



MOSCOW DOES NOT BELIEVE IN TEARS



Photo source: Reuters

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Editor: Ms. Izel SELIM, New Strategy Center

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Authors:



Ambassador Sorin DUCARU, Chairman of the Scientific Council, New Strategy Center, Romania

Lt. Gen. (Ret) Frederick Benjamin HODGES, Pershing Chair in Strategic Studies, Center for European Policy Analysis, USA

Mr. Greg MELCHER, Chief Operations Officer, Center for the Study of New Generation Warfare, USA

Dr. Phillip PETERSEN, President, Center for the Study of New Generation Warfare, USA

Mr. Mykhailo SAMUS, Deputy Director, Center for Army, Conversion and Disarmament Studies, Ukraine

Mr. George SCUTARU, Development Director, New Strategy Center, Romania

*Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears**

Russian Aggression in Kerch Strait: the End of “Hybrid War”. Consequences for Ukraine, Region and NATO

Mykhailo SAMUS, Deputy Director, Center for Army, Conversion and Disarmament Studies, Ukraine

On 25 November 2018 Russia’s war against Ukraine transitioned from hybrid-type of non-kinetic and covert kinetic conflict to overt kinetic armed conflict. Russian *FSB* border guard ships, Russian Navy ships, attack helicopters and fighter jets of the Russian Air Force attacked two Ukrainian artillery boats and an accompanying tugboat. As a result of the armed aggression, twenty-four Ukrainian Navy sailors were illegally seized – six of whom were wounded in the Russian act of piracy. Ukraine declared the sailors prisoners of war.

This November 2018 attack was the first time since the beginning of Russia’s aggression in February 2014 that Russia has overtly committed its aggression against Ukraine without the cover of covert action or use of proxy forces like the “little green men” in Crimea or “Donbas separatists.” Russia used official uniformed units of the *FSB*, Navy, and Air Force to attack and seize Ukrainian naval ships operating in internationally-recognized Ukrainian territorial and international waters.

Ukrainian National Defense and Security Council recognized the Russian attack as an act of armed aggression and President Petro Poroshenko supported the Council’s request that the parliament, *Verkhovna Rada*, to impose martial law as a means to prepare Ukraine for the possible expansion of Russian aggression. The Ukrainian parliament approved this request for 30 days in ten Ukrainian regions located along the Russia-Ukraine border, along the border with pro-Russian separatist Transnistria in the Republic of Moldova, and along the coast of the Black and Azov Seas.

Chronicle of Russian attack

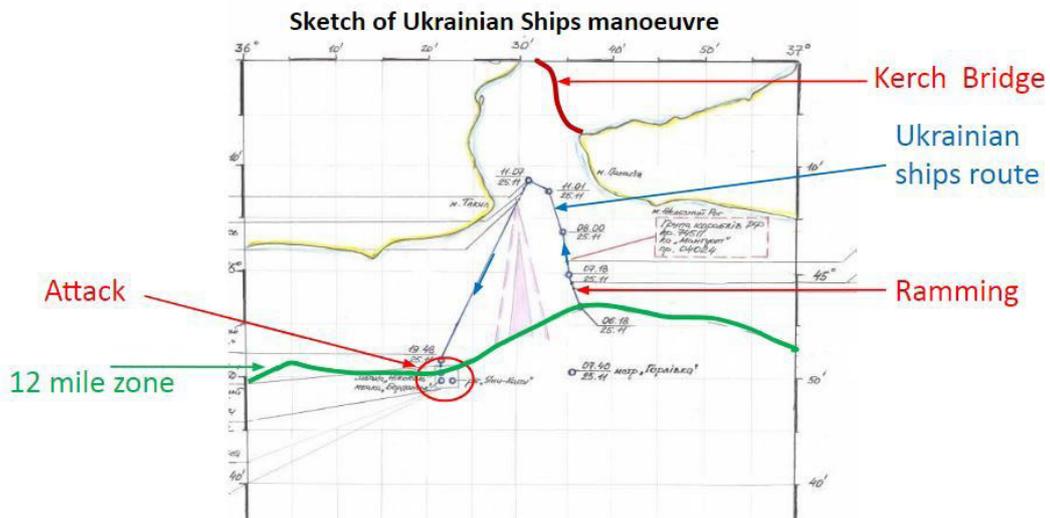
The new phase of the confrontation in the Russian-Ukrainian War was initiated in March 2018 when Moscow used the detention of the fishing vessel *Nord* – operating from annexed Crimea – by Ukrainian border guards as an excuse for militarization of the Azov Sea. By the end of October, Russia had concentrated in this small body of water more than 50 warships and other vessels. In parallel, since the May completion of its illegal construction of a bridge over the Kerch Strait connecting Russian territory to the occupied Ukrainian territory of Crimea, the Russian Government initiated an informal economic blockade of the Ukrainian Azov ports of Berdyansk and Mariupol in the form of routine inspections of ships transiting the Kerch Strait. With the Kerch bridge restricting the size of maritime vessels that could transit, on 6 September the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine took a decision to create a naval base at Berdiansk in the Azov Sea and, thereby, reinforce the fact that the Azov Sea is an international waterway. Before the end of the month Ukrainian ships (*Donbas* and the tug *Korets*) demonstrated freedom of navigation through the Kerch Strait and Azov Sea. Moscow perceived Kyiv’s action as challenging Russia’s *Anschluss* of Crimea, and decided to wage warfare against Ukraine.

*Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears is a famous Soviet film produced by Mosfilm in 1980.



Source: "Route of Ukrainian ships from Odesa to Mariupol", source euromaidanpress.com

On 23 November the small armored artillery boats *Nikopol* and *Berdiansk* and the inshore tugboat *Yani Kapu* started their transit from the Ukrainian naval base at Odesa to the port of Mariupol. These vessels were carrying their regular armament, and the route and procedures were the same as the September passage of the *Donbas* and *Koreas*. During the course of the voyage – on 24 November – the Ukrainian commander received notice from Russian authorities that navigation in the Kerch Strait area was closed, although the International Centre for Navigation Control (Spain) did not confirm the notification. The following day, the commander of the Ukrainian naval vessels twice attempted to communicate with the maritime control officer at Kerch port concerning passage through Kerch Strait. Subsequently, the maritime control officer at Kerch port directed the Ukrainian naval vessels to a waiting area where at some point between 8:30-9:00 a.m. a Russian coastguard ship rammed the tugboat *Yani Kapu*, damaging it. Russian vessels then blocked the other two Ukrainian vessels from group rendering assistance to the damaged vessel.



Source: "Drawing of the events by the Ukrainian Navy", euromaidanpress.com

During this entire time of this incident, Russian vessels were trying to provoke Ukrainian vessels to fire on them. From 01:00-02:00 p.m. Russia used helicopters to harass and restrict movement by the Ukrainian vessels, and by 1:40 p.m. Russia has physically blocked the passage under the Kerch bridge by locating a tanker and, later, a cargo ship in the channel. After concluding by 7 p.m. the impossibility of transiting the Strait, the Ukrainian Navy ships attempted to exit the Kerch Strait. They were pursued by a group of eleven *FSB* Coast Guard and Black Sea Fleet vessels. Approximately at 20:00, after having exited the 12 mile zone of Ukrainian territorial water (surrounding the illegally annexed Crimea), the Ukrainian commander decided to return to Odesa. To prevent their escape, Russia's Coast Guard boats opened fire and Russian Su-30 and Su-25 airplanes and Ka-52 helicopter attacked the Ukrainian ships with unguided rockets. The Ukrainian Navy reported as of 20:33 the *Yany Kapu* and *Berdiansk* lost engines and were boarded by Russian *spetsnaz*. The third vessel, *Nikopol*, was surrounded by Russian ships and forced to follow their course. All Ukrainian ships seized by Russia were towed to the illegally occupied Crimean port of Kerch, and the captured Ukrainian sailors sent to Moscow criminals blamed of violating Russia's border. Since 26 November, in violation of international law Russia has prohibited navigation through Kerch Strait, in effect turning the Azov Sea into a closed "Russian Lake."



