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Recent events in the Black Sea region, especially after Russia annexed Crimea, shows Russia's renewed interest in an area disputed within a geopolitical competition as well as the country's use of a new strategy. In fact, it is part of the emerging pattern of anti-access/area denial regions in the proximity of big powers with revisionist agenda where the freedom can be questioned and even suspended by the will of the strongest power. This hybrid or non-linear warfare practiced by Russia in the Black Sea region aims to weaken the ability of reaction of government targets - by exploiting popular grievances or corruption makers.

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Russia's Black Sea Strategy after Crimean Annexation

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Executive Summary

Title: Russia's Black Sea Strategy after Crimean Annexation

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Thesis: After Crimean annexation, Russia has modified its strategy and is no longer focused on single states but on alliances. Russia is permanently adapting its actions by focusing on a new special relationship with Turkey, by developing the Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) concept, and by conducting an aggressive propaganda campaign.

Discussion: Shortly after the 2008 NATO Summit in Bucharest came to an end, Russia invaded Georgia. The 2014 NATO Summit in Wales was marked by the annexation of Crimea. A week after the 2016 NATO Summit in Warsaw, Russia's attempt to strengthen its relationship with a vital NATO member Turkey became explicit. These examples indicate the Russian leadership's desire to strengthen its influence in western and southern countries beyond its borders, countries in the EU and/or in NATO. In contrast, Russia used direct and explicit military force in Georgia in 2008 and in the hybrid war in Ukraine and Moldova after 2013, and used diplomatic means to attract a new ally, as in the case of Turkey in 2016. But, by far, Russia's most important adversaries remain NATO, the US and the European Union.

Conclusion: Recent events in the Black Sea region, especially after Russia annexed Crimea, shows Russia's renewed interest in an area disputed within a geopolitical competition as well as the country's use of a new strategy. In fact, it is part of the emerging pattern of anti-access/area denial regions in the proximity of big powers with revisionist agenda where the freedom can be questioned and even suspended by the will of the strongest power. This hybrid or non-linear warfare practiced by Russia in the Black Sea region aims to weaken the ability of reaction of government targets - by exploiting popular grievances or corruption makers. By understanding Russia's new strategy and the means used to accomplish it, NATO, the US and European countries will have to think of a different strategy with procedures in the same non-linear spectrum in order to counter it.

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Introduction

Has Russia changed its strategy in the Black Sea after the Crimean annexation or is it still using the same approach, which seems not to be outdated? Russia has changed its strategy by demonstrating a non-linear way of waging war focused on internal and external means to achieve its ends.¹ Russia is permanently adapting its actions by focusing on a new special relationship with Turkey, by developing the Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) concept, and by conducting an aggressive propaganda campaign. After Crimea annexation, Russia has modified its strategy and is no longer focused on single states but on alliances and unions.

The complexity of the new strategic situation in the Black Sea region makes it all the more important to understand Russian security perceptions, international motives, and goals. With the question from the beginning in mind, I conducted an analysis which tries to illuminate the Russian strategy for the Black Sea Region after the Crimean annexation. Such an analysis will help the Black Sea riparian countries better understand the new Russian modus operandi and take appropriate measures to counter any possible future threats. Also, this exploration will familiarize strategists, confronted with the Russian threat, with a new type of war waged by Moscow. They might come up with nonconventional solutions in reply or even develop a new strategy that will shape Russian actions, not only adapt to them. A non-linear type of war can be halted only by other non-linear means and resources.²

Russian President Vladimir Putin leads a new kind of war with the West aiming not at the physical destruction of the enemy, but to challenge the liberal international order. With the help of his strategists, Putin anticipates the reactions of European leaders to turn events in his favor. One year before Russian forces entered in Crimea, the Chief of General Staff of Russian Armed Forces, General Valery Gerasimov, emphasized that in the 21st century modern warfare purely

military methods will be replaced more often with other fighting techniques such as propaganda and sabotage featuring economic, cultural, and humanitarian dimensions.³ Analyzing Gerasimov's approach, Mark Galeotti concludes that a state that functions well can be turned into a theater of conflict and become a victim of an invasion, or slip into chaos, humanitarian disaster, or civil war in a few months or even weeks.⁴

Russia is a country mostly surrounded by land, making sea access difficult and defining its geopolitical strategy⁵ of fighting to push westward. Since the Crimean annexation, Russia has continuously acted aggressively against the US, some NATO members, and other European countries. "Much of the strategic friction between Russia and NATO has occurred at sea, with last year's close fly-by of the USS Donald Cook, by Russian Su-24s only one of many examples."⁶ Given Russia's aggression in Crimea, invasion of eastern Ukraine, destabilization in Moldova/Transnistria, escalation of the war in Syria and the European refugee crisis, it seems that Gerasimov's approach reflects a different strategy compared to one used before Crimea annexation.⁷ Gerasimov's model for modern conflict is a theoretical adaptation of emerging ideas about warfare.

