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Command and Staff College
Marine Corps University
2076 South Street
Marine Corps Combat Development Command
Quantico, VA 22134-5068

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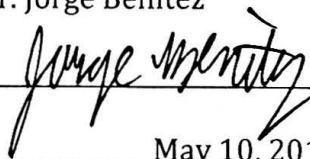
AUTHOR:
Ion- Claudiu Visan,
Major, Romanian Naval Infantry

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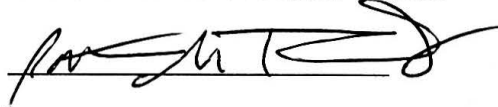
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Lt. Col. Patrizia Dienhart-Stabile

Approved:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Title: A New NATO Strategy for the Black Sea Region.

Author: Ion Claudiu Visan, Major, Romanian Naval Infantry

Thesis: Due to Russia's revisionist strategy, military build-up, and aggression in the Black Sea region, NATO should increase its presence in the region from a *tailored forward presence* to a *smart forward presence*. This smart presence should be the foundation for a future NATO strong forward posture in the region.

Discussion: Since the election of Vladimir Putin as president of Russia, Russia tested its new capabilities and doctrine in the Black Sea region. A combination of Russian aggrandizement, information operations (IO), cyber campaigns, soft power, and hybrid warfare have transformed the Black Sea into a region unstable. This newly aggressive Russia is facing a combination of emergent democracies in the Black Sea region that are under NATO umbrella, like Romania and Bulgaria, as well as emerging democracies that are struggling to be integrated into the West and protected, like Georgia and Ukraine. An important stability pillar in the region, Turkey is on the path to explode under a dictatorial regime that seeks to increase its internal dominance and global influence. Russia is developing a revisionist plan to regain its status as a great power and expand its sphere of influence. The Black Sea is part of this strategy and a very important one because it creates a strategic defensive buffer zone and an operational base for Russia's Black Sea Fleet. The more Russia gains control over the Black Sea, the more it will use this region as an operational base to project power in the Mediterranean Sea, to increase the Russian sphere of influence, and to create an anti-access system against NATO forces. The combination of military development that Russia is building in Crimea and Syria are key elements in Russia's desire for domination over Eurasia. In contrast, the Alliance as a whole does not give the same priority to the region as it does to the security of the Baltic Sea region. As the recent Russian attacks on Ukrainian vessels demonstrate, NATO hasn't yet found the right strategy to deter further Russian aggression in the Black Sea region.

Conclusions: To respect its commitment for peace and stability, NATO must refine its strategy, and start building a new force that can provide a flexible response to the Russian aggression. In addition to building consensus on Black Sea security between its members, NATO must orientate its efforts to smart ideas that will help improve stability in this key geostrategic region.

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PREFACE

Russia's desire to dominate its neighbours is part of its imperial and latter communist legacy. Ideas like Eurasianism¹ and the Third Rome² are not new, they are inherited from the Russia's history of autocratic rulers and nationalist intellectuals. Vladimir Putin is trying today to rebuild Russia into a big power and expands its sphere of influence. Russia's actions in the Black Sea Region must be seen as the first part of a plan to create a buffer zone from where it can project power. The second part of this strategic plan is to increase Russia's sphere of influence in Eurasia. In this moment the buffer zone is almost to be achieved, if the aggression in Ukraine reach Odessa and Transnistria. For the second phase Russia has started to work in the Mediterranean Sea, Europe, and North Africa. Already, Putin has achieved a great victory by improving bilateral relations with Turkey and helping to distance Ankara from its western allies.

In contrast, this year NATO is commemorating its 70-year anniversary. While it is proper to celebrate NATO's success over the past seven decades, it is also a time of challenges and tensions within the Alliance. Its members are fighting for budget, force contribution, weaponry programs, strategies, and threat assessment. In this moment, the 29 members of NATO seem to be more focused on their national interests instead of a common one. The Black Sea Region is a collateral victim in this fight. The lack of consensus between the members of NATO over the Black Sea Region is a key element in the Russian aggression. Thus, the Black Sea region can be seen as NATO's blind spot and Russia's sweet spot. Although Romania, Ukraine, and Georgia are sending out SOS messages about Russia's aggression, the alliance has not yet found a proportional response to the growing Russian threat in the region.

Without a clear understanding of the situation on the Black Sea Region, and the grand strategic plan that Russia has in Eurasia, NATO will be blind, and reluctant to take appropriate

actions. Therefore, it is time for NATO to rebuild its strategy, its programs, and its presence in this important geostrategic region. Currently, NATO has deployed an Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP) in the Baltic Sea Region and a Tailored Forward Presence (TFP) in the Black Sea region. The Alliance needs to demonstrate its Smart Power and transform TFP into a stronger, proportional forward presence that restores deterrence in the Black Sea region.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research is the result of 20 years of military service and studying war and geopolitics. My unit – 307th Naval Infantry Regiment is the closest Romanian operational unit to the Russian military establishment in Crimea. In the last years of my career, I dedicated an important part of my time to read and study Russian national strategy, military doctrines, tactics and techniques, national exercises, political and military leaders' rhetoric, and the influence of Russian foreign policy have produced in Eurasia. Also, I must acknowledge what I learned from my experience in NATO exercises, where I was able to see the alliance's contingency planning to a possible Russian aggression. Finally, I want to pay tribute to the Marine Corps University environment, a place where I was able to evaluate and complete my theories due to the increased level of information, high level of debate, multinational representation, and the professionalism of the instructors.