Source: twitter.com, Ukrainian Military Portal. Armored Ukrainian Artillery Boat Berdiansk hit by Russian shell

Reactions to Russia's flaunting of international law

Ukraine considers Moscow's actions as an act of armed aggression, and the Ukrainian Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated: "The attack on Ukrainian ships that was carried out during a sea crossing from the port of Odessa to the port of Mariupol, in accordance with the provisions of all effective multilateral and bilateral international treaties and navigation rules, is nothing but another act of armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, as defined, in particular, in Article 2 of the Charter of the United Nations and the provisions of United Nations General Assembly Resolution 29/3314 of 14 December 1974 on the definition of aggression. Russia has *de facto* expanded its military aggression against Ukraine to the sea".

As part of its Lawfare assault on Ukraine, Moscow argues that the matter is simply one violation of Russian borders because the annexation of Crimea made its territorial waters Russian. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov claims the entire incident to be one in which Ukraine has "deliberately provoked an incident in the Kerch Strait in order to create a pretext for new sanctions to be imposed on Moscow. "

After the Russian attack on the Ukrainian ships near the Kerch Strait, on 26 November the Ukrainian Parliament approved the recommendation to impose martial law in ten Oblasts of Ukraine for 30 days. The decision affects the Odesa, Mykolayiv, Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, Donetsk, Luhansk, Sumy, Kharkiv, Chernihiv and Vinnytsia *oblasts*, which are located along the Russian border, the border with Transnistria (which is occupied by Russian armed forces), and along the coast of the Black and Azov seas. The reaction of international community to Russian aggression against the Ukrainian ships was disappointing: NATO called on Russia to ensure unhindered access to Ukrainian ports of the Sea of Azov and called for restraint and de-escalation. The European Union issued a statement urging Russia “to restore freedom of passage at the Kerch Strait” and called on Ukraine and Russia “to act with utmost restraint to de-escalate the situation immediately.” No clear condemnation of Russian aggression against Ukraine for its unprovoked attack on Ukrainian naval vessels was expressed, and no clear punishment for Moscow’s war crime has yet to be manifested.

Churchill’s soft underbelly of Europe

Russia’s attack on the Ukrainian Navy was strong signal to the West: reintegration of Crimea to Ukraine will be accompanied by a full-scale armed conflict. Moscow expects this implicit threat of war will encourage the European Union to put pressure on Kyiv to accept the loss of Crimea and the Donbas as the price of its independence. Furthermore, Moscow wants to send a reminder: if Ukraine joins either NATO or the European Union, the Russian Government will consider such action to be an existential threat requiring it to defend itself preemptively. Perceiving the solidarity of NATO and the European Union in northern Europe, Moscow is looking to undermine both institutions by corrupting southern Europe: gas in exchange for geopolitical acquisition on the part of Turkey, and the neutralization of Budapest and Sofia for cash.

Moscow’s aggression over access to the Azov Sea has created new “context” for its aggression against Ukraine, which Russia can be expected to exploit to achieve its strategic objectives:

- To force Ukraine to “voluntarily” review the Ukrainian-Russian maritime borders taking into account the annexation of the Crimea and the occupation of Donbas;
- To begin international legalization of the territorial waters around annexed Crimea;
- To start Ukrainian and international legalization of Russian status of annexed Crimea;
- To destroy the economies of Ukrainian ports on the Azov Sea so as to undermine public support of Kyiv;
- To close Azov Sea for Ukrainian and international navigation and open it only to those willing to recognize the Russian annexation of Crimea;
- To close northern part of Black Sea with total military domination in that area.

Russia made a huge progress in militarization of occupied and annexed Crimea: it now has more than 31,500 troops there, 40 main battle tanks, 600 armor vehicles, 122 aircraft, 62 helicopters, 16 missile systems, 6 new improved *Kilo* diesel submarines with deep strike capabilities by *Kaliber* cruise missiles, 3 new *Admiral Grigorovich* class frigates. At the same time, Russia has created significant military forces around Ukraine: 1st Guards Tank Army with around 1,000 modern tanks and about 30 thousand troops; and about 100 aircraft aimed at Poland and Baltic states. The 20th Army now consists of three divisions equipped with modern equipment and prepared to attack Ukraine on Chernigiv (Kyiv), Kharkiv and Donbas Tactical Directions. Obviously, Moscow has prepared for full-scale military operations against Ukraine and demonstrates it openly to prepare NATO, the European Union, and other main world actors ready for compromise in a “Ukrainian deal.” The 2019 Elections in Ukraine suggest that next 12 months will hold a high probability of new Russian provocations in informational, political, economic, energy, and military spheres with the threat of a full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Strategy for Ukraine, the European Union and NATO

