this type of warfare. Subsequent exercises in the region have come to be viewed as potential springboards for military action, leading to heightened states of alert and readiness in Russia's neighbours.[375]

A key dilemma in the region is finding the balance between deterrence and escalation, reflecting the complex ties between conflict levels. In many cases, the deployment of military capabilities that one side sees as enhancing deterrence in one context could be seen by another side as escalatory in another context. One example is the current proposals for NATO weapon deliveries to the region: if not communicated properly, the acquisition by Georgia and Ukraine of advanced anti-tank weapons—even those presented as being primarily for defence such as the Javelin anti-tank missile—may not increase deterrence but instead provoke further Russian build-ups or even pre-emptive action.[376]

At the same time, with Russia and the Euro-Atlantic community increasingly involved in the protracted conflicts of the region, the risk of a local dispute escalating to draw in regional and international powers is increasing. While each of the region's conflicts has an international conflict-resolution mechanism in place, growing tensions between Russia and the Euro-Atlantic community have challenged the effectiveness of such tools.[377] The case of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict stands out because major powers have relatively little leverage over the local parties, yet a renewed conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh could quickly trigger a wider conflagration, potential drawing in the regional powers Russia and Turkey, with unpredictable implications for NATO.[378]

[373] Clem, R., 'Military exercises as geopolitical messaging in the NATO-Russia dynamic: reassurance, deterrence, and (in)stability', *Texas National Security Review*, vol. 2, no. 1 (Nov. 2018).

[374] Kowalik, T. K. and Jankowski, D. P., 'Zapad 2017: NATO should be keeping an eye on Russia's training exercises', *National Interest*, 7 May 2017.

[375] Kowalik, T. K. and Jankowski, D. P., 'The dangerous tool of Russian military exercises', Center for European Policy Analysis, 9 May 2017.

[376] Cecire, M., 'The rewards and risks of the US providing Georgia with advanced anti-tank arms', World Politics Review, 12 Jan. 2018.

[377] The mechanism for Georgia is the Geneva International Discussions, for Moldova it is the '5+2' format, for Ukraine it is the Normandy Four format and for Nagorno-Karabakh it is the OSCE Minsk Group.

[378] Cavanaugh, C., 'Renewed conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh', Contingency Planning Memorandum no. 30, Council on Foreign Relations, Feb. 2017.

As military force is built up in the Black Sea region and with tensions already high, there are numerous potential triggers for conflicts to start, to escalate in scale and diffuse across different conflict levels in unpredictable ways. In the absence of a clear understanding between Russia and NATO on how to manage such spillover and escalation and where the potential break points in such an escalation might occur, it may be difficult to contain an upward spiral in violence if a conflict breaks out.

Intentions, transparency and confidence

Russia's annexation of Crimea was a shock to the Euro-Atlantic community, despite Russian leaders signalling strongly for over a decade their concerns about and even hostility to Euro-Atlantic enlargement, including in the form of the fighting in South Ossetia in 2008. This breakdown in understanding of mutual threat perceptions is clearly deep and even extends to alternative understandings of recent European security history.[379] Following the annexation of Crimea, European politicians were reported to have observed that President Putin was living in an 'alternate universe'.[380]

The lack of clarity on intentions is critical because it underpins notions of deterrence and proportional response and any effort to establish breaks in escalation. While NATO believes that it lacks sufficient force in the Black Sea to deter Russia, there is insufficient political support among its members for either the deployment of a substantial force to the region or the establishment of permanent bases. Either action is viewed by a significant number of NATO members as likely to risk Russia overreacting.[381] Moreover, it would require a step change in military spending by European members of NATO to fund the acquisition of capabilities to ensure garrisoning, resupply and reinforcement of a substantial force in the region. Instead, NATO has adopted an approach that seeks to signal to Russia that, in the event of a conflict, NATO would be able to quickly transport a significant force into the region.

However, Russia sees the increased NATO presence in the Black Sea as a continuation of an effort to encircle the country, which also includes key areas of uncertainty. For Russia a significant ambiguity concerns the security commitments that the Euro-Atlantic community has made to Georgia and Ukraine. Having previously pursued multivector international relations, these two countries have now aligned their priorities with those of NATO and the EU and other Western institutions. Russia's annexation of Crimea and the war in eastern Ukraine have strengthened support in the region for the EU.

[379] An effort to bridge the gap in mutual understandings organized under the umbrella of the OSCE in 2015 led to a report with separate perspectives on the sources of the crisis. Even then it was not supported by Russia's representative. Panel of Eminent Persons on European Security as a Common Project, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), *Back to Diplomacy, Final Report and Recommendations* (OSCE: Vienna, Nov. 2015).

[380] Traynor, I. and Wintour, P., 'Ukraine crisis: Vladimir Putin has lost the plot, says German chancellor', *The Guardian*, 3 Mar. 2014.

