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# US and NATO need to engage much more directly with the Black sea region

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## *Abstract*

In the Black Sea region, Russia is actively using a variety of methods to counter its biggest geopolitical rival – America and its Allies from the Alliance. Recent developments in the Black Sea region should lead NATO to focus on its security by strengthening its military presence. Romania has contributed to several NATO missions and proved to be a loyal partner, made its defense capabilities a priority and provided solid investments in its defense. The political importance of the Black Sea and economic security in relation to the wider region are becoming increasingly important. The Black Sea is important for the security of NATO's southern flank, because Russia uses the Black Sea as a corridor for logistics during operations in Syria and Libya and the ongoing Russian aggression against Ukraine and Georgia, so that is why the United States and the Alliance must pay more serious attention to the region.

**Key words:** Black Sea, NATO, USA, Russia, Ukraine, Georgia, security.

## *Introduction*

NATO is in the process of developing and adopting a new strategic concept that should pave the way for the future of the Alliance. In the Black Sea region, Romania has become a major ally of the United States and NATO in recent years, contributing to several NATO missions and proving to be a loyal partner. With regard to the new challenges and the conflict in the Black Sea region, it is time for the Alliance to pay more attention to it, starting with the development of a comprehensive strategy for the region. It is therefore necessary to reaffirm NATO's open-door policy towards Ukraine and Georgia. The United States and Georgia have experience working with each other, and Georgians are always looking for ways to contribute to transatlantic security, hoping to speed up their accession to NATO, and Ukraine needs to lift restrictions on the supply of defense weapons systems.

## *Materials*

The materials for this article are publicly available in the Internet space. In such a manner, the subject of the research and the sources for its construction are the same, which is a good fundament for the recognizable position for the expecting results.

## *Methods*

The main method of research is to review and analyze some publicly available expert points on NATO's security policies on the Internet. Their brief presentation in the article aims to achieve the main goals, namely much more active discussion and adoption of the new strategic concept and counteraction to current and future challenges facing the Alliance.

## *Results and Discussion*

The method proposed below for presenting the Internet resources is valuable for the following reasons

– review and analysis of the information and projection of the response to the challenges facing Europe and NATO, as well as the visible specialization of the various electronic platforms.

### **US and NATO need to engage much more directly with the Black Sea Region**

Following the change of administration in Washington and the somewhat spontaneous withdrawal from Afghanistan, many European Allies expect determination from the United States regarding the Black Sea region. This strategically important region must have a growing geopolitical interest in the United States and NATO. In view of the new challenges, NATO is in the process of developing and adopting a new strategic concept that will pave the way for the future of the Alliance and include these challenges, such as: “pandemic”, “China” and others. Recent developments in the Black Sea region should lead the Alliance to focus on its security by strengthening its military presence. Another opportunity for NATO and the United States in the region is to support the eventual membership of Ukraine and Georgia in NATO.

The Black Sea is located at an important crossroads between Europe, Asia and the Caucasus. Bulgaria, Turkey and Romania are members of NATO and are a guarantee of security for the Alliance, and Ukraine and Georgia are candidates for NATO membership. In the Black Sea region, Russia is very active, using a variety of methods to counter its biggest geopolitical rival – America and its allies.

Since Russia’s conquest of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014, almost 5% of Ukraine's landmass and more than half of its coastline have been occupied by Russia. Russian-backed separatists in Eastern Ukraine continue to wage hostilities, killing more than 14,000 people (Associated Press News, 2021). Russia has illegally occupied Crimea and continues to provoke and support a separatist movement in Eastern Ukraine. In this case, Russia is the aggressor, while Ukraine is the victim.

President Biden's administration has been going on for a year, and we have to wait to see how President Biden's policy towards Ukraine will be implemented. Following the start of hostilities between Russia and Ukraine in February 2022, the United States has taken a leading position on the conflict. So far, meetings have taken place between President Joe Biden and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in August and September on the completion of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline. Significant deals and sales of weapons and grants to Ukraine have taken place under President Trump. Between December 2017 and June 2020, the United States provided Ukraine with more than \$ 687 million in aid and weapons, including at least 360 Javelin anti-tank missiles, 47 Javelin launchers and more than a dozen Mark VI patrol boats, plus sniper rifles and ammunition, radar systems and other equipment (These numbers are based on several sources used in research conducted by Heritage Foundation analysts).

The other candidate country for NATO membership, located in a dangerous geopolitical region, is Georgia. After Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008 and the subsequent occupation of almost 20% of its territory, Georgia is reforming its armed forces. It is a trusted partner and supports NATO, as well as US-led operations. Georgia is participating with its contingent of thousands of troops in Iraq and Afghanistan and peacekeepers in the Balkans and Africa. Russia’s invasion has catalyzed the process of rapprochement between Georgia and the West, making it a net player in transatlantic security.

Following the withdrawal of the United States from Afghanistan and the end of Georgia's defense readiness program later this year, Georgian politicians are worried that their relations with the United States and NATO may slow down. Another reason for the slowdown in relations may be the Ukrainian crisis, and Georgia has an interest in continuing to take an active part in NATO operations and continue to increase its military capabilities, maintaining strong ties between its own armed forces and the NATO military, especially with those of the United States.

