



**Russia's Strategic Posture in the Black Sea:  
Naval Modernization, Regional Influence and Security Consequences**

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**Abstract:**

The black sea constitutes a strategically critical region for Moscow, serving both as a vital trade hub and as a gateway between Eastern Europe, the Mediterranean, the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Middle East. This paper examines Russia's dynamic posture in the Black Sea and its implications on regional security dynamics, particularly in light of the growing naval presence. This research adopts a qualitative research method based on secondary data such as academic literature, government documents and media sources. The study employs Regional Security Complex Theory to elaborate regional security implications and the sovereignty concerns of neighboring states, compelling them to increase their military presence for their own security and hence intensifying the security dilemma. Moscow has cultivated *frozen conflicts*, such as those in Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and now eastern Ukraine, as instruments of influence that weaken neighboring states and limit Western integration. These strategies intensified the regional security dilemma, compelling littoral states to expand their military posture. Beyond the region, they carry global repercussions, from straining NATO-Russia relations to destabilizing energy markets and reshaping Eurasian power alignments. These postures have reignited the Novorossiya concept, rooted in 18th-century Russian imperial expansion and serving as a justification for intervention in Ukraine.

**Keywords:** Russian imperialism, the Black Sea, regional security, frozen conflicts, Novorossiya concept, buffer zone, NATO expansion, naval modernization

**INTRODUCTION**

The Black Sea is the largest inland sea located in Eurasia, bordering 6 states: Türkiye, Russia, Ukraine, Bulgaria, Romania and Georgia. It is strategically connected to the Mediterranean Sea through the Bosphorus Strait (controlled by Türkiye), the Sea of Marmara (bordered by Türkiye toward the Mediterranean), the Dardanelles Strait (between Türkiye and Greece) and to the Sea of

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Azov (between Ukraine & Russia) through the Kerch Strait (between Former Crimea and Russia) (Papic & Ladislav, 2024).

From antiquity, black sea has played a major role in regional power politics. During the era of the ancient Greeks (7<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> Century BCE), the black sea became vital for Greek colonization, especially in the Pontic region of modern-day north Turkiye, establishing multiple city-states for resource extraction. Subsequently, the Achaemenid Empire (the 1<sup>st</sup> Persian empire) and later Rome contested for these waters to expand trade and military reach. During the age of the Byzantine Empire, the black sea remained integral to the prosperity and security of Constantinople, with control over the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles Strait serving as decisive strategic advantage. Following the conquest of Ottoman in 1453, the Black Sea evolved into a strategic buffer against the European powers, particularly Russia and Austria, making it a contested zone for centuries (Tsetsckhladze, 1992). The history of the Russian Empire in the black sea region began even before the period of the Great Games, during the period of the Ottoman Empire where they fought for control over the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles Strait. The strategic importance persisted till the Great Games, where the Black Sea became a flash point for European Geopolitics, marked by the first Crimean War (1853-1856) where the allied forces comprising the Ottoman Empire, United Kingdom, France and Sardinia defeated Russia and took control over the Crimean region and its strategic naval ports. The war underscored the importance of the Black Sea region in Eurasian geopolitics (Coffey, 2020).

The Black Sea has consistently been vital for Russia due to its access to the warm-water ports, as the ports on main mainland Russia remain frozen throughout the harsh winter, leading to a trade block. Securing access to a warm-water ports has persisted throughout in Russian foreign policy. During both world wars, the black sea remains vital as it provides supply routes and oil from the Caucasus. In the Soviet Era, the Crimea became a key naval stronghold with the Russian Black Fleet projecting its influence throughout the region (Lewis, 2019). Following the dissolution of Soviet Union in 1991, the strategic relevance of the Black Sea region still persists. Instead it became central to geo-economic interests in trade and energy transit, its geo-strategic objectives related to Naval militarization, Annexation of Crimea (2014), the war in Ukraine and geo-politics for countering NATO and the West and maintaining a political influence in the region, especially the Russian ethnic community (Weber, 2017).

The Novorossiya "New Russia" concept, rooted in imperial history yet adapted to contemporary geopolitical realities, reflects Russia's modern nationalist ambitions in the Black Sea Region. These lands today signify the Russian ambition in southern Ukraine, which the Russian's captured after the defeat of the Ottomans which in present day, hold the majority of the Russian ethnic people. Novorossiya became a nationalist narrative, justifying Russia's territorial claim in the region (Sussex, 2023). In the Kremlin's view, the historical ties with Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova place them in Russia's 'sphere of influence.' The concept of Novorossiya, however, has been expanded and they want their old empire again (Oğuz, 2017).

Naval militarization has become the Kremlin's key strategic goal, especially during the NATO advancement in Ukraine and Southeast Europe. The state Armaments Program in 2011-2020 focused on the Black Sea Fleet and Southern Military District (Petrov, 2021). This process of increasing military and improving capabilities contributed to Russian interference in the region,

including the invasion of Ukraine. Under Minister of Defense Anatoly Serdyukov in 2008, the first military reforms were brought, which sought structural reforms in the military (Basora, 2014). Military modernization includes the addition of warships to Russia's Black Fleet, Anti-Ship and anti-air capabilities. Post 2014, Russia has fortified the Crimea peninsula after its annexation, with radar installations, air defense systems (notably the S-400) and logistics hubs ultimately increasing its A2/AD capabilities. Moreover, the Black Sea fleet has played a pivotal role in sustaining the Russian naval presence in Syria.