Russia is a relevant strategic player in the extended Black Sea region and has traditionally preserved its right to diplomatic influence in the Caucasus, the Balkans and the Black Sea Region, areas very important for its security. In light of recent events, Russia can become an unpredictable actor with a distinct positioning in relation to the states and the problems of the region. Nowadays, the security environment of the Black Sea region is openly influenced by the strategic balance between Russia and the Western countries in their efforts to promote their competitive interests within the region. Recent developments indicate that Moscow

will fight to maintain the status quo in the Black Sea region, and will permanently adapt its policy and strategy to hold total military control over the Black Sea.

According to scholars from Georgetown University⁸ there is a new phase of Russia's history that started with the Russian – Georgian war, that is still ongoing and shapes the Russia's strategy for the Black Sea Region.⁹ Andrey S. Makarychev claims that, "The war against Georgia became a continuation of a highly mythologized method of identity making, which requires both enemies and victors."¹⁰ Based on other debates¹¹ Russia's new strategy has focused on Putin's stated intention to redress the consequences of the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, an event which he called, "the major geopolitical disaster of the century"¹² in an address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation in 2005. Some scholars, including Frederick Starr and Svante Cornell, have taken note of Putin's objectives of building "a new union of republics that could be built on the same territory as the U.S.S.R., beginning with economic ties and then deepening the 'integration' to include politics, security, and culture."¹³

Other scholars like Janusz Bugajski and Peter Doran reflect in a report that¹⁴, Russia is using its Black Sea strategy as a more advantageous method of revisionism than in previous extensive land conquests by targeting individual states. By having tight control of ports and sea lanes within the Black Sea, Russia "threatens to choke the trade and energy routes of wayward states, prevents NATO from projecting sufficient security for Black Sea members and gives Moscow a larger stake in exploiting fossil fuels in maritime locations."¹⁵ Researchers from the European Center for European Policy Analysis explain that Moscow's primary strategic objective under the Putin presidency "is to create a Eurasian 'pole of power' or a bloc of states under predominant Russian influence, that will necessitate containing, undermining and reversing NATO influence throughout Europe's east."¹⁶

As Russia's campaign against Ukraine has demonstrated, this is a "rule breaker to be rule maker strategy."¹⁷ The strategy relies on a variety of internal and external means to achieve its conclusions. The roots of this strategy have many antecedents in Soviet policy, but the policy is not that of the Soviet Union. This policy is also a different one which "strictly and narrowly"¹⁸ follows nationalist aims for redrawing borders to revive a Novorossiia (the new Russia) or rebuild the Soviet empire. "Putin's policy is a mixture of the very old, old, and new in a completely different global strategic context."¹⁹ This approach suggests that Russia's supremacy in the Black Sea appears critical for restoring its domination in Eastern Europe and Eurasia, and to project power forward in the Mediterranean Sea and Middle East.²⁰

As part of this new strategy the three lines of Putin's policy, ideas, ideals and vision are mixed together into a single political and strategic military logic²¹ for breaking out the superficial strategic encirclement of the European security system around Russia, and to establish a stronger, more globally competitive Russia. To this approach, retired US Army General Ryan Kevin claims: "Previous Russian approaches could be characterized as attempting to 'break into' the European security system to politically divide and overrule. In contrast, Putin's current approach attempts to 'breakout' of the European security system, divide Europe, and establish new rules. This is a fundamental change of approach that reflects a fundamental change of policy."²²

The idea of this analysis is that, with the massively increased interest of US, NATO and EU in Ukraine, in the recent years, there are signs of a new emerging strategy that will shape the Black Sea region, and might be in contradiction with these actors' strategies. My arguments for this analysis will be provided on several points. To begin with, I will develop the non-linear type of war framework enabling understanding the evolution and dynamics of this conflict waged by

Russia. Then, I will proceed to evaluate internal and external means, through which the Russian leadership drives its strategy. Then, I will focus on components of the new Russian strategy starting with Turkey's role, and then with the A2/AD component and with Russia's aggressive propaganda. I conclude my paper with some plausible scenarios that might involve Russia, NATO and other Black Sea riparian countries.