*“Despite disagreements,
I expect that we will agree on the fundamentals that we are stronger together than apart.”*
Jens Stoltenberg³

Introduction

In 1991, almost the entire world celebrated the fall of the Warsaw Pact and the end of the Cold War. It seemed that Europe had found peace and the menace of World War III disappeared. Unfortunately, the peace did not last long. Starting with the election of Vladimir Putin as Russian president, Europe returned to the era of George Kennan’s political warfare.⁴ Thus, Russia launched an aggressive revisionist and revanchist plan, to bring back its imperial sphere of influence. After some internal reforms and a period of high energy prices improved Russia’s economy, Vladimir Putin showed his dark side to Europe, and begun to build the fourth Russian empire⁵ preserving the legacy of Ivan the Great, Peter the Great, and Lenin. This initiated a new Cold War, and the first victims were the former members of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. The Black Sea region and the Baltic states faced significant turbulence in the past twenty years, due to this revisionist plan that Russia started under Vladimir Putin’s presidential mandate.

Putin’s plan consists of the aggrandizement of territory combined with an aggressive information and cyber operations campaign against countries in Russia’s perceived sphere of influence. It includes the development of improved political, military and economic relations with specific Western European nations. Putin’s plan is the rebirth of the Soviet Union’s sphere of influence combined with the fall of NATO. Undoubtedly, all these actions show that Vladimir Putin has a revisionist plan. Hence, in this moment the Black Sea region is only the beginning of his plans for Russia. The Black Sea region is only the foundation, a buffer zone from where Russia wants to start its development to north Africa and southern Europe, and to limit the influence of Caspian oil in the European energy market. To achieve its goals, Russia has transformed the Black Sea region in a *gray zone conflict*⁶ through its interventions in Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine. This gray zone

conflict will allow to Vladimir Putin to regain the former Soviet territory, to access the Mediterranean Sea and southern Europe, and to challenge the democratic world order and its institutions.

Looking to the strategic picture, Russia's aggressive behaviour appears to be the only major issue. But this is just an incomplete analysis, NATO and its consistent inactivity on the southern flank is the second element of the Black Sea crisis and arguably, the most important. A lack of consensus between the United States, the Western European countries and the Eastern European countries allowed the Black Sea region to be transformed in a gray zone. And nowadays, with its hybrid warfare Russia can rapidly fill this gap keeping NATO members silent. Winston Churchill described a similar deteriorating security situation in the years prior to World War II. His words provide an illuminating historical analogy to how the current lack of consensus and initiative from the strongest NATO members are contributing to the growing instability in the Black Sea region:

In their loss of purpose, in their abandonment even of the themes they most sincerely espoused, Britain, France, and most of all, because of their immense power and impartiality, United States, allowed conditions to be gradually built up which led to the very climax they dreaded most. They have only to repeat the same well-meaning, short-sighted behaviour towards the new problems which in singular resemblance confront us today to bring about a third convulsion from which none may live to tell the tale.⁷

Unfortunately, 2019 has found the Black Sea region with significantly reduced security, stability, and without a real plan that can deter Russian aggression. The Black Sea region is NATO Achilles heel. Russia wants to regain its influence and control over states formerly in the Soviet Union, as well as other parts of Europe, and it started in a region where NATO is weak- the Black Sea region. Frank G. Hoffman describes Russia's actions as a gray zone conflict in which "Russian officials seek to extend Moscow's sphere of influence without triggering an armed response by Western Europe or the United States."⁸ NATO's objective is to secure peace in the transatlantic

region, and to preserve values of individual liberty, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Yet, how can NATO achieve its objective in a period in which Russia simultaneously has intensified its aggression through hybrid warfare in almost all the European capitals? Retired United States General Ben Hodges stated in an interview for Deutsche Welle that “Russia only respect strength.”⁹ So, in this moment, if NATO wants to preserve its role and celebrate seventy years of existence, it must do more to actively deter Russian aggression. But, how can NATO deter Russia in a period of divergent interests, lack of consensus, and different threat perception through its members? NATO should react more to the Russian aggressive revisionist plan in the Black Sea region. NATO should increase the presence in the region from a *tailored forward presence* to a *smart forward presence*. This smart presence should be the foundation for a future strong NATO forward posture in the region.

Black Sea Region Geopolitics

*“Russia treats the Black Sea as a Russian lake”
Former Romanian president Traian Băsescu¹⁰*

The Black Sea region, at a first glance is just a dead-end sea, with no strategic opportunities. It has often been described throughout history as the Russia’s backyard¹¹, indicating insignificance and lack of interest to other countries. It was used mostly as a battlefield by Russia and Turkey and was historically seen as a region of conflict between these two nations as they fought over control of the straits and the trade in the region.

US Navy Captain Steven Horrell, describes the Black Sea region as a:

Crossroads, an intersection between Europe and the Middle East, from the eastern Balkans to the South Caucasus... it is often a friction point. This is very much the case in the current geopolitical environment of growing confrontation between Russia and the West. Any friction there will almost certainly involve NATO nations and the Alliance’s interests, with three NATO states on the Black Sea and several NATO partners on the Black Sea and throughout the region.¹²

For Russia, and its revisionist plan, the Black Sea is a strategic objective. The Black Sea is the operational base that links Russia with the Mediterranean Sea, and a buffer zone against potential threats from West. At this moment, the Black Sea is the bedrock of Vladimir Putin's strategic objective through four elements: the main logistic and operational corridor used by Russia to support its efforts in Syria and Mediterranean Sea, the access gate to the former Soviet Union sphere of influence, a relation of partnership with Turkey- (the most powerful NATO member in the region), and a region that can limit the flow of oil and gas from the Caspian Sea region to Europe.