## LITRATURE REVIEW

From the security perspective, the Black Sea has evolved continuously throughout the history, reflecting the balance of power in the region, the involvement of diverse security actors and the military significance of the region within broader geopolitical struggles. Scholars identify the Black Sea region as a widely contested security region embedded within wider geopolitical competition connecting maritime and land-based issues in the Caucasus, the Balkans, Central Europe and the Eurasian region (Melvin, 2018). The Black Sea region has been a crossroads of European and Asian civilizations competing for control of maritime routes and strategic significance. The region has historically served as a crossroads for various civilizations (Kayser, 2021).

From geopolitical lens, the black sea is rich with its history and culture, it has been main hub of European and Asian empires interests and due to that they have always tried to influence and dominate the maritime routes and control the region. This region functions as a junction where various civilizations intersect. Since classical times, the Black Sea region has served as a major center of international trade and commerce, as well as a melting pot and transfer point for cultural exchange. In geostrategic terms, it served as a terminus for the Silk Road and an international crossroads, while the Bosphorus and Dardanelles for centuries constituted one of the world's most important maritime waterways (Dardanelles, 2024).

A substantial body of literature focuses on the concept of Novorossiya, a large, historically defined geographical area of present-day Ukraine, located on the north of the Black Sea. In 18th century it was under the control of USSR. Basora and Fisher (2014) argue that President Vladimir Putin has significantly expanded the historical boundaries of Novorossiya to include territories that lie well beyond its actual historical boundaries, most notably by explicitly including Kharkiv, a major city and important that was never part of that historic region, thereby instrumentalizing history to justify modern territorial claims. An additional spatial concept was the new term of 'Novorossiya' ('new Russia'), a geographical unity that includes eight regions of Ukraine, that according to Putin's imperialist propaganda, were traditionally and historically Russian and were unjustly handed over to Ukraine by the Soviet regime. Similar elements can be located in the declarations of the then Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, reinforcing a vision of Russia that transcend its contemporary borders. The Russian leadership thus introduced an ambivalent notion of Russians outside the national territory living in territories not only of the former Soviet Union but also even of pre-1917 Russian Empire that are subject to projection of Russian military power (Kotoulas, 2022).

Russia is not defined by its current borders but by its historical and cultural ties with its former soviet states (Shinar, 2017). Vladimir Putin, through his political actions in Eastern Europe, the Baltic States and Central Asian countries and his current actions in Ukraine, clearly shows his

interests to reestablish the nineteenth century Russian Empire, ignoring the principle of international law that protects the sovereignty of each nation-state over its territory (Shinar, 2017).

NATO has increasingly assigned strategic importance to Black sea region, with its presence expanding as part of broader efforts to counter Russian influence and maintain stability in Europe. NATO has allocated lots of money in upgrading infrastructure and improving security in the Black Sea region to swiftly respond if necessary. It includes building more and better air bases, ports and logistical capabilities for efficient deployment of allied forces and equipment during crisis or security threat. NATO's increasing commitment towards Black Sea region reflects its determination to counter the growing Russian influence and to safeguard its allies and partners in the region. Through strengthening its presence and collaborations in the area, NATO wants to build stability and deter any potential threats in the region (Horrell & Kuz, 2022).

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Regional security complex theory (RSCT) provides a useful analytical framework for understanding Black Sea security dynamics. RSCT, developed by Barry Buzan and Ole Waever in 1990, explains how states interact and perceive risks in a region. This idea states that regionalizing global security will give a theoretical foundation for world regions. Regional security complexes are "a set of units in which the major processes of securitization, de-securitization or both at once are so intertwined that their security problems cannot reasonably be analyzed or resolved independently" (Leszek, 2022). Similar definitions are used by regional security complex researchers. D. Lake and P. Morgan argue that security ties in the shared perception of possibilities, challenges, difficulties and dangers determine regional borders (Leszek, 2022).

The theory further posits that most regional security problems remain inside the region since they are collectively related to other state's security. Due to common boundaries, history, culture, ethnicity, trade and territory, geographical closeness of states increases security risks. Such considerations make state security interdependent. State with superpowers may intervene in other regions due to their power and resources, but every state doesn't have enough to consider outside its territory. Barry Buzan and Ole Waever reframe security as a social construct, placing dangers in their socio-political context. According to Tahir (2022), regional dynamics are more vulnerable than global dynamics because most security issues arise there.

The Regional Security Complex Theory applies to the Black Sea conundrum by viewing the region as a security complex where governments share historical, geographical and geopolitical security concerns. Russia, Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania and Ukraine constitute a regional security complex in the Black Sea region, where their security is interconnected. The military buildup of one state threatens neighboring countries' sovereignty and security, forcing them to reassess and improve their own security. The 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea, attack on Ukraine and military buildup exacerbated regional security issues and instability (Sarıkaya, 2017).