Russia's Non-Linear Type of War

During an interview two years after Crimean annexation, former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili declared that Vladimir Putin does not respect national borders and force anywhere and predicted that the Baltics, Georgia or Azerbaijan could be next. "Putin is obsessed with the idea to test NATO. I know that from the long conversations we had in the past" Saakashvili stated.²³ According to Eerik-Niiles Kross, former Intelligence Chief of Estonian Armed Forces, to understand how Russia wants to reach its goals, "it should be considered the non-linear war"²⁴ aspects, where the belligerents fight each other in a military environment, but where the potential success is independent of the direct military actions.

Russia waged in Ukraine a non-linear undeclared war, characterized by simultaneously striking the opponent throughout its territory with a combination of non-conventional forces conventional forces, and local protesters. Russia used military tools²⁵ in the Crimea annexation but they were combined with cyber-attacks, political and economic pressure, and intensive disinformation campaigns. General Gerasimov outlined this approach in a Russian military publication in February 2013²⁶. With this new approach, Moscow has sought to adapt its military strategy to its opponent's weaknesses. General Gerasimov stressed that the basic rules of war

have changed, and the importance of non-military means to achieve political and strategic objectives has grown.

Mark Galeotti argues that Russia has applied the doctrine of non-linear war in Crimea.²⁷ Operations started with unmarked infiltration of Russian Special Forces, and by the end, the conventional army came to confirm the annexation.²⁸ These actions were accompanied by an information war, broadcasted by a very aggressive media, with persistent accusations against the new Kiev government as illegitimate and brutal, and by cyber-attacks against Ukrainian ministries, banks and official websites.

Non-linear war is currently waged by military means and also encompasses the political, economic, informational and humanitarian dimensions. Non-linear or asymmetrical actions are increasingly used because they allow cancellation of opponents' advantages in armed conflict. Yet, the information operations and Special Forces actions are still essential to manage the hostilities²⁹ because creates a fissure within the targeted country's security. General Gerasimov, in this regard, also mentions that in opposition to nonmilitary measures, conventional military forces are used as a threat only to a certain stage to ensure final victory³⁰. Gerasimov's doctrine derives from "reflexive control theory,"³¹ which states that control may be acquired by unconscious reflex responses obtained from a target group.³² The group is constantly "attacked" with misinformation designed to provoke predictable reactions, anticipated by Russia, from both politically and strategically standing points.

The Russian approach using kinetic and non-kinetic warfare holistically features a lack of formal declaration of war between states, offering the advantage of maneuver on diplomatic and political dimensions. The laws of war, internationally recognized, are bypassed as a result of the fact that this form of conflict has not been yet addressed by the international community. Unlike

other forms of war, in hybrid war, besides political, diplomatic, social and information measures together with the Special Forces operations,³³ the economic component represented by sanctions, embargoes, directed price fluctuation, is very important. For instance, in the Russia-Turkey relationship discussed in one of the following sections of this paper, Turkey represents a very good example of how Russia tries to integrate the economic component in its hybrid war.

Another hybrid war feature is the propaganda. While accompanying any form of conflict, in this case it plays not a complementary role but one equally important to that of Special Forces, economic sanctions, and diplomatic maneuvers. Maria Snegovaya, from Institute for the Study of War, mentions that “Russia’s concept of hybrid warfare relies heavily on information warfare.”³⁴ The Russian information warfare, with focus on propaganda, will be emphasized in the last section of the paper, because it represents one of the main characteristics of the new Russian strategy along with A2/AD and economic components.

The asymmetry of forces involved in conflict is another feature of this non-linear warfare, involving nationalist groups and paramilitary forces, states with organized armed forces and international organizations. Unlike "total war"³⁵ the hybrid war objective is the control and domination over the enemy. All above-mentioned hybrid war features can be found in Russia’s internal and external means. With the support of a select group of people nourishing Putin’s vision and using DIME instruments, Russia is pursuing its goals within Black Sea region.

Internal and External Means to Achieve Russia’s Goals

As Russia’s latest actions and its campaign against Ukraine have demonstrated, its strategy relies on a variety of both internal and external means to achieve its objectives. Internally the strategy “feeds nationalism, familiarity, and orientation to the disempowered

Russian people,”³⁶ “offers the prospect for greater profit to the powerful rich, and promises purpose, identity,”³⁷ and resources to exercise power. Since his return to the presidency in 2012, Vladimir Putin has “surrounded himself with a tighter and tighter circle of friends and partners, while marginalizing those who have spent years running the country.”³⁸ All the western sanctions imposed on Russia for its policy in Ukraine and for the Crimea annexation have caused Russia much economic damage and political destabilization due to tensions and disagreements among the elite groups ruling the country. These disagreements are particularly evident in the power struggles between different economic and political groups.