In recent years, Romania has become a major ally of the United States and NATO in the Black Sea region. In Romania, the United States uses bases such as Campia Turzii Air Base, from which it operates MQ-9 Reapers, and Mihail Kogălniceanu Air Base, which is a major logistics and supply hub for US equipment and personnel, as well as training grounds. Romania is currently investing \$ 2.96 billion in rebuilding Mihail Kogălniceanu Air Base in accordance with NATO standards and

increasing its capacity (Romania-Insider, 2019). Deveselu is home to Aegis Ashore, which has been in operation since May 2016 and is an important component of NATO's defense against ballistic missile attacks.

Romania has contributed to several NATO missions and proved to be a loyal partner, made its defense capabilities a priority and provided solid investments in its defense. Currently, 120 Romanian troops are participating in the US-led NATO-led enhanced military presence in Poland (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2021). In connection with the Ukrainian crisis, an additional 1,000 US troops will be stationed in Romania. Romania has reached 2.02% of its gross domestic product to go for defense and 23.1% of defense spending is on “new high capabilities”, which are criteria for NATO spending and deepening defense co-operation with the United States. On October 8, 2020, the United States and Romania signed a ten-year roadmap for cooperation in the field of defense. Romania's adopted National Defense Strategy 2020-2024 emphasizes both the importance and the priority of working together to ensure US strategic flexibility in the Black Sea (U.S. Department of Defense, 2020). The deepening of Romania's relations with the United States also includes the purchase of American equipment with proven qualities such as Patriot missile defense systems and F-16 fighters.

NATO is a multilateral organization and the foundation of the transatlantic community, which has done more to ensure peace and security in Europe and the world by promoting democratic governance since its inception in 1949. After the end of the Cold War and the new challenges facing NATO, the question of the bloc's even more crucial role in maintaining transatlantic security.

NATO is in the process of developing its next strategic concept (A NATO Strategic Concept is an official document that outlines the geopolitical and security challenges facing the Alliance, and the strategy that NATO should adapt to deal with these challenges). NATO's latest strategic concept, which dates back to 2010, is extremely outdated and needs to be updated, adding new challenges. The words “pandemic”, “China” or “Arctic” are not present in the Alliance's current Strategic Concept. After 2010, NATO had to deal directly or indirectly with the migrant crises in Europe, Russia's intervention in Syria, the rise of Islamic State, the Arab Spring and its aftermath in Libya, the withdrawal from Afghanistan, Russia's annexation of Crimea and its support for separatists in Eastern Ukraine. The new challenges facing NATO are, above all, in conducting hybrid and intelligence operations, including in cyberspace.

With regard to the new challenges and the conflict in the Black Sea region, it is time for the Alliance to pay more attention to it, starting with the development of a comprehensive strategy for the region. The United States must play a leading role in developing a strategy for regional security and working with the Black Sea states. They must be at the forefront of stimulating compliance with NATO criteria, as well as ensuring their security. Russia's annexation of Crimea and its support for separatists in Eastern Ukraine pose a direct threat to the interests and security of NATO, EU, Ukraine and Georgia member states. It is therefore necessary to reaffirm NATO's open-door policy towards Ukraine and Georgia. It is necessary to defend the position that Russia has no right to determine where independent states such as Ukraine and Georgia can and cannot join. NATO must develop a rational path for Georgia's future membership because its membership has taken too long. Due to the interests of most European countries and Russia's partial occupation of Georgian territory, they are refraining from Georgia's future accession to NATO. At the meeting on October 21, NATO member states must unofficially launch a debate on the possibility of amending Article 6 of the North Atlantic Treaty to temporarily exclude the occupied regions as a real way to address fears of war with Russia if Georgia joins NATO (The Heritage Foundation, 2021).

The United States and Georgia have extensive experience working with each other, and Georgians are always looking for ways to contribute to transatlantic security, hoping to speed up their accession to NATO. Their participation in Afghanistan is over and the United States may invite them to join its multinational battalion in Poland.

With regard to Ukraine, restrictions on the supply of defense weapons systems need to be lifted. In 2018, as part of an agreement with the Trump administration, Javelin missiles were provided,

which must be stored until they are needed (The Heritage Foundation, 2021). The United States needs to increase its support for the Ukrainian military, including more anti-tank systems, anti-aircraft systems and small arms with more flexible capabilities.

### **Conclusions**

Following the model of an air policing mission over the Baltic Sea, NATO can establish and maintain a stable presence of patrol vessels in the Black Sea in accordance with the Montreux Convention of 1936. This requires political and military commitment from outside the Black Sea and its member states of the Alliance to commit to a regular and rotating maritime presence in the Black Sea. The United States must take account of the change in Europe's security and pay much more attention to the Black Sea region by establishing a permanent military presence in the Allies. This will show their long-term determination to live up to their commitments to NATO. This would encourage less determined partners to fulfill their coalition commitments.

The political importance of the Black Sea and economic security in relation to the wider region are becoming increasingly important. The Black Sea is important for the security of NATO's southern flank, because Russia uses the Black Sea as a corridor for logistics in operations during Syria and Libya and the ongoing Russian aggression against Ukraine and Georgia, so that is why the United States and the Alliance must take much more attention to the region.

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