Russian aggression against Ukrainian naval ships requires systematic and rapid steps to punish the aggressor and change the military-strategic balance in the Black Sea-Azov region. Moscow can be expected to present the situation as nothing more than “yet another Ukrainian provocation.” While it will be critical to take concrete diplomatic, military-strategic and military-technical measures to underline the costs of Moscow’s aggression, these actions must be presented as being in defense of international norms so as to preclude the Russians from persuading Western publics that such actions are “provocative” and “escalatory.”



Source: U.S. Army photo by Spc. Joshua Leonard. Soldier from U.S. Army Europe and Ukrainian National Guard soldiers during situational training exercise lanes at Rapid Trident, 2015.

Military-technical sphere: While the main task for Ukraine in this regard is to increase the Black Sea presence of NATO Member states, it is equally crucial that Ukraine maximize bilateral cooperation with Romania at all levels of defense. Such cooperation could range from exercises to practice redeployment of air and naval assets for training in refueling and rearming, to joint training of special forces. Ukraine should also seek to create conditions for increasing its naval capabilities by obtaining surface ships from its partners (USA, Canada, UK, Australia, as well as Sweden, the Netherlands, Denmark and others). The key point is to get ships with deep-strike capabilities (i.e., with anti-ship missiles and long range cruise missiles). At a minimum, Ukraine needs to obtain three *Oliver Hazard Perry* class frigates from United States by the end of 2019. These ships could become the hardcore of the Ukrainian navy and provide the opportunity for a permanent patrol of the Black Sea. With regard to reopening the Sea of Azov, Ukraine will need to internationalize this task because any unilateral effort will preclude Western support of Ukraine’s effort to rebuild a Black Sea Fleet.

In the following years, Ukraine must continue with plans to build naval capabilities within the concept of “mosquito fleet” which means to acquire 10-15 small-fast-inexpensive naval platforms (i.e., 500 tons, *Lan’* project) equipped with *Neptun* anti-ship cruise missiles (Ukrainian design).

Military-strategic sphere: Main task in this regard is to increase the Black Sea naval presence of Ukrainian NATO and European Union partners. At the same time, it is important to maximize Ukraine’s contacts with Romania in security and defense sphere at all levels with special focus on the naval sphere.

Diplomatic sphere:

- To build permanent mechanism of international navigation control in the Black Sea, in the Kerch Strait, and the Sea of Azov with maximum emphasis on the status of Crimea as a sovereign territory of Ukraine.
- To introduce new restrictions on the admission of Russian ships to foreign ports (partner countries, European Union and NATO Member countries).
- To ban cooperation between European Union companies and Russian Leningrad Shipyard Pella and Zelenodolsk Shipyard which build missile corvettes at plants in annexed Crimea for Russian Black Sea Fleet.
- To stop any cooperation between European Union companies and the port *Kavkaz* which provided the construction of the *Kerch Bridge* and provides transportation to the annexed Crimea military cargo from Russia.
- To ban flights to EU airports for Russian passenger aircraft registered at the Simferopol airport in the annexed Crimea, because these aircraft were used for violations of the Ukrainian border in annexed Crimea.

A Bridge Too Far ... Again

Ambassador Sorin DUCARU, Chairman of the Scientific Council, New Strategy Center, Romania

Greg MELCHER, Chief Operations Officer, Center for the Study of New Generation Warfare, USA

Dr. Phillip PETERSEN, President, Center for the Study of New Generation Warfare, USA