Meanwhile, there are clear signs of opposition to Putin emerging among the Russian leadership, including well known political and military figures like “Minister of Defense Sergey Shoygu, Security Council of Russia Secretary Nikolai Patrushev, former Chief of Staff of the Presidential Administration of Russia.”³⁹ Power struggles are growing at the top. Putin needs support for his vision from his fellow leadership supporters and that is why he surrounds himself only with people sharing the same interest. But when he is feeling threatened or sees his plans jeopardized in any way he takes measures. The murder of opposition figures including Boris Nemstov⁴⁰ in February 2016 is an example of this internal struggle.

In a well-staged meeting, Putin announced the dismissal of the powerful head of the Presidential Administration ex-KGB agent Sergei Ivanov. His replacement with Putin’s deputy Anton Vaino is an example of a change at the highest level of the Kremlin. This change comes two weeks after an episode of regional responsibility, interpreted by experts⁴¹ as a power play to install order before the legislative elections and especially before presidential elections in 2018, in a context of economic crisis and tensions with the West. The details behind Putin’s ambitions are not clear yet. Mark Galeotti⁴² estimates that the measure is part of a broader trend within

Putin's entourage, to replace older members with a younger generation of officials. Another example of high level change took place in 2016 when several officials, with ties to the early days of Putin in the municipality of St. Petersburg were dismissed from their positions.⁴³

The reshuffling at the top of both the Ministry of Defense and the Presidential Administration reflects the Russian leadership's major rethinking of future survival strategies.⁴⁴ However, it appears that Putin is still in control of the situation, and at this point the tense atmosphere among the elites does not appear to pose a threat to his rule. Furthermore, most of the leadership owes its status to Putin⁴⁵ and with the current situation it seems that there are not too many alternatives. Russia is slightly isolated internationally, subject to severe economic sanctions due to the Crimea Peninsula annexation and eastern Ukraine destabilization, and also hit by low oil price.

Regarding Russia's external plan, the strategy depends on the use of all DIME elements to "discredit, devalue, and delegitimize the current European security system."⁴⁶ The new strategy for the Black Sea region coincides largely with Russian foreign policy principles of political realism aligned with national interests⁴⁷ that can be defended only by purchasing power. For Russia these are the only conditions that allow the state to survive in an anarchic international environment.⁴⁸ According to this new strategy Russia believes it is more realistic to act, in contrast to the European Union, NATO, or the US when it comes to taking the lead in the Black Sea region's problems for historical, geographical location, economic and political reasons.

To weaken the opponent, Russia uses every instrument, constantly harassing and striking wherever and whenever possible. Instability generated by Russia, when acted to change the strategic balance in region by using brute military force, can be seen as a prediction of what

might follow. Aiming to block Ukraine's and Moldova's actions to join the EU, using energy/gas as a tool for geopolitical pressure, constant interventions in the Balkans and Middle East, attacking the system of liberal values, encouraging extreme-nationalist populist discourse, all represent for Russia an external means to achieve its goals and encouragements to expect future challenges to regional stability and security of the Black Sea Region.

Russia combines its Black Sea naval superiority⁴⁹ with its growing political and military influence in neighboring states. Pro-Russian 'separatists' in eastern Ukraine remain active, providing Putin's ground forces with a foothold for possible future operations. At this time, increased political power and military strong position make Russia a virtual hegemon⁵⁰ in the Black Sea region. However, Russia has to be careful when dealing with some restrictions concerning the Black Sea. Only during peace time, are warships allowed to cross through the Dardanelles straits⁵¹, which are under Turkey's full control in accordance with the 1936 Montreux Convention. This means that as long as conflicts involving Russia are mild, Turkey cannot block the Dardanelles connection with the eastern Mediterranean without risking a major confrontation with Russia.

Why is Turkey Important for Russia's New Strategy?

