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Marine Corps University  
2076 South Street  
Marine Corps Combat Development Command  
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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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**TITLE:**

**Romania's Role in Improving Security in the Black Sea Region**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
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**AUTHOR:**

Florin Marius Gindila,  
Major Romanian Armed Forces

AY 17-18

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Mentor and Oral Defense Committee Member: Jorge Benitez

Approved: 

Date: 4/27/18

Oral Defense Committee Member: Nathan Packard

Approved: 

Date: 4/27/18

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## **Executive Summary**

**Title:** Romania's Role in Improving Security in the Black Sea Region

**Author:** Major Florin Marius Gindila, Romanian Armed Forces, CSC

**Thesis:** Romania can improve stability in the Black Sea region by exercising more significant leadership in regional security and by combining multilateral diplomacy with NATO and strengthening the bilateral relationship with the US to establish a stronger deterrence posture on the Alliance's south-eastern borders.

**Discussion:** After more than twenty years of stability and prosperity in Eastern Europe, the security in the Black Sea region has become more unstable and volatile because of Russia expanding its influence beyond its borders. Particularly, Russia led a cyber-attack against Estonia in 2007 and its aggression became even more evident when it used explicitly military force in Georgia in 2008. Also, in 2014, Russia used force against Ukraine and turned to hybrid warfare to annex Crimea. Moreover, Russia has been continuing to increase its military presence and capabilities in the Black Sea.

**Conclusion:** Russia's military intervention in neighboring states, as well its continuing military buildup, have worried all of the other countries around the Black Sea including states who are members of NATO. Particularly, Romania has good reasons to be concerned about security and stability in the region. As a member of both, NATO and the EU, Romania must be able to fulfill its commitments to defend its territory and interests in this edge zone. The role of Romania in regional security is essential in order to improve security in this area by exercising more significant leadership in regional security. The best way to do this is by combining multilateral diplomacy with NATO and strengthening the bilateral relationship with the US.

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## I. Introduction

“The Black Sea lies at a strategic crossroads of geography and culture, where Russia intersects with the European Union, where energy producers of Eurasia connect to energy consumers of central and Western Europe, where Islamic traditions meet Christian traditions, and where Europe and the Middle East meet.”<sup>1</sup> This statement by a senior American diplomat reinforces that the Black Sea is a strategic region with considerable importance to the United States. The Black Sea region has also been on the agenda at high-level political meetings because of the proposed routes to bring gas from central Asian to Europe. Three of the Black Sea littoral states are NATO allies (Turkey, Romania, and Bulgaria) and two of them are European Union members. The U.S. has also become increasingly concerned about the smuggling that flows through the region, whether contraband; trafficking in persons; drugs; or worse, weapons of mass destruction.<sup>2</sup>



Figure 1: Black Sea Geographical Map

Source: [Black Sea, Wikipedia](#)

Also, over the last decade security in the Black Sea region has become more unstable because Russia has been expanding its influence beyond its borders, especially in states to the South and West. Russia led a cyber-attack against Estonia in 2007. Russian aggression became even more evident when

it chose to use direct and explicitly military force in Georgia in 2008. And in 2014, Russia used force against Ukraine and turned to hybrid warfare to annex Crimea. All of these aggressive acts revealed the objectives of Moscow's foreign policy. Having in mind what Hans J. Morgenthau asserted, "International politics, like all politics, is the struggle for power"<sup>3</sup>; Russia's actions are not random but well focused on achieving the goal of strengthening its national power, which has been the dominant drive of Russian President Vladimir Putin from his first rise to power.

According to Andrew Radin and Clinton Bruce Reach of RAND: "Russian leaders and mainstream analysts see the current order's logic as U.S. domination and hegemony."<sup>4</sup> The Russians completely disagree with the current international system and US leadership of it. When he was president, Dmitry Medvedev argued that multipolarity as one of the key principles of Russian foreign policy: "The world should be multipolar. Unipolarity is unacceptable; domination is impermissible. We cannot accept a world order in which all decisions are taken by one country, even such a serious and authoritative country as the United States of America."<sup>5</sup> Moreover, Radin and Reach believe that "Russia has consistently described itself as a great power. At a minimum, this vision includes Russia's desire to participate in deciding global issues and to have a sphere of influence in its region."<sup>6</sup> This desire of Russia to return to one of the first positions within the top of the international hierarchy can be achieved only by growing the country's national power and project it in international relations. Increasing national power should involve the simultaneous development of all elements: Diplomatic, Informational, Military and Economic (DIME). Putin is controlling and paying close attention to developing every element of DIME, but especially the military component.

From Moscow's perspective, the crucial role of the military force as the primary factor in international relations is not declining, and they have already proved how can achieve the political objectives by using armed forces as an instrument of national power. As a result, the current regime in

the Kremlin has successfully experimented using non-military actions such as cyber-attacks, mass media campaigns combined with political and diplomatic activities and, reduced use of explicit military force to achieve its goals. Such a combination of hybrid operations conducted in Crimea and Ukraine has undermined the NATO alliance and its ability to respond promptly.

Moreover, Russia has continued to improve its military capabilities focusing primarily on developing A2/AD (Anti Access/Area-Denial) systems and leading an aggressive propaganda campaign in this strategic interest of the Black Sea area. One of the reasons for higher Russian attention in this area is because the Black Sea region has a high potential not only for the geostrategic value but also for the vast natural resources that exist here. Thus, the current Russian military presence in the Black Sea region is higher than ever.