George SCUTARU, Development Director, New Strategy Center, Romania

Russian piracy in the Kerch Straits once again demonstrates that the Black Sea region is NATO's "soft underbelly" and where Russia feels most comfortable bullying its neighbors and even committing armed aggression to maintain tensions both for purposes of domestic distraction and in an attempt to remind everyone in the Black Sea Region (BSR) of its predominant position. Having committed an act of war against Ukraine in illegally seizing Crimea to serve as Russia's "aircraft carrier", the BSR is also the area of Europe where all of Russia's so-called "frozen conflicts" of Eastern Europe are to be found: Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh and, more recently, Donbas since 2014. Through these frozen conflicts, Russia succeeds in blocking the European Union (EU) and NATO integration of the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, as well as placing Armenia and Azerbaijan in a form of "strategic captivity" that maintains the Caucasus area under Russian influence. These frozen conflicts can anytime become "hot" if Russia so desires, as well as be used by Russia as a tool for shifting attention from one frozen conflict to another to facilitate other geo-strategic objectives. For example, the so called "resolving" the frozen conflict in Transnistria by federalizing the Republic of Moldova and obtaining a veto right of the Transnistrian separatist region in the foreign and security policy of the Republic of Moldova would enable a dangerous precedent for the resolution of the Donbas conflict in Ukraine.

With the illegal annexation of Crimea and the significant military built up, the Black Sea has become indeed the "strategic gateway" for Russia towards the "warm seas" of Eastern Mediterranean area and beyond, as well as a convenient "testing range" for its most sophisticated hybrid tactics. It is high time, once again, for Western Europe and NATO to re-evaluate and upgrade the Black Sea area's strategic and tactical relevance in an increasingly concerning geo-political context. A dedicated Black Sea Strategy of NATO would contribute to the strengthening of the deterrence and defence objectives on NATO's Eastern frontier and would contribute to the stability of this strategic NATO neighbourhood.

From Moscow's geo-strategic view, the Black Sea was at risk of becoming too much of an "European Lake" and Russia's actions in Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine has fundamentally shifted the correlation of forces into its favor. From the military-technical standpoint of the Russian General Staff, what was once a "vulnerability" has been transformed into a secure platform for projection of military force into the Mediterranean and the Middle East, and from there onward into the Indian Ocean. In 2016, the Russian General Staff placed Syrian operations in under the high command of the Southern Military District, and Colonel-General Alexander Dvornikov, the former commander of the Russian contingent in Syria, became the commander of the Southern Military District, the Black Sea, the Caucasus and Syria. Consistent with Russian concepts of strategic leadership, all of the operations in the Southern Theater of Strategic Military Action (*teatr voyennykh deystvii* or TVD in Russian)¹ are now integrated under a single operational command.

¹ Western specialists on the Soviet military, in attempting to explain the geographical concept of TVD (*the Russian acronym for teatr voyennykh deystvii*) to non-specialists, have offered a number of different translations since the 1980s. Theater of military operations (TMO) is one of the most widely used. Hines and Petersen came to a conclusion favoring the expression "theater of military action." Victor Suvorov (see *International Defence Review*, 12/1984) argued that TVD meant "theatre of actions on a strategic scale," but he also argued for continued use of TVD to discourage Western analysts from distorting the concept to fit their own preconceptions. See LTC John G. Hines and Dr. Phillip A. Petersen, "The Changing Soviet System of Control for Theater War," in *SIGNAL*, December 1986, pp. 97-110.

We essentially agree with Suvorov's translation but disagree with his advice. Because TVD does not mean anything to most Western readers, they are very likely to make incorrect assumptions about what the concept represents. We believe the most accurate and useful translation of the Soviet military term is, as Suvorov suggested, theatre of strategic military action (TSMA).

In the 1983 *Soviet Military Encyclopedic Dictionary* and in a 1985 Soviet book devoted to clarifying and updating military terminology, the term military action (although plural in Russian, the English equivalent is singular) as used in TVD is defined as military action on a strategic scale. The same sources point out that smaller scale action at the operational and tactical levels is *boevyiye deystviya*, which literally means "combat action." The phrase, "military operations," in the widely used translation "theatre of military operations" (TMO), therefore is a mis-translation. Moreover, TMO fails to communicate to the non-specialist what any Soviet military planner grasps immediately when he hears