Russian strategists have identified that by having close control over the Black Sea they could disrupt or challenge energy supplies through pipeline connections between the Caspian Basin and the EU and prevent other attempts to pursue energy diversity. This control further preserves Russia's energy influence in the area and will impede the US and European connections with Central Asia by destabilizing the plans for future natural gas deliveries from Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan to Europe. To have influence and a close control over the Black

Sea, Russia has to identify a way to integrate with Turkey, whose territorial water covers almost half of the sea, and which could become a future nexus for Russian gas/energy delivery. In the Black Sea region, Turkey is a strategic player for the EU⁵² and a key ally for NATO and Moscow. In order to fulfill some of its objectives, Russia can take advantage of the recent increased instability in Turkey. "Close observers of Turkey say the pro-Russia moves signify that Moscow is seeking influence in Turkey."⁵³

The opinion that Turkey is the main US ally in the Black Sea region, that Ankara follows Washington's policy and that the relations between Ankara and Moscow can only be tense according to the grid of interpretation inherited from the Cold War, are no longer valid.⁵⁴ After the rise to power of the Justice and Development Party led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in 2002, Turkish-American relations have cooled and Turkish-Russian relations have improved considerably. Turkey and Russia both have practicing authoritarian political systems, with democratic institutions emptied of content, excessively centralized power, corrupt system and a civil society under intense pressure. Not only do similarities between Putin and Erdoğan play in favor of a special relationship between Russia and Turkey, but also many joint strategic projects: the millions of Russian tourists who spend their holidays on the Turkish coast (the easiest way to collect information firsthand) and some energy business. The construction of Turkish Stream and a nuclear plant are two examples.

Recently, Erdoğan's political regime has raised questions among EU countries about Ankara's ability to align to the values promoted by Brussels and if it will be taken into account the distant prospect of EU membership. From Putin's point of view, the situation with Turkey-US relations being one of distrust and tension is an ideal for Russia. For Putin, Ankara should not be too close to either EU or US, and this issue is resolved satisfactorily for Russia's

leadership by Erdoğan's regime. In this way Russian diplomacy has a larger field of maneuver to demonstrate its advantage, not having to promote a set of values but to defend its interests.

Russia does not need an unstable Turkey, but a friendly one. The fact that Turkey is a NATO member and the negotiations for EU accession are ongoing is important, but secondary. It is essential for Russia that relations between Ankara, Brussels and Washington be cold and dominated by mistrust and suspicion.

According to a Kremlin press release,⁵⁵ President Putin asked the Russian government to start talks with Turkey to resume trade relations "mutually beneficial" and remove restrictions for Russian tourists visiting Turkey. During preparation of Russia's military action in Syria in the summer of 2015, Moscow was visited not only by Iranian generals that Russian troops would later work with on the ground, but also by the Turkey's president. Since there was well known antipathy between President Barack Obama and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as well as Erdoğan's tendency to step out from American influence, Russia's leadership has made use of this situation.

General Gerasimov⁵⁶ demanded Russia new ways for border crossings or use of other states' airspace and territorial waters. This new approach of warming up relations with other states by forming time limited situational alliances which may be dissolved after the objectives proposed are accomplished could represent an example of how Russia is applying Gherasimov's doctrine with Turkey. During the signing ceremony for the Turkish Stream project, both the Russian and the Turkish Presidents mentioned that ministers and experts from both countries would continue to hold bilateral talks after the deal, adding that they would also hold talks focusing on the economy, politics, defense, tourism and culture. In addition, Putin also added

that the two countries had reached a consensus discounting natural gas prices, lifting restrictions on Turkish citrus exports to Russia, and intensifying military contacts, as a part of the deal.⁵⁷

Emphasis on A2/AD Capabilities

Russia's recent comprehensive destabilization campaign in Ukraine can be seen as the modern version of an operational-strategic breakout operation designed to break up the European security system. After the Crimea annexation, Russia started a process to strengthen military presence in the Black Sea and the Syrian "folder" also indicates an interest of Moscow for the Mediterranean Sea. In Crimea, Russia built an A2/AD umbrella that has the potential to transform the Black Sea into a Russian lake.

The land-based anti-air warfare, anti-surface warfare, and early warning capabilities that are integral components of this A2/AD strategy provide Russia's Black Sea fleet with impressive long-range defensive and offensive capabilities. According to Isabelle Facon, "Russia has, among other things, developed at an accelerated pace anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) capabilities in zones where, Russian strategists believe, the country could face external military pressure in the future."⁵⁸ On the Mediterranean Oriental shore in Latakia (Syria), Russia has built another A2/AD exclusion zone covering all of Syria, making it almost impossible to militarily oust Bashar al-Assad. The Russians are building land-based A2/AD systems to support their naval fleets for a good reason. By adopting the A2/AD principles, the Russian strategists will successfully block enemy forces from entering, operating in, or remaining in the region of conflict. In support of this statement and in regard to the Black Sea, the only way to get into the Black Sea is through the Bosphorus and Dardanelle Straits which are under Turkey's full control.