### **METHODOLOGY**

This research adopts a qualitative research method based on secondary data analysis to assess Russia's strategic posture in the Black Sea region. The critical analysis of academic literature, government documents and media sources captures the contemporary development in Russia's strategic maneuver. The analysis utilizes Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), to provide a

lens to assess regional security dynamics and impact of Russia's imperialist ambitions in it. The involvement of frozen conflicts, Novorossiia concept and NATO further signifies the theory's reliability. The methodology case study analysis such as annexation of Crimea and invasion of Ukraine to understand regional dynamics. The triangulation of History, Policy and Security, provides a comprehensive understanding of dynamics between Russian influence and impact on regional and broader geopolitical balance in Eurasia.

### **STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THE BLACK SEA**

The strategic significance of the Black Sea can be understood through three interrelated aspects: its Geographical Importance, its Economic importance and its defensive value essential for securitization. The strategic significance of this region persists in the national interest of the littoral states, making it a part of their national security concern. The region has historically served as a crossroads for various civilizations (Kayser, 2021), while also being the main hub of European and Asian empires' interests due to the presence of maritime routes. It has been a nexus of international trade and commerce and a critical conduit of cross-cultural interaction and diffusion. It has served as a terminus for the Silk Road, integrating land and maritime networks and operated as a key intersection in the global exchange network (Hooker, 2024).

#### **Strategic Importance of the Black Sea for the Regional Littoral States**

##### ***Bulgaria***

Bulgaria plays a key role in facilitating NATO access for the southern maritime flank and countering Russia's Balkan ambitions. Bulgaria's major ports (Varna, Burgas) are a strategic asset in the Black Sea (Tol, 2019).

##### ***Romania***

Romania holds significant strategic leverage through its control of the Danube Delta, which enhances NATO's ability to monitor and counter the Crimean Black Fleet. The port of Constanta serves as a major transit hub for European trade with Caucasus and Central Asia (Chastand, 2024).

##### ***Ukraine***

Ukraine is strategically important for NATO and Russia due to its geo-location, particularly as a buffer state between Western Institutions and Russian Influence. Additionally, Ukraine is a major exporter of wheat, fertilizer and other commodities essential for global food security, further amplifying its strategic relevance (Rose, 2023).

##### ***Russia***

The Black Sea is crucial for Russia's southern defense due to its naval projection and warm ports. Key ports like Sevastopol (Crimea) restrict NATO expansion while also trades oil (Golshiri et. al., 2024).

##### ***Georgia***

Georgia serves as a vital connector between Caucasus and Europe, particularly in trade and transit. Ports such as Poti and Batumi are key to the BRI's Middle Corridor connecting China, Central Asia and Europe. Georgia's ports support its logistics and transit hub status (Fraiola, 2023).

##### ***Turkiye***

Turkiye occupies a uniquely strategic position by administering the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits which serves as a gateway between the Black Sea and Mediterranean. As a NATO member maintaining a pragmatic relation with Russia. Turkiye hosts critical trade ports including Istanbul,

Samsun and Trabzon and facilitates energy transit pipelines such as Turk Stream pipeline, with Russia (Tol, 2019).

### **Geo-Economic and Defensive Significance**

As for Geo-economic importance, the Black sea is embedded within the Trans-European Transport Network and China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), linking Europe to Central Asia and beyond. The Black Sea contains an immense amount of oil and gas and is a transit zone for pipelines transporting energy from Central Asia and the Caspian Sea to Europe through Blue Stream and TurkStream gas pipelines. Ports like Novorossiysk (Russia) and Constanța (Romania) are major oil and LNG export hubs (Kaynak, 2018). Commodities like grain and fertilizer, essential for Europe and Asia, are majorly traded through the Black Sea. Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Türkiye and Ukraine are deeply interconnected through trade, where Russia dominates with a trade volume of \$315.6 billion in 2022. Black Sea is a critical chokepoint in global food supply chains and energy economy, with disruptions reverberating far beyond the region (Şeker, 2019).

The black Sea functions as a buffer between two great powers and serves as a launch pad for their strategic operations such as the West represented by NATO and Russia along its former territories. The Russian Black Fleet based in Crimea enables Russia to project power far beyond the black sea against the joint operations led by NATO allies. The Black Sea provides the only accessible warm-water port to Russia that does not freeze in winter, very crucial for year-round trade and military operations. In terms of the NATO view, the Black Sea acts as a defensive parameter for protecting Eastern European states from soviet influence (Childs, 2023). The 2014 annexation of Crimea provided Russia with a key port for its black Sea fleet and a commanding military base at Sevastopol. As a result, the balance of power in the region changed prompting NATO to expand its presence. Many other unresolved or "Frozen Conflicts" keep this location volatile and sensitive. Abkhazia (Georgia) is a region supported by Russia after the 2008 Russia-Georgia war, giving Russia an additional strategic point on the eastern side (Makio & Fuccille, 2023).