The western boundary of the Southern TVD consists of the Balkans, which constitutes the Russian General Staff's Southwestern Strategic Direction of the European TVD. In addition to being the area that triggered World War I – and some of the fiercest violence in Europe at the end of the 20th century in the former Yugoslavia – the Balkans remains what Winston Churchill referred to as the “soft underbelly”² of Europe. The 2015 migrant crisis, the recrudescence of Islamic fundamentalism, the problem of foreign fighters, the fragility of the states in the region and the trauma of recent conflicts with a strong ethnic focus not only make the Balkans a problematic area, but an unstable area providing many opportunities for Russian troublemaking. Russia's 2017 information warfare campaign in Montenegro aimed at preventing it from joining NATO; Russian disinformation efforts to block passage of the referendum on the Macedonia's name change, with the same objective; Russia's outsize influence in the Serbia Republic in Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as in Serbia itself; and the major energy dependence of the Balkan states on Russia, all suggest the plethora of instruments available to Russia to destabilize the Balkans and contagiously to destabilize the security situation in the Black Sea region as well as threaten central Europe.

As grim as the above discussion may sound, Russia's capabilities – both in terms of economic and military power – remain limited. NATO and the EU can counter Russia's actions should they demonstrate decisive political will. Russia will always try to stifle transatlantic solidarity, to induce tensions between the US and the EU or between new members and old members of the EU and NATO, to lure some European states with economic benefits or energy contracts. Russia's aspirations to transform its dominant position in the BSR into a more global competitor with the United States should easily be transformed into a bridge too far. Although Moscow governs a large landmass, Russia has only a modest economy and its ability to project military power is clearly limited if opposed by the United States. As observed in a Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA) study, “in exchange for a promise of constructive behavior by Russia in the 1990s, the Alliance only extended to its Eastern Allies the...political infrastructure of NATO membership.”³ The CEPA Study authors, Peter B. Doran and COL (ret.) Ray Wojcik note that “flush with optimism of that era, NATO and Russia mutually pledged to ‘build together a lasting and inclusive peace in the Euro-Atlantic area on the principles of democracy and cooperative security.’”⁴ Doran and Wojcik observe, however, that “on account of Russia's actions, the strategic conditions of 1997 are now long gone...”⁵ To make glaringly clear, the authors declare “the reality is: Russia has belligerently broken its promise to every country in NATO. Its promise was that it would ensure peace in Europe based on democracy and cooperative security.”⁶



Source: Hotnews.ro, American Cavalry, Dragoons, march through Romania, 2017

the expression TVD – that is a region identified for military action on a strategic scale. See John G. Hines and Phillip A. Petersen, “Changing the Soviet System of Control: focus on theatre warfare,” *International Defense Review*, No. 3/1986; reprinted in *Current News*, Friday, 20 June 1986.

² Notwithstanding the Ottoman victory in the 17 February 1915 – 9 January 1916 Battle of Gallipoli (in Turkish, Çanakkale Savası), the Mediterranean Sea was where the British and Americans began their joint effort to wrest Europe from Fascism during the first half of the 1940s.

³ Peter B. Doran and COL (ret.) Ray Wojcik, *UNFINISHED BUSINESS: Why and How the U.S. Should Establish a Permanent Military Presence on NATO's Eastern Flank*, Washington: CEPA, November 2018, p. 1.

⁴ Doran and Wojcik, p. 6.

⁵ Doran and Wojcik, p. 6.

⁶ Doran and Wojcik, p. 8.

Doran and Wojcik make a sound argument for NATO's creation of what they refer to as "permanent infrastructure" that would "move us beyond NATO's traditional focus on defense-in-depth in favor of a nimbler, more 'preclusive defense.'"⁷

Making this move in combination with other NATO and EU initiatives is important. These other steps are aimed at speeding the mobility of forces across borders and over distances, increasing the effective organization of personnel and resources (namely RSOM: Reception, Staging, and Onward Movement), and improving Alliance-level communications in a shared battlespace – all will help to establish greater deterrence dominance across the entire spectrum of potential conflict in Europe. The result, Russia will have robust and clear reasons to avoid any test of NATO in the first place.⁸