But now, Turkey is situated in between Russian's A2/AD umbrellas in Eastern Mediterranean Sea and Crimea.

The Black Sea became one of Russia's four strategic regions that also includes the Baltic Sea, the Eastern Mediterranean Sea, and the Arctic area. Russia has established smaller or bigger "bubbles" in all these strategic regions. In the language of military analysts and strategists, these bubbles are encoded as A2/AD. "Russian A2/AD capabilities have been implemented in Kaliningrad along the Baltic Sea and in the Black and eastern Mediterranean Seas."⁵⁹ These areas are air exclusion zones, secured and impenetrable perimeters where the enemy armed forces cannot conduct surprise attacks. Correspondingly, these areas do not allow implementation of any form of attack, at least not without assuming heavy losses.

In the past three years, there were a couple of incidents related to one country's armed forces that crossed in an area covered by the A2/AD scheme, and the international press has noted several instances of this type. One of the most striking cases was that of the destroyer USS Donald Cook. In the spring of 2014, the ship was in the Black Sea international waters, where a Russian fighter plane type Su-24 approached without being spotted and passed 12 times over the USS Donald Cook, displaying an aggressive flight path executed at low level. "The system with which the Russian Su-24 shocked the American destroyer has the code name 'Khibiny', it is the newest complex for radio electronic jamming and will be installed on all advanced Russian planes."⁶⁰ This is explained by the fact that the equipment on board the American ship was jammed by the electronic systems used by the Russians, as part of their A2/AD bubble. Basically, USS Donald Cook had to sail blind unable able to anticipate the enemy's presence and unable to use its missile systems for a possible response.⁶¹

The A2/AD bubble does not represent something new in essence, but new is the Russian implementation of the concept. It is not itself a super-weapon, but a complex network including advanced radar systems, electronic and cyber warfare, missile defense systems (naval, ground and air located). It is basically a defensive system, but employing enough elements that place it between a defensive-offensive system. The range of such bubbles can stretch up to 500-600 km and with this range it is therefore foreseeable what strategic advantages would provide a sequence of A2/AD bubbles for a state able to put it into practice. Russia, to be able to build such a sequence of bubbles around its borders, started using the entire spectrum of DIME tools.

After the Russian leadership's calm reaction to the decisions taken in Warsaw at the NATO Summit in 2016, it seems that all measures do not really threaten Russia's positions and interest in Eastern Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean and will not influence much of the Russia's foreign policy behavior. NATO's deterrent actions were not focused on the Black Sea, which reflects Russia's primary maneuver space, and are intended to have a psychological rather than military effect, because it seems that Putin has achieved his objectives so far. As a response to Russia's attitude after the 2016 Summit, former SACEUR General Philip M. Breedlove indicated⁶² that Russia has developed a strong A2/AD capability in the Black Sea. In essence, its cruise missiles (anti-ship) may cover the entire Black Sea, and their air defense missiles have ranges of covering between 40% and 50% of the Black Sea. To have this coverage over the Black Sea, Moscow has placed an S-400 missile air defense system with a range of up to 250 miles in Crimea. But this system not only denies the space in Black Sea, but potentially denies airspace to NATO aircrafts over the Baltic States, Ukraine, northern Poland, Syria, and Turkey.

Russia's IO Operation Heavily focused on Propaganda

Jeffrey Lewis claims that Russia has retreated back toward dictatorship after the fall of the Soviet Union. He mentions that Moscow's leaders are promoting insecurity with the failure of democratic institutions in Russia. Russia is dedicated to build its security on the insecurity of their neighbors. "Creating instability is as easy as casting doubt, while creating stability requires accountability and transparency, which the Russian state need not bother with as it increasingly takes control of the country's media"⁶³.