### **Russia's Geopolitical Goals in the Black Sea**

Russia has historically viewed the Black Sea as a vital gateway to reach warm-water ports, a strategic priority dating back the era of Tsars (Heywood, 2017). From the end of the 16th century until the 20th century, the Russian Empire fought twelve battles with the Ottoman Empire, mainly in the Crimean Peninsula (Robarts, 2012). The permanent stronghold in Crimea would have allowed power over the Kievan steppes, Northern European plain, Astrahan region and Azov Sea. Military ships need warm water ports that do not freeze in winter and allow unrestricted transit to world commerce, therefore Russia wants to control the Black Sea. Winters prevent use of Murmansk (Arctic Ocean) and Vladivostok (Pacific Ocean) for six months. The lack of a hot port with wide access to the world's oceans been a strategic drawback since Peter the Great. Russian imperial ambitions were to join the Mediterranean, Pacific and Indian Oceans via seizing Afghanistan as a apart of this broader visions (Dumitru, 2021).

Annexation of Crimea in the 18th century and again in 2014 shows Russia's enduring ambition to secure Sevastopol naval base by taking over Crimea, ensuring Dominance in the Black Sea. Russian interests focus on the different degrees of political and economic control, to exercise power over coastal state and to control the Black Sea trade. Russia further aims to influence energy exports (to Europe) and other sea transport through Novorossiysk port. At the same time, Moscow seeks to

avoid a security void with NATO that could threaten the Kremlin's South-West front. Russia will use diplomatic, informational, political, cyber and economic resources, backed by a growing military, to achieve these goals. Russia sees NATO expansion as a challenge to its sovereignty and control. In this region, numerous governments are NATO members or willing to join and Russia wants to shield its neighbors from western influence, reflecting its ambitions of regional dominance (Socor, 2021).

Russian interest primarily focuses on obtaining different levels of political and economic power in each coastal state to maintain control over the Black Sea area for energy export and other sea transportation via Novorossiysk port while simultaneously avoiding any security deficit toward NATO that can potentially endanger the South West flank of the Kremlin (Dumitru, 2021).

### ***Regional Dominance and Sphere of Influence***

Although Russia remains the most powerful actor in the Black Sea region, but its relationship with other actors shapes the nature of approach that Moscow incorporates in its foreign policy. Unfortunately, for Russia no littoral state in the Black Sea region have stable cordial relation with Russia, prompting Russia to adopt coercive measures. The main threat to Russia remains of western influence and increasing westernization of Black Sea states. Three states have now become a part of NATO, while Ukraine is heavily supported by it. Lastly, Georgia is influenced by the west and is more aligned towards it, which led Russia to support separatist movement in Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Tskhinvali Region). After the Russia-Georgia war in 2008, Russia heavily intervened through these regions and expelled Georgian forces from Abkhazia and South Ossetia expanding its sphere of influence though this strategic buffer (Flanagan, 2020). The only key strategic partner, that is highly inclined toward the Moscow is Armenia, which kremlin supported during Armenia-Azerbaijan war, but Armenia shares no land with the Black Sea. Although, Moldova shares mixed relations with Russia, on one hand it is dependent on Russian gas but on the other hand Moldova despise Russia for its involvement in Transnistria (region of Moldova on border with Ukraine) where Russia still holds it 1500 troops for a strategic leverage against NATO and Ukraine (Weber, 2017)

Russia relies on Black Sea trade and economic activities, therefore, regional stability is essential for economic surplus. The war in Ukraine has already rendered the region dangerous, hurting trade for all littoral governments, including Russia. Russia is building alliances to increase its influence in the region and counter western influence by combining hard power (military build-up and collaborations) with economic relations (Trade and Energy) and soft power (Lewis, 2019). Russian dominance and power projection in the region and beyond are achieved through these methods. Turkiye is second most influential regional power after Russia. It controls Black Sea transportation due to its strategic location, but relations with Russia is complex and often contradictory. Their relations are complicated, with cooperation on energy projects like Turkstream pipeline and severe competition over Libya and Syria. Russia gas enters Turkiye and Europe via the Turkstream pipeline, a classic example of collaboration. Turkiye bought S-400 missiles from Russia and participates in cooperative military operations which illustrates its pragmatic engagement even as geopolitical rivalry continues. Conflicts in Syria and South Caucasus are also addressed diplomatically (Baev & Kirişci, 2020).

Armenia is one of the closest allies of Russia due to their longstanding historical ties and shared strategic needs. They are part of Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and Armenia is also part of Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and Russia also has its bases in Armenia. Their historical, economic and strategic relations bring them closer as allies in the Black sea region. Abkhazia and South Ossetia are two regions separated from Georgia, they both are politically, economically and militarily supported by Russia. Russia ensures their dependency upon Moscow for its own interests. Same is the case with Transnistria where Russia actively plays its role as a facilitator and supports separatist movement (Anisimov, 2019).

