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# The Black Sea region: Beyond NATO

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*New geostrategic thinking for a more competitive age*

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## Contents

<b>Foreword</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Map 1: Geopolitical centrality of the Black Sea region</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Map 2: The Black Sea region</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1.0 Introduction</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>2.0 The Black Sea as a geopolitical region</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>3.0 Rethinking geostrategy in the Black Sea region</b>	<b>14</b>
3.1 Enhancing resilience	14
3.2 Regional realignment	18
3.3 Reframe the Black Sea region	22
<b>4.0 Conclusion</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>About the authors</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Acknowledgments</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>About the Council on Geostrategy</b>	<b>31</b>

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## Foreword

Politics is the art of the possible, and nowhere is that perhaps more true than geopolitics. This Policy Paper's work examines immediate and systematic ways that the United Kingdom (UK) and its allies can engage in the Black Sea and make a positive contribution to Europe's near abroad.

Given Russia's recent military build-up on Ukraine's eastern border, the timing of this Policy Paper, by three leading strategists, is fortuitous. To protect his own regime, Vladimir Putin is bent on destabilising the Black Sea region and undermining the free and open countries on its shores. The UK has an interest in deterring him by enhancing the resilience of its allies and partners adjacent to the Black Sea, as well as reinforcing the entire Eastern European region.

Entitled 'The Black Sea region: Beyond NATO', the paper's title is deliberately misleading. Although the Russian occupation of Crimea, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia complicates Ukraine and Georgia from attaining membership of the alliance, the authors do not argue that these two close British partners should terminate their ambitions to join. Rather, they provide a thoughtful number of options for the two countries – backed by their supporters in NATO – to pursue to boost security in the Black Sea region. Indeed, both Georgia and Ukraine remain key partners for the UK, and the UK is right to be a strong supporter of their continued role as NATO partners through the Partnership for Peace, the International Crimea Platform in the case of Ukraine and the NATO-Georgia Package, and I am glad that this paper builds on these initiatives.

Enhancing the resilience of Black Sea partners and realigning and reframing the region from a geopolitical standpoint make sound strategic sense. This will help the UK to extend a 'network of liberty', to use the words of Liz Truss, the Foreign Secretary, in Southeastern Europe. This is a fascinating study and one that I recommend should be read widely.

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## Executive summary

1. The Black Sea region is at risk of becoming an anarchic environment where insecurity reigns amid Russian domination. The Kremlin's military adventures, modulated build-ups – most recently in November 2021 – and destabilising proxy and covert operations have decisively changed the balance of power in the region. Not only are Georgia and Ukraine in further jeopardy, but the Euro-Atlantic order is under threat more generally (see Map 1).
2. Early hopes, especially following Georgia's 'Rose Revolution' in 2003 and Ukraine's 'Orange Revolution' in 2004 and 2005, that the Black Sea region could take its place in the Euro-Atlantic order were first undermined by Russia's military offensive against Georgia in 2008, followed by the Kremlin's ruthless invasion of Ukraine and annexation of Crimea in 2014. The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) immediately moved to consolidate itself by establishing an 'Enhanced Forward Presence' to deter potential Russian attacks on its exposed Baltic frontier.
3. Although NATO's focus was on the Baltic, the Black Sea was not entirely overlooked. In 2016, the alliance established a 'Tailored Forward Presence' covering Romania and Bulgaria and stepped up its commitment towards Ukraine and Georgia (see Map 2). However, the reluctance of some Western European NATO allies to extend a Membership Action Plan (MAP) to Kyiv and Tbilisi – the two countries were first promised membership by the alliance in 2008 – means that Georgia and Ukraine are unlikely to join the alliance anytime soon.
4. Given the geopolitical challenges afflicting the region, allied with the rise of the Indo-Pacific, Georgia and Ukraine, as well as their supporters within the Euro-Atlantic area, would do well to explore other options to enhance regional security in the Black Sea region. Though they ought not give up on their ambitions to