While the north sector of eastern NATO's flank is boosted by Enhance Forward Presence (EFP) deterring hostile activity, "Russia has returned to the Black Sea region and Eastern Mediterranean as the European and American presence in the region is in retreat."<sup>7</sup> Even Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan warned that the Black Sea has almost become "a Russian lake"<sup>8</sup> and many countries in this area are concerned about the Russian threat to the region. Russia's increasing military presence has become a big challenge even for NATO and the US. Taking into account these things the natural question arose: How should NATO and the US respond to deter and prevent a possible hostile Russia's actions in Black Sea region? The role of Romania in regional security is essential for effectively answering this question.

This paper's purpose of providing an overview of the regional security situation and Romania's possible approaches in order to improve security in this area. Romania can improve stability in the Black Sea region by exercising more significant leadership in regional security. The best way to do his

is by combining multilateral diplomacy with NATO and strengthening the bilateral relationship with the US.

## **II. The current problem in the Black Sea region**

### **A. Russian aggression**

After the downfall of the Communist regime, and the fragmentation of the Soviet Union in 1990, each new state, sought political orientation with the West and the implementation of democracy based on freedom and human rights. Countries like Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Ukraine, Moldova, etc. followed the same pattern, but the degree of fulfillment was determined by a series of internal and external factors. Georgia also was one of the countries which expressed its interest in Western values and the desire to meet the requirements to become a Washington treaty ally. At NATO's summit in Bucharest 2008, the alliance members seriously discussed this option but put off a final decision.

On the other hand, even though Russia looks like an exhausted power "its leaders have consistently articulated a policy of maintaining close links with and influence within Russia's neighboring area."<sup>9</sup> After the unpleasant experience with the Baltic countries, states that were formerly parts of USSR but which are now NATO and EU members, Russia has engaged in systematic efforts to maintain control over its close vicinity and has become directly interested in limiting NATO's expansion into its former territory. Another benefit for Russia's leaders has been to distract the Russian people by creating foreign problems and crises so that domestic problems could be mitigated, neglected, or hidden.

In this way, in the mid-2000s the Kremlin changed its attitude towards the Black Sea region. In short time after the serious discussion at the Bucharest NATO Summit regarding Georgia's alliance integration, the situation changed, and Georgia's membership in NATO was effectively blocked. Explicitly, on 07 August 2008, the military conflict between Russia and Georgia broke out. Both

countries claim innocence for initiating this war, but Russia's desire for Georgian territory is well known and was demonstrated by Russia's invasion of the Georgian town of Gori, located outside of South Ossetia. After the conflict, Russia recognized the independence of two regions of Georgian territory, Abkhazia and South Ossetia.<sup>10</sup> Russia also announced its "planned to keep nearly 8,000 troops in Georgia's breakaway regions."<sup>11</sup> Today, after almost ten years, it is clear that Russia has punished Georgia for intensifying relations with NATO and so far, has accomplished its goal of keeping Georgia out of NATO.

Even though, the international community continues to support Georgia's territorial integrity and recurrently asks Russia to end its recognition of Abkhazia's and South Ossetia's "independence," the situation in the Black Sea region continues to be alarming. In addition, international observers have detected a lot of human rights problems in Russian occupied parts of Georgia, such as freedom of movement, right to learn in the native language, kidnappings, and illegal detentions.

In the relationship with Georgia, Russia proved it possessed the capability to fulfill its political objectives by using the military as an instrument of national power. Moreover, Irina Kobrinskaia asserted that there is a new phase of Russia's history that started with the 2008 Russian – Georgian war, that is still ongoing and shapes Russia's strategy for the Black Sea Region.<sup>12</sup> This new strategy was developed for Putin's specific intention to rebuild "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."<sup>13</sup> From Putin's perspective, restoring the lost power and territory of Russia is the only way to repair what he called, "the major geopolitical disaster of the century,"<sup>14</sup> the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Russia's desire to possess Crimea was not new, and in some ways, the situation was expected by some but not through the means actually employed. After the Iron Curtain fell and the dissolution

of the USSR, there were 100,000 Russian personnel, 60,000 service members, and 835 vessels, including 28 submarines, in the key military base in Sevastopol.<sup>15</sup> After the Cold War, the Western democracies perceived Russia as just a shadow of “the Big Bear,” and the Black Sea as an area of less geostrategic significance, but the new Russian Federation still had its mind on the Black Sea as a very strategic area to project its power.

In 1997, “the Ukraine-Russia Friendship Treaty split the Soviet Black Sea Fleet between Russia (81 percent) and Ukraine (19 percent) and allowed Russia, in exchange for the cancellation of most of the Ukrainian debt and concessionary energy prices, to lease the Sevastopol base for 20 years.”<sup>16</sup> Later in 2010, Moscow and Ukraine signed a new treaty, called “gas for the fleet,” and Russia’s lease for the naval base was extended till 2047. However, a lot of the Ukrainian people criticized this agreement, and some believed it would not survive more than the presidency of Viktor Yanukovich. Thus, Russia did not assume to depend on Kiev’s policy endlessly, especially when the situation became more complicated in 2014 and the popular pro-European (Euromaidan revolution) uprising expelled Yanukovich, known as “Russia’s friend.” Today, it is widely believed that Russia’s primary interest in Sevastopol base was the main reason for annexing Crimea.