Russia's invasion of Crimea in 2014 severely deteriorated the relations between Ukraine and Russia, followed by Moscow's continued support for eastern Ukraine separatists Donetsk and Luhansk. Similarly, Russia's backing of Abkhazia and South Ossetia has significantly shaped Georgia's security environment, especially given Georgia's pro-western orientation. NATO member states Bulgaria and Romania also maintain poor relations with Russia due to their pro-western stance. Russia values its lands and people, making frozen conflicts an essential part of its strategy (Guanciale, 2024). Russia may operate its 'sphere of influence' and prevent governments from joining NATO and the west through these frozen conflicts. Russian involvement varies in frozen conflicts including Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, Nagorno-Karabakh in Armenia and Azerbaijan and Transnistria in Moldova (Flanagan & Chindea, 2019). Disintegration of USSR in 1990s led to ethnic minority wars demanding independence from new republics. Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, together with Nagorno-Karabakh, are in "frozen conflicts" with post-Soviet countries that claim sovereignty. Nagorno-Karabakh, Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia remain Azerbaijan, Moldova and Georgia internationally. Each has declared independence and established de facto elected administrations with sustained Russian political, military and economic support (Muradov, 2017).

### ***Economic and Energy Interest***

Russian foreign policy increasingly incorporates Black Sea economic cooperation to gain a strategic edge and diversify its regional influence. Collectively, Black Sea states generate almost \$3 trillion in GDP, host a population of approximately 300 million inhabitants and maintain a dense network of interconnectors that facilitate trade and energy movements between Europe, Eurasia, the Middle East and beyond.

Russia creates complex economic ties through energy exports and infrastructure projects, trade and economic integration, regional infrastructure investment, energy diplomacy, tourism and financial help. These initiatives strengthen its regional influence and give it the economic muscle to fight Western influence and protect its Black Sea geopolitical interests. Russia seeks control of the Black Sea primarily because of its role as a critical energy corridor. Its objectives include asserting regional dominance across political, economic and cultural spheres; expanding energy exports and raising hydrocarbon prices; constructing nuclear power plants; developing new pipelines to Europe and ensuring peaceful and sustainable regional growth, as instability reduces energy demand. These aims are crucial to Russia's Black Sea influence (Khishtovani et al., 2025).

Energy projects and economic partnerships enable Russia to build and sustain relationships with neighboring states. Russia benefits economically, politically and strategically from its participation in the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), as trade and investment opportunities arise from



member states' economic cooperation. Russia, a regional economic power, benefits from economic relations. Energy transit and collaboration are facilitated by the Black Sea region (Gorenburg, 2020). BSEC initiatives benefits Russia as a major energy exporter as they contribute to the improvement of energy infrastructure, boosting its energy transportation and sale interests. Economic ties in the Black Sea boost Russia. Russia establishes economic relations beyond energy through commerce, investments, and joint ventures. Economic reliance can enhance Black Sea relations diplomatically. By becoming an economic partner, Russia can improve its geopolitical position and minimize potential opposition to its military and political action in the region. Russia's energy initiatives, trade agreements and economic alliances increase its regional influence. Russia strengthens its regional presence through soft power, alliances, and diplomacy. It boosts its regional political power (Isachenko, 2024).

Russia exports crude oil and petroleum to global markets through Novorossiysk, its main export terminal. Russia's port investment has strengthened its economy and enhanced energy exports. The Turk Stream pipeline brings Russian gas to Turkey and Europe without Ukraine, demonstrating collaboration. It offers Russia more influence over European energy supplies and lessens its dependence on the Ukrainian route. Russia's massive oil and natural gas reserves are its greatest economic leverage in the Mediterranean or anyplace. Energy exports have long made up half of its global exports. Moscow has repeatedly used its role as the main oil and gas provider to reward and punish neighboring governments like Ukraine to keep them on its side (Pritchett, 2021).

### ***Political and Diplomatic Leverage***

Russia's political maneuvering in the Black sea region is mainly aimed at achieving its interests such as enhancing its influence in the region and project power, countering west and boosting its economy through trade and alliances. It uses multifaceted approach for political maneuvering which includes economic alliances, diplomatic efforts, military actions and covert strategies such as supporting the separatist movements. These strategies are used by Russia to ensure fulfillment of its interests in the region. It uses energy projects as a tool for forcing states into compliance by increasing their dependency on the Russian resources. Black sea is an energy corridor and whoever will control the Black sea will have the ability to control the trade, it will be able to stiff trade as per its interests (Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, 2012).

These energy projects are not only used for political advantages but it also boosts their economic revenue which complements their military buildup. Russia tries to maintain its diplomatic clout by playing active role in international platforms such as United Nations in order to maintain its influence. Despite having strained relations with Turkiye, it still managed to build cooperative relations through energy projects like Turkstream pipeline. Through diplomatic relations it tries to counter western influence and enhance its presence in the region. Following the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Russia actively engaged into supporting the separatists in Donetsk and Luhansk in Eastern Ukraine by providing them military and financial support. Moscow justified these actions on ground that Ukraine's potential accession to NATO would constitute a direct threat to Russian security, a perception that ultimately contributed to Russia's decision to launch a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 (Khishtovani et al., 2012).