Although, the Black Sea is not mentioned explicitly in the Russian National Defense Strategy¹³, there are clear references to the perceived threat that NATO's military deployments in the Russia's adjacent waters and neighbouring territories. The Black Sea region is a combination of both. In 2017, the Black Sea region was identified as a strategic area among the Mediterranean Sea and the Caspian Sea, in the documents regarding naval strategies and doctrines.¹⁴

Since its success in the battle of Gallipoli¹⁵, Turkey has owned the gate to Black Sea, and the Montreux Convention¹⁶ assure them an important role in the region. NATO understood that, and in 1952 Turkey joined the Alliance and became a stability pillar on NATO's southeast flank. The historical relationship of conflict relation between Turkey and Russia does not provide clues for what happened recent years. Reinforced by their desire for power, Vladimir Putin and Turkey's president Recep Erdogan changed the balance of power in the Black Sea region through a new set of economic and military relations¹⁷. The key is mostly in Syria where the two countries built an alliance that serves both: Turkey wants to deter the Kurds and gain access to Erdogan's dream - the Islamic caliphate,¹⁸ and Russia wants to show strength and that they have capabilities to project power all over the world. Now, the Black Sea region is used by both countries as a tool in their efforts to gain influence, and to build stronger relations with each other.

Unfortunately, NATO has so far found it difficult to find an effective solution to the aggression that Russia plays in the Black Sea Region, even though in 2016 the final NATO Warsaw Summit communique¹⁹ highlighted the strategic importance of the Black Sea region. The communique described how Russia' plans to "use its military presence in the Black Sea to project power into the Eastern Mediterranean have posed further risks and challenges for the security of Allies and others."²⁰ Also, the final NATO communique explicitly "condemn[ed] Russia's ongoing and wide-ranging military build-up in Crimea, and are concerned by Russia's efforts and stated plans for further military build-up in the Black Sea region"²¹. In his research about NATO's expectation in the Black Sea Region, Zviad Adzinbaia presents that "when thinking geopolitically, most western experts...believe that whoever controls or dominates in the Black Sea Region, can project power to the European continent, mainly in the Balkans and Central Europe, as well as in the eastern Mediterranean, the southern Caucasus and the northern Middle East."²² But in this moment only Russia and Turkey have shown that they understand the great geo-strategic value of this region: Russia by transforming the region in its bedrock to implement its revisionist plan; and Turkey by building a closer relationship with Russian that its leaders believe will allow them freedom of action and support in the Middle East.

The Black Sea Region Crisis: A Gray Zone Conflict

"I don't like what is happening either way "
Donald Trump²³



Figure 1: Territorial Disputes in the Black Sea Region²⁴

The menace of a new Cold War conflict is growing, if it has not already started. In 2000, after Vladimir Putin was elected as president, Russia began to rebuild its hegemony. Its actions in Georgia, Ukraine, Belarus, the Baltic states, and in European capitals are the proof that Vladimir Putin wants to reconstruct the Soviet Union's sphere of influence. Currently, the Ukraine, Georgia, the Sea of Azov, the Black Sea and the Baltic states are the battlefields for a Russian revisionist plan. This revisionist plan is a clash between two civilizations: the western civilization consisting of the democracies in NATO led by the United States, and the eastern civilization of an authoritarian regimes represented by Russia. It is a clash, that if not well managed, may to lead to another world war. Additionally, we must not forget that the previous world wars started in the Central- Eastern Europe. Thus, when studying the current gray zone conflict, we must understand the impact on

geopolitical situation in the region of; Russia's aggressive behaviour, NATO's lack of consensus in building a strategy to deter Russia, and the strange new relationship between Russia and Turkey.

Russian Aggression in the Black Sea Region

“The fall of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century”
Vladimir Putin²⁵

Russia was, is, and desire once again to be seen as a great power. Russia's impressive culture and civilization, long history and traditions, and rich heritage make it a great contributor to world history. But, its authoritarian political system, and revisionist foreign policy are a threat for the global peace and the international order. Russia's aggressive foreign policy is part of its grand strategy. Russian leaders are trying to bring back the power, territorial possessions, and the political influence of the Soviet Union. This revisionist policy is not new, it is the legacy of the Russian empire, and of the desire by Russia's leaders to control or influence Eurasia.

Dmitry Gorenburg, a senior analyst at Harvard University identifies a continuity in Russia's foreign policy and its preferences that “have focused on the quest to restore Russia's great power status and maintain a zone of influence in states around its borders as a buffer against potential security threats.”²⁶ He sees the revival of the Soviet Union's sphere of influence and power as the main strategic objective of Vladimir Putin's foreign policy and as the benchmark that guides Russia. Thanks to a relative increase in its power, Russia is acting forcefully in support of its revisionist policy. But if the strategy remains the same, the means have changed. Russia's leaders have learned that military power must be assisted by soft power in order to accomplish its objectives.

Russia has passed from its previous tactics of sending tanks into Hungary²⁷, and Czechoslovakia²⁸, to a new era of warfare. Using a salami slice strategy²⁹ with small steps and limited engagement, Russia is trying to revive the Soviet Union's sphere of influence through a larger concept- Eurasianism using hybrid warfare. This hybrid warfare consists of a strategy that

combines diplomatic efforts in winning the heart of politicians, informational operations that influence public opinion, economic relations, and military actions. These are efforts to rebuild Russia's sphere of influence without triggering a western response. This diplomatic combination with military actions in a hybrid environment uses mostly extremist or nationalist parties and politicians, mercenary or undercover soldiers, and the Russian diaspora. Russia's aggression is affecting not only Georgia and Ukraine but also the Baltic states, the European Union, and NATO. Its actions are based on the Roman dictum "*Divide and conquer*."

Vladimir Putin has a plan and it consists of first creating a buffer zone from where Russia can act freely and protect its territory, and secondly to increase its sphere of influence in Eurasia. The first step- the buffer zone consists in passportization³⁰, an aggressive informational and cyber campaign, territorial aggrandizement, economic control through the energy market, limited freedom of navigation and trade, and substantial military developments in the South Military District. The second step consists of a soft power campaign to control or influence politicians and state government, creating dissension between allies, building economic relations based on the European dependence to the Russian oil and gas, and development of forward posture presence and power projection capabilities.