Using military force was something specific for Russia but for the second time in a short period, it was not recommended to do it. So, as far as Ukraine is concerned, Moscow has understood the risks of exclusively military action and has prepared from advance for political, diplomatic and humanitarian operations as well as powerful propaganda to promote the old Russian values and to allegedly protect “Russian speakers.” The use of hybrid warfare means was later addressed in a legal form by questioning the will of the free people expressed at the March 16, 2014, referendum, where Moscow claimed that over 95% of the Crimean population agreed to join Russia. Nevertheless, most of the countries in the world have not recognized the validity of this referendum, and some have

described it as “a hoax.”<sup>17</sup> For example, the UK’s foreign secretary William Hague stated that “Nothing in the way that the referendum has been conducted should convince anyone that it is a legitimate exercise<sup>18</sup> (..) the UK does not recognize the referendum or its outcome, in common with the majority of the international community. At the meeting of EU Foreign Ministers tomorrow we believe measures must be adopted that send a strong signal to Russia that this challenge to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine will bring economic and political consequences.”<sup>19</sup> According to the Special NATO Rapporteur, Ulla Schmidt, even though “Russia failed to achieve international recognition of the annexation, Moscow continues to consider the Crimean issue to be ‘closed.’ Currently, no viable bi-or multi-lateral initiative exists to address the problem. Therefore, it is likely that Crimea will remain an unresolved conflict and a major bone of contention between Russia and the international community for the foreseeable future.”<sup>20</sup>

Despite economic sanctions imposed by the European Union against it, Putin has achieved his geostrategic aim in the Black Sea. The annexation of Crimea gives Russia hundreds of kilometers of coastline, greater access to the Syrian conflict theater, and a permanent base for the Black Sea Fleet. It is also important to look at Russia’s interest in the Black Sea area from an economic perspective. According to Janusz Bugajski and Peter Doran, through close control of harbors and communications lanes in 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.”<sup>21</sup>

In the meantime, Russia has not stop blaming the US and NATO for expanding in its neighborhood and threatening its national interest through a sustain propaganda campaign. Russia’s negative narrative is promoted from the very top. For example, Russian Prime Minister Dmitry

Medvedev, told a security conference in Munich in February 2016 “We have, in effect, slid into a new Cold War.”<sup>22</sup>

In the end, it appears Russia stopped the possibility of Georgia and Ukraine joining NATO and has continued its efforts to undermine the Atlantic Alliance. Meanwhile, the Kremlin succeeded in creating strong “bubbles” of Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD)<sup>23</sup> in Kaliningrad, Crimea, and Syria

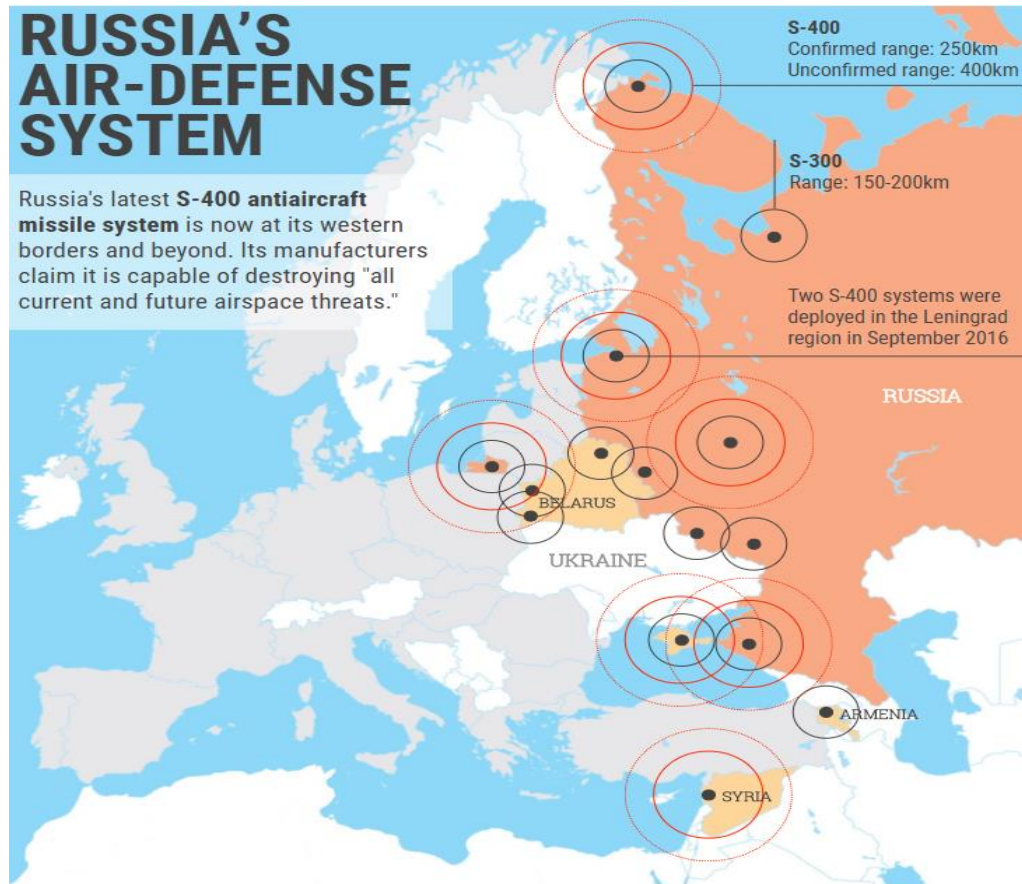


Figure 2: Russia's air-defense system  
Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

with strategic effects. These types of systems cover the western flank of Russia, but also a good part of NATO's eastern flank, including the Baltic states, a part of Poland, and now almost the whole of the Black Sea (Fig.2).<sup>24</sup> Russian's A2/AD capabilities make for NATO and US either impossible or very restraining the freedom of maneuver in this seized area. “The ongoing refurbishment of Soviet-era bunkers and reanimation of early-warning radar stations, in conjunction with the deployment of high-