The proposal by Doran and Wojcik should sit on top of an expanded version of Poland's Central Transportation Hub (CTH) initiative. Romania, as the center of gravity for NATO/EU security in the Black Sea Region should have a counterpart for Poland's CTH, enabling the Allies to rapidly shift forces to the south from northern Europe. We need a stronger political commitment to supporting the strategic projects of the 3 Seas Initiative in energy, transport and digital areas. Romania and Poland are right in the middle of these initiatives that could decrease dependency on Russian gas and improve the infrastructure that will run north-south, to include the TransCarpathia highway link and Gdansk (PL) - Constanta (RO) high speed railway (both projects were endorsed at Bucharest 3 Sea Initiative Summit in September 2018). These efforts should be tied into Poland's CTH project and will facilitate the freedom of movement/military mobility necessary to reinforce Romania as a key geo-strategic location on to Black Sea.



Source: Army photo by Pfc. Nicholas Vidro. Saber Guardian 2017 exercise, Romania

With a permanent infrastructure in place, more operational-tactical measures in the BSR would have greater credibility:

- Establish the command structure for a Multinational Division in Romania, to include a rotating presence of the combat elements of a US Brigade;
- Continuation and intensification of exercises in Romania and Bulgaria;
- Positioning and integration of additional GBAD (Ground-Based Air Defense) and missile defense capabilities before 2020;
- Positioning more US strategic and operational ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance) in the Black Sea Region;
- Enhanced reconnaissance and surveillance, including the employment of unmanned air vehicles along with underwater, surface, and land sensors;

⁷ Doran and Wojick, p. 8.

⁸ Doran and Wojick, pp. 8-9.

- A continuous NATO naval presence in the Black Sea via rotation in accordance with the provisions of the Montreux Convention;
- Continue dialogue with Turkey, to take on a form of a more meaningful allied naval cooperation; Turkey realizes that the growing misbalance, favoring Russia as a Black Sea Naval Power would undermined Turkish interests in the long run.
- Strengthening the prepositioning of military equipment, ammunition, fuel along the Eastern Flank;
- The continuation of investment by Romania in modernization of its military equipment, in include creation of modern naval capabilities both with regard to the Black Sea and exploitation of the Danube as an operational LOC;
- EU investments in civilian infrastructure that will enhance military mobility both west-to-east and north-south (integrating the Baltic, Black, Adriatic, and Aegean Seas);
- The use of the Danube as an additional axis of movement for fuel and military equipment and the intensification of the cooperation between Romania and Bulgaria in order to ensure the continuous dredging operations of the Danube both in the Romanian and the Bulgarian parts;
- Considering and imposing new sanctions' options against Russia, for example, by closing ports to any Russian maritime vessels departing from any Black Sea port, as well as sanctions against any port receiving such ships.



Source: www.navy.ro, Multinational Naval Exercise Sea Shield 18, May 2018

Conclusions

Lt. Gen. (Ret) Frederick Benjamin Hodges, Pershing Chair in Strategic Studies, Center for European Policy Analysis, USA

NATO needs to establish and resource a strategy for the greater Black Sea region if Russian aggression in Ukraine and around the Black Sea littoral is to be checked. It must match that strategy with a more assertive policy that seeks to take the initiative away from Russia in order to guarantee freedom of navigation in the Black Sea and Sea of Azov and which protects Allies and Partners in the region from Russian aggression. And it must continue to hold Russia accountable to fulfil its obligations with respect to Ukrainian sovereignty, the Minsk agreements, and Georgia. If NATO is unable or unwilling to do this as an institution, then the United States must lead with other willing Allies and Partners to develop and implement this strategy and policy.

Since Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008 and the subsequent occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia with nearly 10,000 Russian troops...despite their commitment to leave after the signing of the so-called Sarkhozy Agreement which ended the fighting in Georgia...the Kremlin has continued to use military force and threat of force, economic coercion, and misinformation to expand its control over most of the Black Sea, an international body of water. The seizure and illegal annexation of Crimea and the thousands of Russian troops aiding/leading the Separatists in Donbas as well as the continued occupation of Transnistria by over 1,500 Russian "peace-keepers" are further evidence of Russian intentions and their total disregard for international law. Their blatant naval attacks on three Ukrainian naval vessels just last month at the entrance to the Kerch Straits are only the most recent step in what is surely a longer-term campaign.