Figure 2: Percentage of Russian language speakers in Ukraine³¹

One of the key elements in Russia's revisionist plan is the exceptionalism of the Russian culture. Using elements of soft power, Russia is strengthening some popular support for its revisionist plan. The first step in its grand strategy is passportization. Passportization is a systematic distribution of Russian citizenship to the Russian diaspora with the dark scope of using the national interest of defending its citizens through independence or annexation of some territory. In her book *Beyond Crimea*, Agnia Grigas revealed how Moscow uses the Russian diaspora to influence and leverage over neighbouring states: "Moscow has consistently used its compatriots in bordering nations for its territorial ambitions."³² She identifies a Russian plan that follows seven steps: soft power, humanitarian policies, compatriot policies, information warfare, passportization, protection,

and annexation. Almost 30 million Russian ethnics are identified to live in the diaspora and to be part of this big plan. Grigas identifies all the former Soviet states as potential victims to this plan.

Another important element in Russia's use of soft power is emphasis of religion and tradition in manipulating the Russian diaspora. A useful tool for manipulating the Russian diaspora is the Orthodox Church. Using the concept of the Third Rome and the supremacy of the Russian Orthodox Church as the follower of the Roman and Byzantine Empire, Russia is trying to become the leader of the orthodox world and promotes itself as the defender of the conservatism and Christianity. The Orthodox Church is also used as a tool to explain the Russia's intervention in some areas where its ethnics are not allowed to preserve their religious affiliation. Unfortunately, recent events³³ regarding the autocephaly of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church will provide ammunition for Putin to exploit as the harassment of Russian ethnics in the diaspora. The Russian Orthodox Church is not the only tool used to strengthen Moscow's influence over the diaspora. Russian embassies and consulates spend money on festivals, cultural events, and partnerships with universities and private schools to teach Russian language and to show the superiority and exceptionalism of the Russian culture. Also, Russia invested a lot of money in historical movies like *Stalingrad*, *Viking* or cartoons like *Ivan Tsarevich*, "*The three heroes*" or "*Masha and the Bear*" to counter the influence of Western civilization on young generation and to spread its interpretation of Russian tradition, history and culture in contrast to the culture presented by Hollywood.

Russia learned from Crimea, that the easiest way to conquer a territory is from inside, and they are investing a lot of effort to build strong Russian communities inside other countries, that are dependent on the Russian government and committed to Russia's revisionist movement. This campaign can be easily identified not only in countries with a strong Russian presence, but also in Romania or Bulgaria where the Russian community is not large but well organized in *strong and*

active association ³⁴supported by Russian embassies. Attached to this aggressive campaign to attract the Russian diaspora is a complex combination of information operations and cyber-attacks that focused on influencing public opinion and political leaders.

This combination of information operations (IO) and cyber action is focused first on influencing European political leaders to support Russian foreign policy, to create dissension within NATO, and to silence opposition to Russian aggression. Thus, Russia provides support and money for an entire network of Eurosceptic parties in Europe³⁵. This movement is starting to grow, and in some states to achieve power like Syriza in Greece, Lega Nord and the Five Star Movement in Italy, and Fidesz in Hungary ³⁶. Through these movements, Putin is trying to use nationalism to destabilize transatlantic unity, and to create a climate of distrust between countries. Markus Wagner, a political science professor at the University of Vienna stated that for Europe's Far Right, "Putin is a patriotic hero"³⁷, and a hero that provides cooperation, loans, political cover and his propaganda machine.

Secondly, IO and cyber campaigns focused on influencing Western public opinion by presenting Russian exceptionalism in culture and by reducing perception of the Russian threat. Vladimir Putin is using nationalism, mischaracterizations of American influence, and issues like Brexit, the Yellow Vests movement, and LGBTQ issues to radicalize vulnerable segments of the European population. Finally, Russia wants to create fear of a nuclear or military strike in public opinion across Eastern Europe, to make voters afraid their governments are giving too much support to NATO. We must pay attention to a sustained campaign of threats that Russian officials used against NATO members such as Romania, Denmark, and Poland due to their support for a more NATO active policy and contributions to some powerful instruments like the Aegis missile defense system. For example, Vladimir Putin threatened in a joint conference in Athens that:

If yesterday in those areas in Romania people did not know what it means to be in the cross-hairs, then today we will be forced to carry out certain measures to ensure our security... We won't take any actions until we see rockets in areas that neighbour us. ³⁸

This campaign showed results in Bulgaria, where the prime minister wants to see only “sailboats, yachts and a gas pipeline in the Black Sea”³⁹, not a NATO fleet. The effectiveness of this campaign is also visible in the lack of European efforts to sustain the integration into NATO and the European Union of emergent democracies such as Ukraine and Georgia.

The recent event in the Azov Sea- “the seizure of two Ukrainian gunboats and a tug in the approaches to the Kerch Strait, by vessels of the Russian Border Guard-, has inevitably brought security in the Black Sea to the forefront of NATO's agenda”⁴⁰, as Jonathan Marcus, a diplomatic correspondent for BBC noted. And in a declaration after the Azov Sea incident, President Donald Trump stated clearly: “I don't like what is happening either way.”⁴¹ Furthermore, after the Azov incident, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko said that Russia's attack escalated the crisis in the region. ““Mr. Putin, this is the act of aggression. Mr. Putin, this is the war.”⁴² This language makes it clear that the situation on the Black Sea Region is on the edge. This aggressive actions in the Sea of Azov is part of a bigger plan to limit freedom of navigation and trade for the countries were Russia wants to regain its influence. It consists also of reconnaissance flights, aggressive actions taken by Russian pilots against vessels⁴³ and planes⁴⁴, of NATO members and permanent violations of air and sea. All efforts are made to limit the economic development of the countries in the Black Sea region by keeping the region unstable, and unattractive for investments. Russia's ambitious revisionist plan is also sustained by the development of a strong military build-up in the Southern Military District.