Though Russia used military force to pursue its goals in Georgia, in Crimea, and recently in Syria, scholars and analysts have increasingly drawn attention to the modern attempts of Russia's power projection as a new characteristic of their overall strategy, and note its stronger presence in the sphere of international media through different means. These means includes the Russia Today television channel, its web page rt.com and youtube.com platform, just to name a few of them. Russia has developed a multi-platform, sophisticated propaganda machine in order to spread Kremlin messaging worldwide. Elizabeth Nelson, Robert Ortung and Anthony Livshen explain why the flagship of Russia's information operation is to be considered Russia Today "RT": "This analysis focuses on RT because RT is the largest and most visible of these branches with both a large budget and multi-lingual reach on a variety of platforms. RT is also the easiest to track and provides the tools to create a ballpark estimate of efficiency, since YouTube videos provide a view count."⁶⁴

In the current environment, in terms of information warfare, one of the primary goals of Russia is to confuse the true situation regarding the conflict in Ukraine. In reference to this primary goal, Dmitry Gorenburg claims that "Russia seeks to diffuse the responsibility for the conflict to a wide range of international and Ukrainian domestic actors."⁶⁵ Russian propaganda is

conducted through a very complex operation, which sends a variety of different messages to different audiences in the US or in Western countries. Russia puts energy into this kind of campaign in order to highlight inconsistencies and double standards in Western society. Robert Ortung, stresses that, “While tailoring themes to each audience, Russia seeks to undermine Western unity by calling into question the central values that Western countries claim to promote.”⁶⁶ At the same time, Russian media exposes Putin and Russia’s leadership as playing a positive role in Ukraine or in Syria, spaces that Russia’s leaders consider of very high importance.

Since coming to power, Putin has taken control of Russian television stations. The reality has become subordinated to politics and to maintain propaganda, Russian leadership has built a new philosophy: ‘Eurasia’⁶⁷. “The plan was simple: first put the Soviet Union back together and then use clever alliance diplomacy focused on partnerships with Japan, Iran, and Germany to eject the United States and its Atlanticist minions from the continent. The key to creating ‘Eurasia’ is to reject a narrow nationalistic agenda, which could alienate potential allies.”⁶⁸

Conclusion

The Russian document "In support of National Interests and Strategic Priorities"⁶⁹ signed by President Putin in 2016 established Russia’s hostile position towards NATO forces. The relationship between the Alliance and Russia has deteriorated over the past years on account of the crisis in Ukraine, but also due to the ballistic missile shield installations in several European countries. Russia's new strategy is based on the idea that "the alliance is too close to the Russian border," which is considered a threat to national security. This paper argued that after the Crimea annexation, the non-linear war waged by Russia in the Black Sea region required a new strategy

with two definite characteristics: A2/AD competences development combined with an aggressive IO campaign. To counter the Russian fluid non-linear warfare it requires both: a new strategic concept to carry on this struggle over time, and a coalition formed by NATO, EU and the US in order to implement the concept.

The fact that Russia is focused on enhancing the capacity of its "soft power" and "hard power" within the Black Sea region demonstrates the crucial importance of the Russia's overall strategy. The hybrid conflict sustained by Putin in Ukraine, the Crimean annexation, the forgotten support of Russia for Transnistria and the newly developed Russia-Turkey relation, represents basically an encirclement around the Black Sea. It is no coincidence that Russia annexed Crimea in the first phase of his intervention during the revolution in Ukraine, because full control of the Crimean Peninsula offers greater freedom to develop offensive and defensive capabilities, both land and sea.

Before annexation, the Russian Black Sea fleet consisted of several cruisers and warships dating from the Soviet era, but after annexation, intense modernization and expansion of their fleet improved the quality of their naval assets in the Black Sea. These military-strategic developments and policy in the wider Black Sea have consequences beyond this space, affecting the security interests of the West, in particular of the United States and its Allies. It seems that a reassessment of security threats on southern and eastern NATO flanks is necessary, making a clear distinction between military and non-military challenges. The permanent naval and air presence of NATO in the Black Sea is fully justified in order to correct the disproportion, which creates the possibility for rotational bases in full accord with the provisions of the 1936 Montreaux Convention.

Although it is premature to summarize this development, and Russia is still far from fully achieving its objectives, it is clear that Russia is taking steps to consolidate its position in the Black Sea region and in Middle East in the long term, while attempting to reduce NATO and US influence in these areas. While many new developments have occurred recently in the Black Sea region and attempt to guess what could follow is a difficult task, there are some hypothetical developments which, though unlikely, could become a reality. In all these scenarios human error or miscalculation represent a probability.