The effect of the Kremlin's actions has been to re-establish the Iron Curtain across the Black Sea, with NATO Allies Turkey, Romania, and Bulgaria on one side and our strategic Partners Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia on the other side. On that side of this new Iron Curtain, the leadership of the Russian Federation believes it can act with some impunity without concern for international law or a military reaction from NATO. This is further enhanced by their advantage in the region provided by the restrictions of the Montreux Convention of 1936.

Turkey is unlikely to take on any additional responsibilities in countering Russian aggression in the Black Sea region for a variety of reasons: economic, focus on fighting three different terrorist organizations inside Turkey and in Syria, and because of the lack of significant naval infrastructure on the Black Sea. This means that Romania becomes the key geostrategic hub for a new Black Sea strategy for the West. US land forces and Aegis Ashore are already in Romania...with Mihail Kogălniceanu Air Base (or "MK" as the Americans call it) as the hub for logistics, land, mission command, and air activity. The NATO Black Sea Air Policing mission already flies out of there...and this should be remissioned to Air Defence instead of Air Policing, with attendant new rules of engagement and appropriate capabilities. Romania's purchase of Patriot is a key step and purchase of long range artillery/rockets, attack aviation and drones with strike and ISR capabilities will all help improve Romania's ability to counter Russian encroachment into the western Black Sea. Romania should also form the nucleus of a Black Sea flotilla that permanently includes Turkey, Bulgaria, Georgia and Ukraine naval vessels with periodic augmentation from United States, United Kingdom, Germany and other Allies, within the provisions of Montreux Convention.

Finally, Ukraine must develop a maritime strategy and then develop its capabilities to carry out that strategy...getting the strategy right first is essential before spending money on new platforms. The US and NATO should work closely to ensure that the Ukraine maritime strategy is integrated into the greater Black Sea strategy. Only then can the West check Russian aggression and expansionist aims in the region and ensure the freedom of navigation and security of some of our closest Allies and Partners.



Center for Army Conversion and Disarmament Studies (CACDS) was established in 1999 in Kyiv, Ukraine as a non-governmental, nonpartisan, non-profit research organization for contribution to the development and democratization of Ukrainian society through increasing of civil control over the country's military strength (Armed Forces, National Guard, secret services and others). CACDS focusing its activities on studying disarmament and armament processes in the country and abroad, effective modernization of Ukrainian defense industry as well as security sector reform. Since 2014 CACDS experts are actively engaged in activities on research and analysis on so called Russian "hybrid" warfare and aggression by Russia against Ukraine.



New Strategy Center is a Romanian think tank specializing in foreign, defence and security policy, a non-partisan, non-governmental organization. New Strategy Center operates at three main levels: providing analytical inputs and expert advice to decisionmakers; holding regular debates, both in-house and public, on subjects of topical interest; expanding external outreach through partnerships with similar institutions or organizations in Europe and the US, joint policy papers and international conferences. The Balkans and the Black Sea space are priority areas of interest for New Strategy Center. The current activities of New Strategy Center also cover such subjects as domestic developments in Romania as relevant for national security, military modernization and defence procurement, energy security, cyber security and hybrid threats.



The core mission of The Centre for the Study of New Generation Warfare is to educate the widest range of parties in the West on the active warfare being waged against liberal democracies by the Russian Government of Vladimir Putin. The foundation of this effort is the continuing research into evolving techniques of New Generation Warfare begun by Moscow and now being adopted by other regimes and illiberal democracies. The Centre will utilize a wide a range of educational tools; from briefings and speeches, to the publication of articles and books, to the employment of various forms of simulations and computer war games to distribute the facts of this military-political aggression emanating from Moscow.



The Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA) is a non-profit, non-partisan, public policy research institute. CEPA's mission is to promote an economically vibrant, strategically secure, and politically free Europe with close and enduring ties to the United States. CEPA's analytical team consists of the world's leading experts on Central-East Europe, Russia, and its neighbors. Through cutting-edge research, analysis, and programs, they provide fresh insight on energy, security and defense to government officials and agencies; they help transatlantic businesses navigate changing strategic landscapes; and build networks of future Atlanticist leaders.