Southern Military District: Russia's Super MAGTF



Figure 3: Russian Build-up in the Southern Military District⁴⁵

The key development in Russian' military strategy on the Black Sea region is its Southern Military District. It was formed in 2010 and reinforced after Crimea in 2014. Now, under the command of General Aleksandr Vladimirovich Dvornikov the Southern Military District has been transformed into a combination of defensive and expeditionary force in readiness. Although, it is the smallest district, the new organization and investments allow the Southern Military District to operate in the full spectrum of military operations. It consists of elements of 3 army corps, the Black Sea Fleet, the Caspian Flotilla, airborne and special forces, logistical elements, air defense capabilities, and air capabilities⁴⁶. A very important fact is that the commander of the Black Sea

Fleet is the geographical commander for the Mediterranean Sea. Felix K. Chang, senior fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute described the Southern Military District as the new model army⁴⁷. It is an army that will “annually receive up to 1,500 new and upgraded weapon system”⁴⁸, and that according to Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu has modernized almost 60 % of its capabilities.⁴⁹ As a result of all these efforts in the last few years, the Southern Military District has been transformed in a super MAGTF, “an autonomous military formation consisting in a naval base, army corps, aviation and air defence forces”⁵⁰, a combination of defensive anti-access, area-denial forces and offensive expeditionary forces.

The deployment of missile system like the S-400 and Bastion in Crimea and Syria is part of an anti- access, area-denial system that Russia is building in the region. According to Admiral Alexander Moiseyev, this system is planned to be fully operational in 2020.⁵¹ . If the development of this system is understandable for the Black Sea region, the development of this anti-access system in Syria is further proof that Russia has the desire to increase its area of influence, and an attempt to block far from its territory any deployments of NATO ships. All NATO naval exercises in the Black Sea, get a response from the Russian side by simulating attacks with Iskander- M missile launchers and air attack with jet fighters⁵². The most expeditionary force is the Black Sea Fleet. The Black Sea Fleet has a dual geographic area of operations, some of its ships being stationed in Tartus, Syria. This dual geographic responsibility is showing the Russian intention to operate a large naval presence in the Black and Mediterranean Seas with two clear objective: to protect its territory and to project power.

An important detail of the Southern Military District is that during the last national exercises it was reinforced by troops from the other districts⁵³, showing the possibility that Russia has to increase its military power in the region. Although, Russian officials claim that all the exercises are focused on strengthening defence capabilities, in March 2019, the 7th Airborne Division conducted

an exercise that was focused on long range deployment of the forces. The airborne division was supported by aviation assets that have exercised an attack over a large-scale model of the Romanian Deveselu Base.⁵⁴ Another important exercise for the Black Sea Fleet was conducted in 2017, and it included a bilateral exercise with the Turkish Fleet- a NATO country.⁵⁵

The New Relation Between Turkey and Russia

“Russia’s relations with Turkey have fully recovered”

Vladimir Putin⁵⁶

Turkey’s downing of a Russian warplane in 2015⁵⁷, seems to be the beginning of a geopolitical nightmare. After Crimea, NATO cannot afford another big crisis with Russia. But what started as an incident, ended as friendship between Erdogan and Putin. Russia and Turkey started rapprochement during discussions about Syria. They began as adversaries: Turkey in supporting an anti- Assad regime, and Russia supporting Assad. After two meetings with no results, The Idlib Agreement⁵⁸ that established a ceasefire and a buffer zone put the two countries in a weird context. Syria became a reason to continue cooperation: Turkey wants to solve the instability on their border and the Kurdish issue, Russia wants to become a global actor and to revive its influence on the Mediterranean Sea. The Idlib Agreement was also a lesson for the United States, “it shows that a country’s goals can be achieved, and conflict avoided, as long as military force is a clear option and a country stands by its allies. In this case, Russia and Turkey both were committed to their allies and refused to see them defeated or lose face in a potential battle.”⁵⁹ This was only the beginning of a weird alliance. In the next month a Russian- Turkey- Iran axis, developed near Syrian conflict. In Ankara 2018, the final picture finds Recep Erdogan between Vladimir Putin Iran’s president Rouhani, and a cementing alliance that vows to find a solution to the Syrian crisis, and a new balance of power in the Middle East⁶⁰.

Erdogan did not stop there. He wanted to show that he is a global actor, and in the Istanbul summit, Erdogan allied with Putin and introduced Germany and France in a reconstruction plan for Syria⁶¹. Both countries achieved their objectives to become not only regional power but global.

Another element in this relationship is a *brotherhood of arms* that produces disorder in NATO. After a failed missile deal with China, Turkey reoriented quickly toward Russia. In a 2.5 billion dollars deal, Russia agreed to sell the S 400 missile system to Turkey. What seems to have begun as e just a maneuver by Turkey for more incentives and carrots from Europe and the United States, ended in a brotherhood that made from Turkey a “semi-detached member of NATO.”⁶² But this is just part of Turkey’s vision for a centennial 2023, a year in which Turkey wants to eliminate the “external dependency on defense equipment supply,”⁶³ and to a policy of zero problems towards neighbours. The problem is that this system cannot be part of NATO’s integrated missile defense system and allows Russia to gain access on the European weaponry market. Furthermore, it may give access to Western missile technology if Turkey allows Russian specialist access to its integrated air defense system. And NATO must not forget that Turkey also has on its territory US nuclear weapons.