[381] Visan, G., 'Growing submarine threat in the Black Sea', Eurasia Daily Monitor, 19 Jan. 2018.

NATO has indicated that both Georgia and Ukraine will join the alliance but there is no timetable in place. Since the annexation of Crimea, NATO has stepped up its cooperation with both countries, and individual NATO members have significantly increased their engagement with them. These relationships are continuing to evolve and deepen.

The deployment of heavy weapons by NATO countries to military exercises in Georgia and Ukraine appears to signal a readiness to commit force to their defence, at least by leading NATO members (principally the USA), but the NATO Article 5 security guarantee is not in place for these two countries.[382] In addition there is no bilateral commitment by the USA to defend Georgia and Ukraine. However, the conduct of such exercises ensures that Russia continues to regard Georgia and Ukraine as potential platforms for NATO forces on its borders. The concern is that, with such ambiguity, there is a risk that violence in either country could escalate in the light of uncertainty about the commitments and intentions of NATO and the USA.

The breakdown of regional security management and integration

The conflicts of the Black Sea region, the escalation of tensions and the military build-up since 2014 have dealt a serious blow to the post-cold war efforts to establish new 'hard' and 'soft' security arrangements in the region based on openness, strengthening contacts and connections across the region, and consensus. These measures were seen as an integral part of the broader European security framework, notably the commitments made within the OSCE.

Turkey, in particular, took the lead regarding regional cooperation, emphasizing its role as a stabilizing influence in the Black Sea. Despite the positive international environment from the early 1990s, the achievements of regional cooperation initiatives were generally modest. The security initiatives led to increased military-to-military contacts, but this did not translate into deeper and effective cooperation. The extension of Euro-Atlantic integration into the Black Sea region offered a new model of integration for many of the countries of the region, but it also challenged the traditional leading positions of Russia and Turkey.

As tensions between Russia and the Euro-Atlantic community have grown, the initiatives to encourage comprehensive regional cooperation from the 1990s and 2000s have been severely undermined. The fighting between Georgia and Russia in 2008 illustrated the new situation emerging in the Black Sea and that the mainstays of the European security order established since the end of World War II were increasingly under pressure in the region, with many of the key European and international agreements that underpinned regional cooperation in the Black Sea undermined.

The USA withdrew from the bilateral 1972 ABM Treaty in 2002, which opened the way to its deployment of a European ABM system.[383] Russia suspended its

[382] In Article 5 of the 1949 North Atlantic Treaty, the NATO members agree that 'an armed attack against one or more of them . . . shall be considered an attack against them all'. North Atlantic Treaty, signed 4 Apr. 1949, entered into force 24 Aug. 1949.

[383] Soviet–US Treaty on the Limitation of Anti-Ballistic Missile Systems, signed 26 May 1972, entered

participation in the CFE Treaty in 2007 and then withdrew in March 2015, notably leaving it free to militarize Crimea from 2014. The Open Skies Treaty has also been noticeably eroded as Georgia has refused Russia permission to fly over Georgian territory due to Russia's support for Abkhazia and South Ossetia, while Russia has closed part of its border with Georgia to flights.[384] In October 2018 the USA indicated it would withdraw from the INF Treaty, citing Russia's violations of the treaty (following Russia's claims that the US ABM system in Romania is in violation of the agreement), further weakening arms control between NATO and Russia.[385]

into force 3 Oct. 1972, not in force from 13 June 2002, *United Nations Treaty Series*, vol. 944 (1974).

[384] Reynolds, G. M., 'Taking stock of the Treaty on Open Skies', Expert Brief, Council on Foreign Relations, 3 Nov. 2017.

[385] Borger, J. and Pengelly., M., 'Trump says US will withdraw from nuclear arms treaty with Russia', *The Guardian*, 21 Oct. 2018.

6. Conclusions and steps forward

The Black Sea region today is a complex and unpredictable security space. The sources of this dynamism are diverse, being the result of the accumulation of unresolved local security problems, the deterioration of relations between Russia and the Euro-Atlantic community, and far-reaching shifts in the power balances in interlinked security regions and the wider global order. With the militarization of the region accelerating at the same time as regional conflict-management mechanisms are increasingly ineffective or have even broken down, the risks of increased conflict, and even military confrontation between Russia and NATO, are being magnified.

As the crisis has approached, there have been numerous efforts to address the strategic challenges of relations between Russia and the Euro-Atlantic community, which play out in particular in the Black Sea region. These have achieved little progress due to fundamental disagreements on the key issues of sovereignty, security, democracy and competing integration projects. At present, there appear to be few opportunities for improvement in broader relations between Russia and the Euro-Atlantic community, and the likelihood is that tensions will continue to rise.

In the Black Sea region a further consolidation of the military positions of NATO and Russia can be anticipated, including a deepening security engagement in the countries caught between the larger powers. The protracted conflicts in the region will continue to evolve through their own local dynamics and under the influence of the regional power confrontation. Russia appears set to retain its position of military predominance that it established with the annexation of Crimea but whose foundations have been built up from the early post-cold war years.