tech electronic-warfare equipment, has transformed Crimea into the epicenter of a nearly impenetrable A2/AD zone in the Black Sea.”<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, Kremlin is still not satisfied and is preparing an even larger military presence in the Black Sea. Russia plans to deploy 30 new warships<sup>26</sup> in the Black Sea, in addition to the present 45 warships and seven submarines stationed principally out of Sevastopol.<sup>27</sup> “In May 2014, Russian defense minister Sergei Shoigu announced a \$2.43 billion naval buildup program. The plan included the deployment of new land-based air defense systems by 2020 in addition to new surface combatants and submarines to bolster Russia’s Black Sea fleet.”<sup>28</sup>

### **B. Turkey's role and complicated attitude**

After the collapse of both the Ottoman and Russian empires at the end of World War I, the map of the Black Sea region was redrawn through the Treaty of Sèvres (1920) and the Peace Treaty of Lausanne (1923). These treaties led to the creation of the Republic of Turkey and its unique role in managing access to the Black Sea from the Mediterranean. According to Boris Toucas, “Turkey was able to call upon the Lausanne Treaty to manage growing tensions among European powers in the region, which resulted in the 1936 Montreux Convention that established Turkish control over the straits and guaranteed free passage of warships belonging to the Black Sea states not at war with Turkey. Non–Black Sea powers were restricted in sending their military vessels to the Black Sea (they must be under 15,000 tons per vessel, 45,000 in aggregate, and could only stay in the Black Sea for 21 days).”<sup>29</sup>

After the Second World War, the Soviet Union repeatedly tried to renegotiate with Turkey control of the straits Bosphorus and Dardanelles which connect the Black Sea with the Sea of Marmara, and the Mediterranean Sea through the Aegean Sea. The highest tension happened in 1946 when Turkey was under intense military pressure from Russia and asked for help from the United States which sent some naval ships to the region. This Russian threat determined the Truman administration's

decision to include Turkey and Greece into NATO to counterbalance Russia's coercive military power in the region. Hence, in 1952 both Turkey and Greece, became members of NATO at the same time.

On July 15, 2016, part of Turkey's armed forces attempted to overthrow the Erdogan administration. This coup attempt resulted in about 249 deaths and 2191 injuries, and of course, had a profound impact on Turkish society. Following the crisis, the government took several extreme security measures; "over 100,000 civil servants – mostly teachers, police, military officials, doctors, and judges – were dismissed, about 47,000 jailed on terrorism charges, and hundreds of news and media outlets closed down."<sup>30</sup> One year later, the Erdogan government continues to arrest people it claims were involved in the attempted coup for various charges, such as violating the constitution, terrorist connections, murder, and attempting to assassinate the President. As a result, almost 500 people are facing charges of up to life in prison.<sup>31</sup>

There are a lot of doubts whether the Ankara's government's response was according to the Euro-Atlantic system of values and the Western community is also concerned about the signals that Turkey might reintroduce the capital punishment. It is also important to note that on, "16 April 2017, Turkey held a constitutional referendum that would give sweeping powers to the president. According to the official results, 51.41% of citizens voted in favor, and 48.59% against the changes."<sup>32</sup> Many Western leaders manifest respect regarding the opportunity provided to the Turkish people to make a meaningful political decision through a referendum, but they also recommend to the government to take into account the close results of the referendum and to seek the path of dialogue and consensus with the opposition.

Although the historical conflict between Turkey and Russia reached a high level in 2015, when a Russian Su-24M aircraft was shot down by Turkey, one year later there was one hundred eighty degrees shift in the Russian-Turkish relationship. Taking advantage of the friction between Turkey

and NATO, as well as Turkey's strained relationship with Europe, characterized by postponement its membership in the EU, Russia is striving for a new strategic partnership with Turkey. The two countries enhanced their cooperation in November 2016 by signing the so-called Turkish Stream pipeline agreement. "Russia and Turkey negotiated further the terms of construction for this EUR 13.6 billion natural gas pipeline under the Black Sea."<sup>33</sup> Moreover, Turkey supported Russian military coordination in Syria and lastly, "Turkey reinvited Russia to bid on a multi-billion air defense contract, which has drawn concern from NATO."<sup>34</sup>

Turkey's behavior as a NATO ally has been increasingly unpredictable, and there are a lot of disagreements with the US. Turkey itself looks dysfunctional with its leader unpredictable and capricious.<sup>35</sup> As Aydogan Vatandas describes, President Erdogan's style of rule has often been described as "sultanistic"<sup>36</sup> and seems more in common with a Russian style of leadership, instead of Western values. Erdogan's desire to obtain absolute power step by step counters the fundamental principle of democracy. According to CNN, Turkish authorities claimed that about 1.5% of the army was involved in the coup attempt. Consequently, 168 generals arrested and other 7463 members of military detained, which has left the military dangerously understaffed.<sup>37</sup> With so much of its military leadership in jail, Turkey's military power has become weaker, its capabilities of response and readiness are questioned. Thus, NATO's hope of support from Turkey in defending the Black Sea, given its interpretation of the Montreux Convention, has been severely compromised.