Not everything is positive, because Erdogan wants more, and some tension are still unresolved like the declaration in which Erdogan gave support to Ukraine and didn’t recognize the annexation of Crimea⁶⁴, or the F 35 deal that is still up in the air⁶⁵, or the recent close relation between Turkey and the United States after the announced withdraw from Syria, and the Trump administration lack of support for the Kurds. Also, we must pay attention to the fact that Turkey was the only NATO country invited to participate to VOSTOK 2018⁶⁶, the biggest Russian military exercise last year.

A New Strategy for NATO: Smart Forward Presence

“The alliance agreed to prioritize the Black Sea rhetorically, if not actively.”

Iulia-Sabina Joja⁶⁷

NATO is defined as “a political and military alliance; whose principal task is to ensure the protection of its citizens and to promote security and stability in the North Atlantic area. As outlined in the 2010 Strategic Concept, the Alliance’s three core tasks are collective defence, crisis management and cooperative security.”⁶⁸ Lots of big words, values and not so much commitment. NATO is an alliance that since the beginning had some issues in assuming decision, and now due to its composition- 29 states- it is even harder to take clear and fast decision. In the last years it has made some action like a tailored presence in the Black Sea Region and some NATO exercises, but nothing that can deter the Russian aggression. NATO was focused mostly in the Baltic states and avoided deploying forces in southern Europe because some countries fear that Russia will respond with more aggression, while others (farther West and away from Russia) oppose such deployments because they do not consider Russian aggression a threat to their country.

Romania is one of the key NATO members in the region and the strongest supporter for an increased NATO presence. Therefore, Romania is the natural leader for a new NATO initiative for the Black Sea region. Most of the major parties in Romania attach great value to their membership in NATO and the role of the alliance in the Black Sea⁶⁹. Due to this strong political consensus, Romania has become an important stability factor in the region. Romania is also one of the NATO members most likely to fulfil the NATO pledge committed to spend 2% of GDP on their defense budget by 2024. Romania also benefit from having a relatively low level of threat from terrorism. In addition, Romania hosts NATO’s Aegis ashore missile defense system⁷⁰ and is a permanent participant in NATO operations. Thus, NATO can and should use Romania as a solid foundation where it can build a strong response to Russian aggression in the Black Sea., A feasible way to

build consensus for a new alliance presence in the region is for NATO focus on smart ideas that can be used in the future to deploy a strong forward presence.

This smart forward presence is first a reasonable way to overcome the lack of consensus between NATO members. It consists in elements that cannot be refused a center of education, adding new information collection capabilities to the region, and defensive measures to raise the costs of further aggression from Russia. Secondly it should not be seen as provocative by the Russians. Third this smart presence is built as a flexible structure that will provide the basic elements for future development. This smart response will be built on three pillars: education, information, and collective defensive measures. They have been chosen due to the lack of these capabilities in the Black Sea region. Through a smart response, NATO will address all the current gaps in its capabilities. And with elements from all three pillars, NATO will demonstrate a more robust presence in the region using knowledge to enable relevant capabilities, new information assets to improve situational awareness, and collective defensive measures to strengthen deterrence in the region.

Also, a smart presence allows a multitude of solutions and flexible responses. Therefore, NATO could choose from different options and establish multiple actions. Some of these actions include an amphibious operation training center as part of the educational pillar, the expansion of the Alliance Ground Surveillance (AGS)⁷¹ system in Romania as part of the information pillar, and the strengthening of the anti-access, area-denial (A2/AD)⁷² system in the Black Sea region as part of the defensive pillar.

An Amphibious Operations Training Center

“Knowledge enables capabilities”

NATO School Oberammergau⁷³

Vladimir Putin sees “NATO enlargement as the cause of all crises since the fall of the Berlin Wall”⁷⁴, and yes NATO should act cautiously but not with fear. NATO should show respect to Russia and keep open all the forms of dialogue that allow constructive solutions.

One of the key elements in the success that NATO showed in the past is the interoperability of its members. NATO is an alliance that is based on cooperation and support. Since the end of the Cold War, the integration of countries with limited economic power and an Eastern tradition regarding the organisation of their military system, were obstacles to the success of future operations. NATO made some efforts to integrate these countries and there is now the enhanced presence in the Baltic Region and some headquarters in the southern region, but there remain significant differences between technique, procedures and the educational system.

For example, there are lots of discussion regarding the future of amphibious operations especially in contested environments, and the abilities of forces to get success in an era of strong anti-access area-denial capabilities. The United States Marine Corps is leading the discussion: “the Marines are scrambling to develop a new operational concept dubbed Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations which will require an entirely different approach to amphibious assaults as well as new weapon systems”⁷⁵, because 70 % of the world is still covered with water. Also, one of the most critical element of effective deterrence in Europe is the successful deployment of North American reinforcement across the North Atlantic Ocean. Therefore, an Amphibious Operation Training Center is vital for NATO. Such a center can be of value not only for military defense but also to help during humanitarian crises. Naval forces are key elements in a global era in which distances are decreasing due to the capabilities of techniques and increasing usage of the sea lines

of communication. NATO must be prepared for rapid deployments, forward presence, large scale humanitarian crisis, increasing needs to protect freedom of navigation, and anti- piracy operations and migration control.

In a world where aggressions and conflicts are becoming more frequent, partnerships and alliances are vital. But, in order to respond to all the obstacles that amphibious operations pose to NATO, it must create an educational base for all its members. An amphibious Operation Training Center is part of the solution and should be created. It would not be provocative, would require relatively small funds, and would be an efficient means for getting together western Europe and eastern Europe, as well as keeping the United States active in the region. Furthermore, this center can also serve as a think tank to generate ideas and stimulate discussion of topics such as a new NATO maritime group for the Black Sea, and other ways to increase NATO's stabilizing role in the region. Finally, we must never forget that education and knowledge are the greatest enablers for the future development of capabilities.