### ***Naval Power and Maritime Strategy***

Russia's strategic goals in the Black Sea are majorly aimed at strengthening its Naval power, enhancing its military capabilities, securing its economic interests and countering western influence in the region. Russia being a Nuclear power nation although does not hold any strategic nuclear submarines (SSBNs) in the black sea, but the conventional submarine still holds enough capability to strike beyond Ukraine including into Eastern Mediterranean. The key composition of Russian Naval capability includes approximately **seven** diesel-electric attack submarines, (Project 636.3, Improved Kilo II class), five guided-missile frigates, nine guided-missile corvettes including Steregushchiy-class, four offshore patrol vessels, four anti-submarine warfare (ASW) ships, eight seagoing minesweepers, two guided-missile boats, two gunboats and four landing ships. In total, the Russian Naval capacity constitutes of approximately 41-44 warships alongside seven submarines. Very interestingly, although the improved Kilo II-class submarine does not hold any nuclear power, but its capability is enough to deliver a nuclear payload. Moscow can strategically maneuver this advantage in containing NATO (Celac et al., 2022).

The annexation of Crimea in 2014 marked a decisive shift in Russia's maritime posture with a pivotal base for its Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol, granting it leverage over Ukraine, significant influence over regional trade and energy flows, and the ability to project maritime power into the Eastern Mediterranean, the Middle East and beyond (Stronski, 2021). The Black Sea fleet regularly conduct unilateral and joint naval exercises to demonstrate readiness and deterrence. Strategic allies like China, helps Russia to expand its naval cooperation and enhance capabilities. The first visit of Chinese Navy to the Black Sea in 2015 for the "Joint Sea 2015 II" drills hosted near Novorossiysk symbolized deepening Sino-Russian maritime cooperation. Additionally, Russia conducts joint exercises with Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) allies such as Armenia and Belarus etc., integrating their ground and air contingents in Southern District Drills despite their landlocked status. This diversification reflects a strategic maritime strategy aimed at increasing Russian maritime approach counterbalancing NATO and the West (Flanagan & Chindea, 2019).

Russian policies and strategies are designed to keep Black sea under its influence and control since the time of Tsars and Kremlin views it as a centerpiece for maintaining regional security through Moscow's Black Fleet. The fleet holds Russian Southern flank and act as a forward base for projecting power into the eastern Europe (Kuimova & Wezeman 2018). The Montreux convention (1936) although give rights to Russia to send its warships (including from the Black Sea Fleet) through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles (administered by Turkiye) into the Mediterranean but put severe limitations, acting as a counter to Russian maritime supremacy. Turkiye as a custodian of the strait can close them in wartime or when threatened under Montreux article 21. This can be exemplified when Turkiye invoked article in February 2022 and closed the strait preventing Russia from reinforcing its black fleet (Stronski, 2021).

Despite these legal constraints, Russia has employed strategic diplomacy to bypass legally accepted limits, using exclusions like 'The maintenance Clause' to deploy submarines for delivery or maintenance and stay in the Mediterranean. Russia sails surface ships and frigates into the Mediterranean with Syria under Bashar-al-Assad's regime providing naval base and complete support, Russia exploited Syria as a naval base and secured Tartus in the Mediterranean (Katz,

2017). Russia secured long-term access to naval facility at Tartus, a legacy of Soviet era agreement dating back to 1971, which accommodated Soviet 5th Operational squadron. Russia expanded its influence in Libya through this port to further safeguard its interest. According to Borshchevskaya (2020), Tartus was the key base for Russian naval support to General Khalifa Haftar and the Libyan National Army, mainly for delivering military equipment and soldiers to eastern Libya.

The State Armaments Program (SAP) for 2011–2020 was a Russian military modernization effort that successfully achieved its goal of having a 70% share of modern weapons in its armed forces by 2020, especially in the Black Sea Fleet which protects its interests in the Black Sea and Mediterranean. Russia acquired much of the Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol, Crimea and Novorossiysk via the 1997 and 2010 bilateral agreements with Ukraine (Kuimova & Wezeman 2018). Post-2014 militarization Crimea transformed the peninsula into a heavily fortified hub for force projection into Black Sea, Eastern Mediterranean, North African and Middle East. e Russian domination of the Black Sea would alter Europe and the Mediterranean's power balance. Crimea and Sevastopol were critical bases in the Southern Military Region, where civic infrastructure was subjugated to military needs (Celac et al., 2022). Putin claims this is a nationalist response to western political destabilization and sophisticated military threats (Flanagan & Chindea, 2019).