While NATO continues to strengthen its forces in the region, to improve its ability to transport reinforcements and to enhance its security partnerships with Georgia and Ukraine, there is no political consensus among its members on challenging or even matching Russian regional military forces in the Black Sea. NATO is thus caught between reassurance and deterrence in the region and risks sending an ambiguous message about its commitment to the Black Sea.

While there appears to be little prospect of a breakthrough in NATO–Russia relations, there is an imperative to explore pragmatic means to manage the emerging security situation in the Black Sea region. Maintaining existing communication channels and developing new—possibly ad hoc and informal—ones to help prevent and manage military accidents, including avoiding unintentional escalations, should be a priority. Increased military-to-military exchanges of information, transparency and communication would decrease the risks of unintended conflict.

While the existing set of military security agreements is under considerable pressure, the Open Skies Treaty and the Vienna Document continue to offer the best available means to build confidence through transparency. Every effort

should be made to maintain the operation of these important risk-reduction mechanisms and to explore how they might be adapted and modernized, notably for the new security environment of the Black Sea. While both sides have a responsibility to improve transparency in military activities, Russia should take the lead in re-establishing functioning arrangements, as it has expressed the strongest criticism of existing agreements, and the Euro-Atlantic community should be ready to give consideration to serious Russian proposals in good faith.

Misperceptions have been an important element in the security crisis in the Black Sea. The Euro-Atlantic community has historically underestimated Russian concerns and resolution, while Russia has overestimated the militarized threat of the Euro-Atlantic community. Developing a dialogue to improve mutual understanding of the security challenges of the Black Sea, including developing clearer understandings of the potential for conflict overspill and escalation in the region would be a useful confidence-building mechanism.

The grey zones that have built up around the protracted conflicts of the Black Sea region remain a serious risk for conflicts that could escalate into larger conflagrations. Russia has twice intervened militarily to consolidate and create such zones to prevent NATO enlargement, which Russia sees as a core security interest. While the Euro-Atlantic community does not appear prepared to go to war in the Black Sea, it is not ready to concede a Russian sphere of influence in the region. In this context, while it may not be possible to resolve the conflicts in the near future, it is necessary to make efforts to demilitarize and desecuritize the engagement of the major actors in the protracted conflicts in order to reduce their potential to escalate to the regional or international levels.

The Euro-Atlantic community and Russia should continue to cooperate in areas where they have worked effectively together in the past. The OSCE Minsk Group process on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has demonstrated that the USA, Russia and other European states can find common cause on security in the region. In the future the Minsk Group should address the increasing militarization around the conflict through restricting the supply of heavy and advanced arms to the conflict parties.

Softer targets for cooperation could be pursued in the areas of, for example, the environment, trafficking in illicit substances, managing refugee and migration flows, and research. Contact in these areas would encourage dialogue and promote confidence building, but it would be unrealistic to expect that this will lead, at least in the short term, to improvements in the harder security environment.

While a comprehensive resolution of the security challenges of the Black Sea probably lies in the distant future, confidence- and security-building measures need to be undertaken today to prevent the emergence of full-scale, militarized power balance politics in the region.

Progress is unlikely to come from discussion in a single format. Developments in the Black Sea are being driven by multiple actors, across different levels of conflict and in a security space that is evolving rapidly. Multiple tracks and dialogues, involving officials but also, and perhaps more importantly at this point, civil society and experts should be developed to promote better understanding of the

military dynamics of the region and to foster the contacts that will be necessary to find eventual solutions to the region's security challenges.

REBUILDING COLLECTIVE SECURITY IN THE BLACK SEA REGION

Armed clashes between Russia and Ukraine in the Kerch Strait in November 2018 are a timely reminder of the fragile nature of security in the Black Sea. Since Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the onset of conflict in eastern Ukraine, tensions have risen as Russia has continued to build up its regional armed forces and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has significantly strengthened its commitment to the Black Sea. While neither side is seeking a direct military confrontation, the risks from military accidents and unintended clashes, misperception and miscalculation are clear.

The dangers of confrontation leading to escalation in the Black Sea region are magnified by protracted conflicts and interstate wars that have destabilized the region and fostered conflicting threat perceptions. Today, across the Black Sea region, de facto independent states are insecure in the face of the more powerful rump states. The rump states are insecure as the de facto states are generally aligned with the more powerful Russia. Russia itself is insecure because it perceives that a militarily stronger Euro-Atlantic community is encroaching on its borders. Equally, NATO and the European Union feel insecure because Russia commands a dominant military force in the Black Sea region.

Given the centrality of the Black Sea region for security in Europe, Eurasia, the Balkans and the Middle East, there is an urgent need to address the sources of militarization, insecurity and confrontation in the region. This SIPRI Policy Paper highlights a number of initial steps to begin to rebuild collective security in the Black Sea region.

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