Romania can play a very positive leadership role for NATO in the region. It is a country that has good relations with its neighbours. In particular, the city of Constanta has large port and airport facilities, already hosts a US military presence at its Mihail Kogălniceanu Base⁷⁶, a training facility in Capu Midia with amphibious capabilities,⁷⁷ and a range that can be used for land, air, and sea operations. Romania also has Babadag, a training area⁷⁸ that can be used for riverine training in a complex landscape near two lagoons and the Black Sea coast.

A new NATO amphibious center can be used to promote military education programs in the region, and to develop NATO doctrine and procedures for amphibious operations. Also, it demonstrates NATO commitment for new NATO members such as Romania and Bulgaria. Also, the center would be the ideal place to develop a collaborative program for producing a future NATO amphibious doctrine, that will increase interoperability between NATO members.

The center can be used to explain a rotational presence for amphibious vessel in the Black Sea, and to encourage countries like Bulgaria and Romania to invest in new naval capabilities. The naval presence will be used to provide training for participants in educational programs. The location of a new NATO center in the Black Sea is also a valuable opportunity for key partners such as Ukraine and Georgia. They would benefit from using it as training center for their soldiers and sailors, increasing their participation in bilateral and multinational amphibious exercises, and in providing expertise for their efforts to develop a modern military system. For Turkey it should be a sign that NATO is active in the region and doesn't want to give Russia more open space to exploit.

The center can be easily used to plan and coordinate amphibious exercises in the region, and to facilitate some investments in improving regional infrastructure. It might provide the basics to build a future joint operational base in the area, that can be used as a gate for access in the Balkans, the Caucasus and the Middle East. Furthermore, the center can even be used to integrate Russia in a common effort in the fight for freedom of navigation against piracy and in a global effort to support humanitarian disaster, in a long-term possibility.

Going back to the amphibious exercises⁷⁹ that can be organised in the Black Sea, NATO must use them as a demonstration of its intentions, not only rhetoric, to support democratic values in the region. Some may argue that big joint exercises can be provocative to Russia but going back to General Ben Hodges' words: Russia only respects strength. And Trident Juncture 2018⁸⁰, is an example of good practice, a demonstration that NATO can be relevant and ready to fight to support its values and for collective defence. NATO must focus not only in its northern flank but also to look south where Russia is more active. Because, if Putin gains control of the Black Sea the next step is the Mediterranean Sea. An annual NATO joint amphibious exercise in the Black Sea is a good response to the question: how can be Russia deterred? It will show consistency, commitment,

capabilities, interoperability, host nations support, and strength. Such an exercise must be done in conjunction with other smart elements such as more intelligence gathering capabilities, and an anti-access anti-denial system.

NATO's New Eyes and Ears

“Know the enemy and know yourself;
in a hundred battles you will never be in peril”
*Sun Tzu*⁸¹

Russia has increased its military engagement on the Black Sea Region, transforming its Black Sea Fleet. Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said that “Russia will continue to strengthen its forces around the Black Sea in order to neutralize the security threat in the Black Sea region from NATO.”⁸² And NATO responded, but mostly with rhetoric or with small scale exercises such as Sea Breeze⁸³. As a result, some agree with this thesis that NATO should have a stronger presence in the region. For example, former NATO Deputy Secretary General Alexander Vershbow advocated that “with Russia’s increasing anti-aircraft and anti-ship capabilities, and with large numbers of combat forces able to move with great speed along its borders, it is no longer sufficient for NATO to rely exclusively on rapid reinforcements. We need to be there.”⁸⁴ If the Alliance does not have the consensus to build a forward presence, it should at least build a smart presence by sending first new eyes and ears.

Poland and Romania are new members promoting two initiatives that can improve regional security: the Bucharest Nine⁸⁵, and the Three Seas Initiative⁸⁶. These initiative are focused on how new members can become more active and be integrated more efficiently into NATO overall capabilities. As a response to these efforts NATO should support these two countries with some tools.



Figure 4: NATO's Global Hawk ⁸⁷

One successful project that NATO accomplished is the Alliance Ground Surveillance⁸⁸ system. The system consists of 5 Global Hawk remotely piloted aircraft and the command and control station. It is a system that is under the Alliance's Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) and was acquired by fifteen members of the Alliance. AGS is operating from Sigonella Air Base, Italy. NATO needs more intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities to deal with the growing threats from the North, East, and South. Five Global Hawks are not enough to cover so much territory, and there is competition for their time. Therefore, the AGS project should be expanded to provide ISR capabilities hosted in the Black Sea region.

If we look through a geographical perspective, Romania is one of the countries that is close to Russia and Ukraine; areas of potential conflict that can affect Europe and NATO. Also, Romania is part of the AGS program. The AGS system is based in the Mediterranean and pays attention to Russia's provocations in the Baltic Sea region. AGS is a situational awareness system that can provide the Alliance and its members with more information about Russia's activities and military build-up. But AGS only has five Global Hawks. More should be purchased to provide permanent

situational awareness in the Black Sea region. Basing two new AGS UAVs in Romania should be part of a program to secure NATO borders. Romania already hosts complementary capabilities such as an air policing mission, the Aegis⁸⁹ system, the Romanian SCOMAR⁹⁰ system and some rotational naval presence. In this moment Romania has in Campia Turzi and Fetesti two very modern air base that can provide accommodation for an AGS system and integrate it in the air police mission with the new F 16 capabilities. Thus, NATO must make the next step to an integrated system, a smart defensive system, a cooperative one that can forge trust, reliance and the brotherhood that should connect NATO forces.

Expanding the AGS system to Romania would be a positive step forward for integrating NATO new members into one of NATO's most advanced capabilities. It would show commitment to NATO's vulnerable borders in Southeast Europe and hopefully to help develop an integrated network that can help improve intelligence sharing between NATO allies. For Romania and the Black Sea stability such a network will improve the regional intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities, will create more access to information, databases, and intelligence. Such a network will build trust and remove one of the greatest problem of the alliance-information sharing and connection between NATO forces.