### **Security Implications of Russian Actions: Case Studies**

The regional order in the Black Sea region is being redefined due to geopolitical struggle, reshaping the geopolitical identities and relations among states. Mediterranean and Black sea are considered as one interconnected geopolitical space in which regional and extra-regional powers are playing their rivalries for their interests. Within this environment, Russia has sought to take advantage of frozen conflicts, persistent instability and its leverage over trade and energy as a political tool to maintain its influence. Russia's endeavors in the Black sea are forcing states to integrate with the NATO and EU to maintain balance of power. Through military victory in the Ukraine, Russia can ensure its regional hegemony, it will give Russia control over the Black sea trade routes and energy. To advance these objectives, Russia has supported the separatist movements in the Eastern Ukraine, played active role in the frozen conflicts and finally it invaded Ukraine in 2022. These actions reflect a broader strategy aimed keeping neighboring states politically fragmented and strategically unstable, thereby preventing their integration into western economic or security structures. However, rather than stabilizing Russia's regional position, this approach has intensified instability across the region. The resulting instability has affected the broader international community (Bechev, 2025,).

### ***Annexation of Crimea 2014***

In response to Euro-maiden protests and the subsequent ousting of pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovich, Russia finally decided to invade and annex Crimea. Moscow justified its invasion as a way of protecting its people which are related to them ethnically and historically. Moscow asserts a longstanding historical claim over Crimea. The peninsula was colonized by Russia during the reign of Catherine the Great, with Sevastopol, its principal port and largest city, established as a homeport for the Russian Black Sea Fleet. Following the establishment of the Soviet Union, Crimea remained part of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic until 1954, when it was administratively transferred to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (Pifer, 2020).

After Russian military invasion, a referendum was conducted under which majority voted to join Russian Federation. Annexation of Crimea in 2014 was a bold move which benefitted the Russian interests as it was able to take control of Sevastopol naval base through which it successfully expanded the Black Sea Fleet. This event also led to instability in Ukraine where Russia was now actively supporting the separatist movements through military and financial means. It severed the relations with Ukraine and broader international community. Russia proved itself to be the only regional power and embarked on a journey to rebuild its lost empire by taking over majority of its regions. In response to Russian invasion, NATO also increased its military presence in the region and EU imposed a series of economic and political sanctions on Russia aimed at deterring further aggression and upholding international norms of sovereignty and territorial integrity (Celac et al., 2022).

### ***Kerch Strait Incident 2008***

The Black Sea is a nearly landlocked body of water connected to the Mediterranean Sea through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits, both of which are under Turkish control. It is further linked to the similarly landlocked Sea of Azov via the Kerch Strait, situated between Crimea and Russia. This maritime corridor provides Russia's Northern European territories with warm water access, from the Kerch Strait to World Ocean through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits. Consequently, control over these straits holds significant strategic importance for the regional powers (Kirilova, 2023). In November 2018, Russian forces captured three Ukrainian naval vessels in order to navigate through the strait. It reflected Russia's aggressive actions to take over the maritime routes and control the access to Sea of Azov. This event attracted the international community with fear and created instability. The construction of Kerch Strait Bridge connected Crimea to mainland Russia, thereby consolidating Russia's strategic foothold in the region. Although this move was widely condemned by the international community and prompted the imposition of additional sanctions, it nonetheless strengthened Moscow's control over the Kerch Strait and the surrounding maritime space (Kirilova, 2023).

### ***Invasion of Ukraine***

The February 2022 invasion of Ukraine shocked the world, making the first full-scale attack on a European state since the end of World War II. By launching this assault, Russian President Vladimir Putin openly challenged the core principle of the post-World War II international order: that national borders cannot be altered through use of force alone. Putin had signaled his willingness to challenge the global order as early as 2007, during his speech at the Munich Conference on Security Policy. In that address, he declared that the world had reached a decisive moment requiring seriously reflection on the architecture of global security. His remarks were sharply critical of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), especially the United States, which, he accused of having, "overstepped its national borders in every way" in pursuit of a "unipolar world" dominated by "one center of authority, one center of force, one center of decision-making." Putin warned that such a system undermined collective security and left no state truly safe (Brunk & Hakimi, 2022). Russia was unstoppable despite the response from international community and massive sanctions placed. Western growing influence in the region was a direct threat to Russian security, according to Russia it was necessary to protect its people and territories from the Western encroachment (Brunk & Hakimi, 2022).

## Regional and Global Security Repercussions

The strategic complexity of the Black Sea has transformed the region into a battle ground for great powers competition. This region will define the future of Eurasia, as control over the Black Sea translates into the control over the Eurasian Energy supply. These politically complex maneuvers have ultimately resulted in unintended consequences, not predicted by both West and Russia (Delanoë, 2019). These consequences not only had major regional implementations, but also effected global repercussions. This unpredictability in this region has even more intensified by Trump's government and Kyiv's reluctance to align its policy with either of the main contenders (the US and Russia). These developments have transformed black sea in to a 'regional arena' with 'International Contenders' resulting in shifting of balance of power and intensifying great power rivalry (Rácz, 2022).