### **C. Bulgaria's limited capabilities and ties to Russia**

Bulgaria is another relevant actor in the Black Sea region. Although it is a member both NATO and the EU, Bulgaria is considered a modest military player in this region. Bulgaria dramatically reduced its defense spending in the 1990s and by 2016 only 1.35 percent of GDP<sup>38</sup> was allocated for defense. Moreover, its political and business elite have remained in a close relationship with Russia. In

fact, Bulgaria is a Slavic country that historically has been close to Russia, and Moscow's influence is still felt strongly in Bulgaria, mainly through criminal networks and political corruption.<sup>39</sup>

Of course, it is a mistake just to oversimplify and assert Bulgaria is a pro-Russia country or a pro-Russia nation. In both World Wars Bulgaria was not on the side of Russia, but, it is also true that any Bulgarian government, including a pro-western government, is obliged by electoral calculation to take into account the sizeable pro-Russia sentiment among large sections of the population. Hence, “it is not surprising that [in Bulgaria] there has been a robust political debate regarding the imposition of EU sanctions against Russia, as well as political difficulties when the United States or NATO seeks action that is perceived as anti-Russian.”<sup>40</sup>

Also, in 2016, Bulgaria refused Romania’s proposal to create a multinational naval force to balance Russia’s Black Sea Fleet even though, all other countries accepted. Bulgaria’s Prime Minister, Boiko Borisov said “I always say that I want the Black Sea to see sailboats, yachts, large boats with tourists and not become an arena of military action... I do not need a war in the Black Sea,”<sup>41</sup> and the president Rosen Plevneliev added: “Let’s stop with the speculations that fleets will be set up against anyone.”<sup>42</sup> As a result, the project has remained derelict up to today.

In 2017, units from eleven NATO countries took part in exercise called Noble Jump (NOJP 17) in Romania. The participating Bulgarian soldiers refused to shoot because: "Russian identification marks have been placed on targets, and they will not shoot Russians!"<sup>43</sup> There were no signs of identification of Russian armed forces, but from a distance, they seemed to look the same. The Romanian organizers quickly corrected so that the exercise continued in normal conditions. Yet, “despite Sofia’s reluctance to play a leading role in reinforcing NATO’s Black Sea presence, Bulgaria has offered to participate in the Multinational Framework Brigade stationed in Romania with 400 troops.”<sup>44</sup> All these factors lead to Romania’s special role in Black security. Romania is a reliable ally

with both the will and capabilities to help build a pillar of deterrence and stability for NATO in the Black Sea region.

### **III. The Way Forward**

Romania should take a more prominent leadership role in the region and promote improvements in security and stability in the Black Sea area. Romania can achieve this by strengthening its efforts with NATO and the US to establish a stronger deterrence posture on the Alliance's south-eastern boundaries.

Over the last three centuries, the people of Romania fought against multiple foreign invaders forces, and a lot of Romanian ancestors lost their lives defending their values, protecting their families and territory. As a result, today the ideas of sovereignty and independence are deeply rooted in the minds and souls of the Romanian people. These profound beliefs are reflected in the Romanian Constitution: "Romania is a sovereign, independent, unitary and indivisible National State."<sup>45</sup> It is also manifested in a strong consensus in Romania that national security is a top priority.

Today's Romania aspires and sharing the Western democratic values such as human rights, human dignity, the rule of law, equality under the law, freedom of personality development, etc. However, due to its proximity to Russia, Romania has been oppressed by Russia. And under Russia's control, Romania experienced one of the worst dictatorial regimes in Europe. Due to these reasons, a recent poll revealed that<sup>46</sup> Russia is the number one country Romanians say they "most dislike." Moreover, when they were asked about the state which poses the biggest threat to them, Russia is also, in the first place.<sup>47</sup>

As a small country, Romania Armed Force has around 71,700 people. The Romanian Armed Forces are organized into a Land Forces (55,000), Air Forces (9,700) and Navy (7,000) and are charged with responding to potential regional military threats; domestic requirements oscillating from

natural disasters, such as floods and earthquakes; and continuing support to multinational missions outside Romania<sup>48</sup>. Nevertheless, as a NATO member since 2004 and an EU member since 2007, Romania's armed forces' structure, training, and doctrine are focused on interoperability with multinational forces. Romanians are generally well educated, but the young people do not generally view military service positively due to the legacy of conscription during the years under Communism. Thus, the armed forces have struggle competing for quality recruits. This is intensified by the temptation of well-paying jobs in other EU's countries and by difficulty competing with the private sector in terms of pay and benefits. However, the current government has created some optimism that the civilian and military leadership can do what is essential to improve the army's ability to defend Romania and improve stability in the region.

Currently, facing the threat of Russia's increasing military power in the Black Sea, Romania has good reasons to be concerned about security in the region. First, because of its democracy, economy and even the state's sovereignty are in a dangerous situation and second, because as members of both, NATO and the EU, Romania must be able to fulfill its commitments to defend its territory and interests in this edge zone. Given these factors, Janusz Bugajski states "Romania plays a pivotal role in securing this region in terms of democratic, economic, regional, and integrative development."<sup>49</sup>

Even though there are still some problems to cope with, Romania is categorical to take on its crucial role in Black Sea area, but it is mostly agreed that no one single state, is capable of deterring Russia. It should be a collective effort of the region's countries, fully supported by NATO and the US. Romanian leadership is acutely needed for developing and implementing a long-term strategy to provide security and assure the stability in this sensitive region. The original reason for NATO's role

in the Black Sea has become relevant again. The support and participation of the NATO democracies are again needed to deter Russian aggression in the Black Sea region.