One possible scenario refers to the reopening of military hostilities, this time at the interstate level between Russia and Ukraine. This might happen following a major offensive from any of the parts in breakaway regions of Donbass and Lugansk in case of the failure of the Minsk I and II processes. Alternatively, it can be considered a possible Russian deliberate action to ensure a land corridor towards Crimea in the attempt to revive, at least partially, the concept of the 'Novorossiya'. Also in connection with Crimea, another different development could refer to serious tensions related to maritime spatial status as a result of the Crimean Peninsula's incorporation to Russia. In the absence of formal boundaries, legal territorial waters and airspace, continental ridge, and exclusive economic zones within Black Sea, Russia can act unilaterally imposing its claims by force and seizure.

Another scenario might refer to a direct confrontation with a medium intensity between Russia and Turkey. This would be possible in the event of an open war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh enclave, forcing Moscow and Ankara to support their respective allied parts. Another trigger could be a serious air or water incident which would cause a disproportionate reaction. Related to the same area, considering the Russian interest in Armenia, its military base on this country, and the increased potential to transform Armenia in

another A2/AD bubble which will fully envelope Turkey, we could also consider this scenario as another possibility to break out a conflict, due to the limitations that would be imposed by Russia over Turkey's reaction capacity.

An alternative scenario could advance the idea of conflict activation in the Transnistria region. This is a breakaway province of Republic of Moldova, situated between Ukraine and Moldova, and having a consistent Russian military presence. In this possible scenario, Ukraine might be tempted to act in order to ensure sustainable control over the port of Odessa, of vital importance for the country. Focusing on Moldova, specific Russian hybrid war actions are credible to take place to prevent Moldova's aspirations to accede to the EU (and/or possible to NATO), taking advantage of the fluid political situation in this country, which at this time has a pro-Russian president.

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²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid,3.

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²³ David Greene, “Interview with former Georgia President Mikheil Saakashvili about Western relations with Vladimir Putin in the Trump era, Interviewed by NPR, November 24, 2016. Saakashvili recently resigned as governor of Ukraine’s Odessa region. <http://www.npr.org/2016/11/24/503236202/what-will-presidential-relations-be-like-between-trump-and-putin>.

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<http://www.politico.eu/article/vladimir-putin-war-smoke-and-mirrors-russia-occupation-crimea-ukraine/>.

²⁵ According to Isabelle Facon, in *Russia’s National Security Strategy and Military Doctrine and their Implications for EU*, Directorate general for foreign policies, European Parliament, Belgium, (February 2017):16. “Special Forces and military intelligence in particular, but also military exercises were used either to distract attention from actions elsewhere and to intimidate or create doubts about Moscow’s military intentions. For example, major (150,000) exercises (surprise inspections) were ordered on February 26th, 2014 in the Central and Western military districts before the ‘Crimea operation’. Units were deployed along Ukraine’s border in a show of force aimed at deterring the Ukrainian government from acting and, as a signal to the West, at displaying Russia’s determination to defend its perceived interests in the conflict.”

²⁶Valery Gerasimov, “The Value of Science Is in the Foresight: New Challenges Demand Rethinking the Forms and Methods of Carrying out Combat Operations,” *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kurier* (February 2013),

http://usacac.army.mil/CAC2/MilitaryReview/Archives/English/MilitaryReview_20160228_art008.pdf

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²⁸ Ibid.

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³⁰ Charles K. Bartles, “Getting Gerasimov Right,” *Military Review* 96, (January 2016): 34.

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³¹ Thomas Timothy, “Russia’s Reflexive Control Theory and the Military,” *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, no. 17, (2004): 237. Reflexive control is defined as a means of conveying to a partner or an opponent specially prepared information to incline him to voluntarily make the predetermined decision desired by the initiator of the action. Even though the theory was developed long ago in Russia, it is still undergoing further refinement. Recent proof of this, is the development in February 2001 in a new Russian journal known as *Reflexive Processes and Control*.

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⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Reid Standish, “Putin dismisses his Chief of Staff. What does it mean for Russia?,” *Foreign Policy*, August 2016, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/08/12/putin-dismissed-his-chief-of-staff-what-does-it-mean-for-russia-ivanov-vaino-kremlin/>.

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⁴⁶ Stephen R. Covington, “Putin’s Choice for Russia,” *Defense and Intelligence*, Harvard Kennedy School, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, (2015): 37.

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⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Nordenman Magnus, “From Submarines to Smuggler Skiffs,” *Proceedings*, March 2017, 57.

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⁵¹ Bulent Gokcicek, “The Montreux Convention Regarding the Turkish Straits and Its Importance After the South Ossetia War” (master’s thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, 2009), 62, http://calhoun.nps.edu/bitstream/handle/10945/4858/09Mar_Gokcicek.pdf?sequence=1.

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