Anti- Access, Area-Denial

*“Invincibility lies in the defense; the possibility of victory in the attack”
Sun Tzu⁹¹*

The annexation of Crimea and the subsequent military build-up in the peninsula and furthermore in Syria, Egypt and Libya are a proof of Russia's renewed imperialistic ambitions and demonstrate that the Black Sea is a base from where Russia can project power in the Mediterranean Sea. Sabina Joja articulated an example of the calls for more NATO action in the region: “after 2014, Bucharest added a new verse to its Black Sea ballad: We told you so. Since the end of the

Cold War, Russia has acted aggressively in the Black Sea region. It has threatened neighbours with frozen conflicts.”⁹² And Romania was not the only NATO member calling for more action. The Lithuanian Minister of Defence, Juozas Olekas also speak out about opportunities that NATO missed due to its lack of will: “We did not exploit the window of opportunity that was open to us. Nature does not tolerate a vacuum, and the opportunity we missed was seized by Russia. I believe this is the lesson we have to learn when dealing with our partners and building our common future.”⁹³

As a result, Putin has transformed the Black Sea into a Russian lake. With a consistent policy to improve Russia’s military capabilities in the region, and to make a partnerships with Turkey, Russia is now capable to project power farther, into the Mediterranean Sea. Thus, Russia must be stopped before it continues to build up its military and attacks more countries. A porcupine strategy⁹⁴ can be the solution for the Russian aggression. Even without strong chances to survive a full-scale Russian invasion, Romania can at least make victory very costly for Russia. An anti-access/area-denial system⁹⁵ is a key element in this porcupine strategy.⁹⁶

Discussion about freedom of movement, contested area are part of the history of warfare. So, the concept of A2/AD is not so new, but the development of precision strike-systems made the debate more actual than ever in an environment of peer competitor. The strategic advantage of a viable A2/AD system is that will deny the freedom of movement for the adversary, or at least limit it. An A2/AD system in the Black Sea region will allow NATO to deploy its forces under Article 5. This system provides more time for the Alliance and a solution to deter any military forces. The classic definition of the A2/AD system in an article by Luis Simon, Research Professor at the Institute for European Studies is “military capabilities used to prevent or constrain the deployment of opposing forces into a given theater of operations and reduce their freedom of maneuver once in a theatre.”⁹⁷ Such a system in the Black Sea region is a key for NATO in its collective defense

mission. It will provide the tools to substitute a strong forward presence in the region and it is a solution to deter Russian aggression.

In recent years Romania has made investments in limited anti- access capabilities, but it must improve its system and integrate it into NATO's shield. Romania must further develop its naval capabilities, and current discussion about purchasing new corvettes and submarines should be finalized as soon as possible. Furthermore, Romania must show commitment to increase the number of its F 16 platforms from 12 to 52- the number necessary to accomplish all the range of air mission for national and international engagements.⁹⁸ Another important program is the coastal defense system that should be finished no later than 2020. But Romania should be supported in this effort by NATO and its strongest members. A solution can be to create under the Multinational Division Southeast Headquarters⁹⁹ a structure that should coordinate such a system in the Black Sea region. NATO should act with diplomacy and help persuade Bulgaria to partner with Romania in a regional A2/AD system. Another positive step would be to increase the presence of US vessels in the Black Sea, like the USS Fort McHenry's transit in January, and the statement of Vice Adm. Lisa M. Franchetti, commander, U.S. 6th Fleet:

USS Fort McHenry's transit into the Black Sea reaffirms our collective resolve to Black Sea security and enhances our strong relationships with our NATO allies and partners in the region... Our routine operations in the Black Sea also demonstrate the inherent flexibility and capability of U.S. 6th Fleet naval forces."¹⁰⁰

Furthermore, NATO must remember Ukraine and Georgia and make more efforts to integrate them as partners in Black Sea crisis response options. NATO has the capabilities to answer the Russian threat, but to do so, the Alliance must be more successful in building consensus between its members.

Conclusion

*“The world is a dangerous place, not because of those who do evil,
but because of those who look and do nothing.”*
Albert Einstein¹⁰¹

It is time for action, not rhetoric. NATO should assume its role to preserve stability and security in the Black Sea region. NATO is at a crossroad. Russia, its old enemy is surprising the West by manifesting its more limited power in deceptive, misleading ways like a chameleon. It is not perceived to be as great a threat as it was after the end of War World II.

It is time to throw away ambiguity and instead offer a strong answer. Europe and its North Atlantic partners must revive NATO. NATO has taken some steps forward but so far; they have failed to prevent Russia from continuing its attacks in eastern Ukraine and intervening in Syria and seizing Ukrainian ships in the Sea of Azov.

NATO has the capabilities in the Black Sea region, and it should begin immediately. First it must create a regional security platform that can become easily an advanced operational base in case of conflict. Thus, NATO should keep a smart footprint in the region. With Russia focused on its imperial ambitions and Turkey also seeking to expand its regional influence, Romania has the courage to challenge the greatest powers in the region, and to show them that in every action is a reaction, and there is a red line. NATO should invest smart, create networks, a center of excellence for amphibious warfare, anti-access anti-denial systems, training facilities, and especially recreate its core, its brotherhood. NATO should invest in relations, education, trust, reliance in all its members, because we are stronger, when we are together. Also, NATO members must understand that the Black Sea is just the first phase- the buffer zone, for Russia's desire for expansion. The second phase may include a larger presence in the Mediterranean Sea. If NATO members allow Russia to complete the first phase, it will use the Black Sea as a base to move further and create disruption in other regions.

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