## **A. Romania's Contribution to Security in the Black Sea Region**

### **1. Hosting US Black Sea Rotational forces**

After the end of the Cold War, U.S. armed forces became involved in Romania in a series of training, education programs and many of them took place under NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) program. The bilateral security relationship deepened after 9/11 and Romania allowed US forces to use its Black Sea port of Constanta and the nearby Mihail Kogalniceanu Air Base as logistical centers for U.S. forces flowing to the Middle East. Then in 2005, US fashioned the first Joint Task Force East (JTFE) on the Romanian territory. According to Matthew Rhodes and Plamen Pantev, the JTFE was, "the framework for shared use of select military bases in Romania and Bulgaria marks a major milestone in America's military presence in Central and Southeast Europe."<sup>50</sup>

As the security environment changed and new, diverse challenges emerged, the JTFE was reformed and became the Black Sea Rotational Force (BSRF). The BSRF is located in Romania's Mihail Kogalniceanu (MK) military base. It began in 2010 as a biannual rotation force and is "a multilateral security cooperation activity between the U.S. Marine Corps and partner nations in the Black Sea, Balkan, and Caucasus regions designed to enhance participants' collective professional military capacity, promote regional stability and build enduring relationships with partner nations."<sup>51</sup>

The number of U.S. rotational troops in the BSRF has been between 150 and 400.<sup>52</sup> The BSRF has trained with more than twenty allies and partners nations in peacekeeping operations, non-lethal weapons employment, counterinsurgency, military decision-making processes, etc. The U.S. units in the BSRF have also taken part in some extensive military exercises. For example, Agile Spirit (2013 Georgia), Platinum Lynx in the Carpathian Mountains (2014 Romania), Silver Force, Blue Raptor

(2018 Turkey) or the last one Platinum Eagle hosted by Romania to enhance professional military capacity and increase interoperability in this area.

## **2. Hosting NATO: Aegis Ashore and TFP**

In September 2009, being concerned mainly about Iran's developing ballistic missiles, the Obama administration took action against this growing threat by creating the European Phased Adapted Approach (EPAA). "The EPAA is intended to be the U.S. voluntary national contribution to NATO and is designed to protect European NATO allies, and the U.S. deployed forces in the region, against current and emerging ballistic threats from the Middle East."<sup>53</sup>

The EPAA was an important step of a common effort to protect NATO allies from the increasing threat from ballistic missile proliferation and the creation of the Aegis Ashore Missile Defense System (AAMDS) in Romania was a critical contribution to this new Alliance capability. As part of the EPAA, the NATO missile defense facility in Romania became fully operational in August 2016; its effectiveness was validated during the Air and Missile Defense Exercise (CAMDEX). "It is the capability to intercept and destroy ballistic missiles in flight, destroying the warhead and any potential weapons of mass destruction."<sup>54</sup> This system is a strictly defensive one, and its warheads are not armed with any explosive, they rely exclusively on the energy of the collision to destroy the incoming enemy ballistic missile.

At the 2016 NATO summit in Warsaw, the allies agreed to deploy an Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP) in north-eastern Europe. The Alliance has enhanced its presence in this area with four multinational battlegroups in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland. These battlegroups led by the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, and the United States respectively, are combat-ready, are multinational, and each of them has about 1,000 troops.<sup>55</sup>

NATO leaders also decided at the Warsaw summit to develop a “tailored forward presence in the southeast part of the Alliance territory.”<sup>56</sup> This Tailored Forward Presence (TFP) was designed to encompass all three domains; land, sea, and air in the Black Sea region. Both types of Forward Presence; *Enhance* in the North, and *Tailored* in the south, are part of NATO’s plans for reinforcing its Eastern flank. This flank between Baltic Sea and the Black Sea, which Marek Jan Chodakiewicz labeled the “Intermarium,”<sup>57</sup> is the fault line along which Western Europe has faced Russia/Soviet Union over the last 350 years, and it remains a coveted area. NATO’s reassurance measures in the Intermarium look great on the paper but neglect some vulnerabilities and are not as balanced as they appear.

### **B. Investing in a Persistent Romanian Diplomatic Campaign Among NATO Allies**

Romania is already a valuable base for allied activities in the Black Sea, but it should pursue a stronger leadership role in the security of the region by investing diplomatic, economic, and military resources in strengthening multilateral NATO commitments and the bilateral US presence in the Black Sea region. Firstly, Romania has to lead a persistent and persuasive diplomatic campaign among NATO allies for balancing NATO’s Forward Presence in the East. Secondly, it should make a strong case for NATO to Improve Air Defense in the Black Sea Region and lastly, Romania should advocate for increasing US military presence in the area.

#### **1. Advocacy for strengthening and balancing NATO’s Forward Presence in the East**

Since the 2008 NATO Summit in Bucharest, the Black Sea was described as being strategically essential for Euro-Atlantic security. However, it has been neglected so far., NATO focused more of its attention and resources on the north sector of eastern flank; the Baltic’s states and Poland. Finally, after the situation in the Black Sea dramatically changed, in 2016 NATO Summit in Warsaw the

leaders promised to “increase alliance presence in the region through the creation of the Tailored Forward Presence (TFP)”<sup>58</sup>

NATO members and partners in both the Baltic Sea area and the Black Sea region have been the targets of Russia’s hybrid warfare. In response to this campaign against the West and the potential threat of Russian aggression, the Alliance has deployed the bulk of its new forward presence in the Baltic Sea area. But this overlooks the far more direct threat of existing Russian aggression in the Black Sea region. For too long it has been disregarded that all of Russia’s outright military interventions took place in the Black Sea, not the Baltic Sea. It has been in the southeast, in Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova that Russia has used military forces to take territory from its neighbors.