At a regional level, Russia's security posture has intensified securitization of littoral states and deepened their reliance on external security alliances, particularly through NATO. The annexation of Crimea although had expanded strategic approach of Kremlin, far into Mediterranean but ultimately had security dilemma, prompting Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine to further intensify their stance on alignment with NATO. The war in Ukraine has imposed costs on Russia that have exceeded initial expectations, contributing not only to broader political instability but also to disruptions in trade and energy supply for all littoral states and beyond (Boungou & Yatié, 2022). Simultaneously, NATO deployment in Turkey, Romania and Bulgaria has intensified with joint exercise and naval patrols. Repercussions of the war have also majorly affected the European states, which are depended on Russia for their energy supply and on Ukraine for the supply of wheat and commodities. The persistent stance of Europe on Ukraine has not yielded any significant result against Russia, nor did the Western sanction on Russia which were meant to cripple the Russian economy (Eroglu, 2023).

At an international level, perhaps the most significant repercussion is on the global energy and food security. The rivalry between Russia and the US both being part of the UNSC (United Nation Security Council), has resulted in an institutional dead lock, undermining functionality. This rivalry has revived the reminiscent of the Cold War with now the blocks divided in to pro-western camp comprising the US, the EU and NATO with its allies and pro-Eastern camp comprising Russia and its allies including China, Iran and North Korea etc. (Grigoryev, & Pavlyushina, 2022). States like Pakistan and Indonesia were dependent on Ukraine for wheat and other commodities now have to find other alternatives for food security. Heightened risk in energy market has increased inflation, Western sanctions and supply disruptions caused oil prices to surge. Natural gas prices in Europe also spiked to record highs as Russia threatens to cut supplies. This has led the European to aim for diversifying their energy imports rather than to be dependent on Russia. Simultaneously, Russia is now diversifying its export to Asia/East Asia particularly in China, through projects such as new pipeline (Power of Siberia) signaling a broader reorientation of global energy flows (Umbach, 2022).

## CONCLUSION

Russia's overarching strategic objective in the Black Sea remains to counter NATO's eastward expansion, a goal that has driven Moscow to adopt increasingly assertive political measures. The narrative of broken promise albeit although informal assures that NATO would not expand

eastward following Germany reunification in 1990, still persist in Russian strategic policy as a justification for military intervention. Within this framework, the Black Sea becomes one of the last strong hold for Russia to maintain its territorial integrity and sphere of influence. The intense rivalry even involving international actors only signify the importance of the black sea, as a stake holder of global energy economy and future of Eurasian politics. The region has only securitized in recent years and the littoral states are now seeking to counterbalance Russian imperial threat, hence aligning more toward NATO. Russia's actions in the Black sea reflects their agenda of regional dominance and to expand its economic presence in the region.

These strategic postures of Russia explicitly explain its traditional Novorossiia concept, symbolizing Russia's strategic and cultural push into the Black Sea, serving both as a military frontier against NATO and justification for intervention. Furthermore, it also seeks to reclaim its former territories especially in the East Europe. Since the early 2000s, Vladimir Putin sought to reincorporate Ukraine into its territory and extend its dominance over the Black Sea region. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 was a decisive move to secure the ports for its black sea fleet, it ensures its naval presence in the region. Later in 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine by full military invasion and took control of the major areas and cities. Today, its control of Crimea gives it leverage over the Ukrainian, regional and international economy and strategic advantages to project power beyond the region. Another enduring source of Russian strategic advantage in the black sea region lies in the persistence of '*Frozen Conflicts*', unresolved territorial disputes that keeps the region volatile. These conflicts characterized by a "no war, no peace" situation render the regional security environment unpredictable and makes it a high risk situation for the West.

Naval modernization not only helps Russia maintain its regional dominance, but also expand its reach beyond Ukraine, further in to Europe. As a nuclear power with immense military capability, it only compels NATO to further secure its strong hold in order to deter Russia. Although mobility is limited by Montreux convention (1936), but Russia can still transit it warships and submarines by clause exploitation. The fall of Bashar-al-Assad regime had negatively affected kremlins maritime reach and also its interest in Libya, as Syria had leased Moscow its port. Russia's maritime capability through Black Fleet i.e., Crimea is still enough to encompasses the Eastern Europe. The modernization of Russian navy has only increased the security dilemma and made the region more volatile.

Most of the trade is carried through Black sea because it is rich with oil and other natural resources. Access to warm-water ports is essential for Russia's economic and military operations. Russia is a dominant energy supplier to Europe and other countries. It uses its economic and energy power as a tool to force states into compliance. Russia wants to limit the littoral states from integrating into the western economic and security structures. Due to shifting political and strategic circumstances, Russia, the EU and the Black Sea region is now aiming to diversify their economic policy, with Russia aiming to sell its energy to Asia, the EU to import energy from Scandinavia and the littoral states moving toward western integration. This regional conformation is having global repercussion, high and uncertain energy prices, states who were dependent on Ukraine and Russia are finding alternative to establish food and energy security and inflation in Europe and the Black Sea region.

In sum, Russia's strategic ambitions in the Black Sea region are driven by a desire to secure its national security, economic interests and regional dominance. Through military modernization, economic leverage and strategic diplomacy, Russia has significantly expanded its influence in the region. However, these actions have also contributed to regional instability and shifted the geopolitical balance, presenting ongoing challenges for European security and international stability. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing effective policies to address the complexities of Russian influence and to promote stability and cooperation in the Black Sea region.

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