And the Russian threat is getting worse, not better. Putin continues to increase Moscow’s military capabilities in the Black Sea region. As U.S. Ambassador Hans Klemm warned, “We can speculate about the reasons for this, whether it is to hold on to recent territorial gains on the Black Sea to keep certain Black Sea states under its influence, to project power to the Mediterranean Sea and the Middle East, to protect Russian economic interests while diminishing those of the U.S. and Europe. But it really does not matter because soon Russia will have the military power to do all of these things.”<sup>59</sup>

This exposes the imbalance and vulnerability along NATO’s eastern borders. The Black Sea region seems to be the weakest NATO’s zone, and at the same time, it is increasingly exploited by Russia. As a US defense official admitted, “Basically, anything new that they have they are putting in Crimea.”<sup>60</sup>

This disequilibrium and disparity regarding NATO’s approaches to the two sides of eastern flank are due to political reasons. First, because of the persistent efforts of the Baltic states, Poland, and their supporters in NATO’s internal debates to highlight the threat in the northern flank. The

second reason is the lack of a united threat perception on the southern flank. While there is more a consensus on threat perception among the three Baltic States and Poland, there are sharp differences in assessment of the threat among the NATO members on the southern part of eastern flank. Boris Toucas described this contrast within the Alliance. “Unlike the Baltic states, which have argued for greater NATO military presence, the Black Sea littoral states (except Romania) have generally favored a lighter NATO footprint in their region (...) Because NATO has primarily focused militarily on the Baltic Sea region, some analysts see the Black Sea as increased vulnerability to the alliance.”<sup>61</sup>

There are strong reasons for allies to develop a deeper consensus on threat perception in the Black Sea region. NATO members Romania, Bulgaria, and Turkey, face an increasingly dangerous of Russia building up its power projection and area interdiction capability in and around the Black Sea. Moreover, it is commonly agreed that NATO’s interest in the Black Sea region is linked strategically and operationally to challenges in the eastern Mediterranean and Levant. The Alliance’s east and south flanks intersect in the Black Sea region. Nevertheless, NATO’s activities on its eastern borders focus on the northern sector.

What is the difference between Enhanced and Tailored? EFP deployed in the northern sector contains a larger presence of combat units force led by three of NATO’s largest members (the US, UK, and Germany) as framework nations, troops European Reassurance Initiative (ERI) mark from the both old and new NATO members countries and a continuous rotational presence of them. By contrast, in the southern sector, the TFP encompasses training units and staff units which are distinct from the combat units. Also, there are no framework nations from North America or Western Europe; the framework nation (or leader of the multinational units) is a local ally, Romania. Another key vulnerability is that in the Black Sea region, NATO multinational units have an intermittent presence rather than a continuous presence. While in Poland and Baltics there are around 4500 troops from

fifteen countries as “part of the biggest reinforcement of NATO’s collective defense,”<sup>62</sup> in the south these multinational structures are almost Romanian. Except for the commitment of a Bulgarian battalion of up to 200 troops and a Polish company according to the bilateral treaty of reciprocity between both countries, most of NATO is making a very little contribution to strengthening deterrence in the Black Sea region.

Therefore, NATO should respond to the threat in the Black Sea region by strengthening the TFP into a true multinational unit, with at least half of the forces coming from allies outside the area (as is the case with the Baltic Sea units) and committing to replacing rotational gaps with a continuous presence (again, the same type of presence as the Baltic Sea deployments) in the region. These steps will help to balance NATO’s deterrence in both the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea regions, and thus create a united effort along NATO’s entire eastern flank.

## **2. A Strong Case for NATO to Improve Air Defense in the Black Sea Region**

NATO has maintained an Air Policing mission in the Baltic Sea area since 2004. The size of this air mission was doubled in 2014 following Russia’s attack on Ukraine. At the beginning of this year, “the Royal Danish Air Force took over the lead in NATO’s Baltic Air Policing from the United States Air Force.”<sup>63</sup> For the past fourteen years, this persistent deployment of multinational aircrafts to NATO’s northeastern borders has strengthened deterrence and kept the peace. According to NATO, “in total, forty-five Allied air force detachments have deployed to Šiauliai in support of the mission, totaling over 3,000 personnel including pilots, technicians, logisticians, guards, air traffic controllers and many other functions.”<sup>64</sup>

In contrast, there is no multinational air presence in NATO's southeastern border, the Black Sea region. Romania has an obsolete fleet of MIG 21 Lancers made by the Soviet Union and is buying twelve F-16 aircraft which cost about 638 million EUR (866 million USD) over five years.<sup>65</sup> Apart from local air forces (and in contrast to the persistent air presence in the Black Sea region), NATO has had sporadic deployments of aircraft in its vulnerable southeastern flank. The United Kingdom deployed four Typhoon aircraft to Mihail Kogalniceanu in 2017<sup>66</sup>, and they were replaced by four Canadian CF-18 Hornets<sup>67</sup> which successfully conducted NATO's Air Policing until December 31, 2017.



Figure 4: UK Typhoon aircrafts  
Source: British Ministry of Defense

During its mission, the CF-18 crews led common military procedures within the area, and trained Romanian hosts regard to flight safety, medical support, aircraft maintenance, military policing. For the next four months after the Canadians left, there was no NATO Air Policing mission in the Black Sea region. It was not until April 2018, when the British air force resumed the mission they first undertook the year ago.<sup>68</sup> Unfortunately, the gap of time between when the Canadians air forces left in December and the British royal air forces came back in April might be critical for this

uncovered area. As a good thing, it should be remembered that earlier, four Italian Air Force Typhoon jets were deployed to Bulgaria, to undertake the same southern flank NATO Air Policing mission from July until October 2017.<sup>69</sup> These temporary deployments of NATO aircraft to the region are steps in the right direction, but not enough to deter the significant Russian military threat around the Black Sea. A significant factor is Crimea, where Russia has developed A2/AD capabilities in Crimea which cover practically the entire Black Sea. Russia's A2/AD bubble in the Black Sea is a major challenge to the freedom of maneuver of NATO and US in this area; NATO should invest more in strengthening deterrence in the region by developing a more robust Air Policing mission in the region that is persistent and genuinely multinational.

### **3. Increase US military presence in the region**

In addition to increasing NATO's forward presence in the Black Sea, the United States should deepen its contributions to regional security. As Romania's Ambassador to the US George Cristian Maior emphasized: "at its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the Strategic Partnership between Romania and the United States, both based on the common values of freedom and democracy, provide the framework for developing our common security and prosperity."<sup>70</sup> Romania is a responsible US ally and one of only six nations which meet the NATO goal of spending two percent of GDP on defense. In fact, Romania has begun a significant effort to improve its defense capabilities; by acquiring the Patriot missile defense system, F-16 fighter jets, the HIMARS artillery rocket system, four ships and three submarines, as well as more than 200 infantry fighting vehicles.<sup>71</sup>

There is a strong national consensus in Romania that the bilateral Romanian-US relationship is a top national security priority. While the strategic partnership with the US complements Romania relationship with NATO, in some cases and dimensions, the bilateral security partnership with the US is more important to Romania than its ties with NATO as a whole.

In fact, the only real Western military presence in Romania is the US, and this is due to the strength of the bilateral relationship, not because of NATO. This presence includes the antiballistic missile defense site in Deveselu, the Mihail Kogalniceanu (MK) Air Base, and other military land bases made available by Romania and supported by the United States for its rotational troops presence and joint exercises. The US should protect its valuable relationship with Romania with a modest increase in its military presence in NATO's vulnerable southeastern flank. This should consist of committing more units to the Black Sea Rotational Force (BSRF) and additional air/naval exercises in the region.

The BSRF has almost a decade of experience working in this partnership. During the entire period, more than 2000 troops<sup>72</sup> have deployed within the region, and they successfully led multinational exercises and trained partners and allies. Among activities should point out exercises like Platinum Lion, Blue Raptor, Agile Spirit 2017 and the last one Platinum Eagle 2018. For instance, BSRF's participation in Platinum Eagle has allowed training with multiple partners and allied nations and is vital in dealing with regional problems and keeping peace in the Eastern European area.

Due to the rise of the Russian threat to security and stability in this area, Romania should renew its efforts to increase the number of US troops deployed to the BSRF. This will ally the two allies to conduct more proportional bilateral and NATO military exercises to help deter any hostile actions in the region.

In addition to persuading the US to contribute more Marines to the BSRF, Romania should request more of a US naval presence until the region becomes more stable. Recently, the US deployed two military vessels, the USS Carney and the USS Ross, simultaneous in the Black Sea.<sup>73</sup> This was the first time two US Navy warships sailed in the Black Sea, and both are taking part in maritime security operations.

Romania is pleased with this decision because all this time it advocated for an improved deterrence posture in the region, in particular, a proactive position instead of reactive one after the situation would escalate. The confirmation came from the US Navy Vice Adm. Christopher Grady, one of the US Navy commanders, who told a CNN reporter: "Our decision to have two ships simultaneously operate in the Black Sea is proactive, not reactive."<sup>74</sup> Greater US naval presence is needed to increase deterrence in the Black Sea and Romania should continue to be the leading advocate for it.

It is clear that Russian aggression has been most considerable in Black Sea region and weakened security in this flank. Consequently, NATO should balance its forward presence and address the vulnerabilities in the Black Sea region by deploying a more proportional multinational presence. The US also should take advantage of its strategic relationship with Romania to improve regional stability with modest increases in the BSRF and its naval presence in the region.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

After more than twenty years of stability and prosperity in Eastern Europe, the situation in the region has become more unstable and volatile. In particular, Russia's military intervention in neighboring states, as well its continuing military buildup, have worried all of the other countries around the Black Sea, including states who are members of NATO.

The risk in the region has increased because firstly Russia is more aggressive in the Black Sea region in the south, than in the Baltic Sea area in the north. Secondly, although three Black Sea nations are members of NATO, there is little multinational alliance presence in this region of intense Russian military activity. The current situation permits Russia to achieve a sort of preemptive deterrence effect not just against Romania, but also against the security of Bulgaria, Turkey, and NATO's partners in

the region. NATO should do more to balance the Russian military buildup, and the US should play a leadership role in improving security in the region.

Romania shares the democratic values of the West, and as a US partner and NATO ally, it has tried not to be only a consumer of security, but also a provider of it and a dynamic leader for improving stability and deterrence in the Black Sea region. Although it is not a large country and does not have the same level of defense capabilities as other allies, Romania has made tangible progress in strengthening regional security. Therefore, Romania should commit more diplomatic, economic, and military resources to its leadership role in Black Sea security. Essential elements of this include critical military acquisitions, but the main effort should be to achieve progress on developing consensus on more proportional NATO commitments to the region and the strategic bilateral partnership with the U.S. By increasing the investment of national, bilateral, and NATO capabilities to the Black Sea, Romania will strengthen security and stability for itself and the whole the region.

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