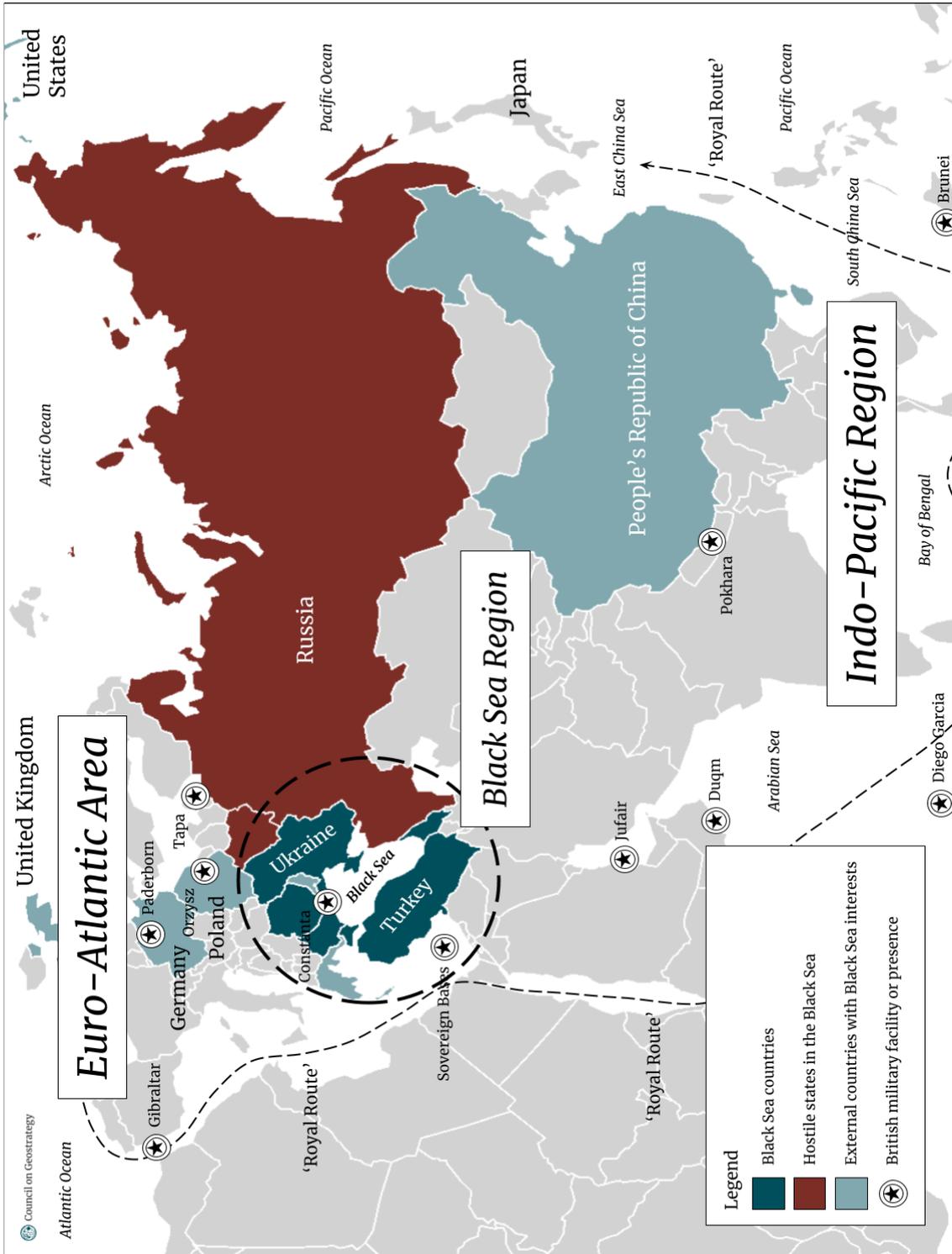


join NATO, supplementing such a large generational project with smaller initiatives could bear significant fruit.

5. This Policy Paper provides a new generation of geostrategic thinking by reimagining what Georgia and Ukraine – as well as their backers, the influential ‘maritime democracies’, such as Canada, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US) – could do to deter the Kremlin, enhance regional security, and connect the Black Sea region more closely to the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific regions (see Map 1).
6. Consequently, this Policy Paper proposes three lines of effort: firstly, to make Georgia and Ukraine more resilient; secondly, to geopolitically realign the Black Sea region in a more competitive age no longer dominated by the Euro-Atlantic; and thirdly, to discursively reframe the Black Sea region, not as a distant periphery, but a central ‘gateway’ between Europe and Eurasia and between the Euro-Atlantic and the Indo-Pacific regions. In particular:
  - i. Support the military; address the intelligence; police for security; and administer justice for security;
  - ii. Develop a mechanism for tracking and punishing maritime infractions; focus geopolitical initiative to draw in extra-regional maritime democracies; enlarge the Three Seas Initiative; and create a Black Sea Forum;
  - iii. Resist ‘hegemonist’ narratives more effectively; uphold freedom of navigation; systemically ‘centre’ the Black Sea region; and generate a Black Sea Strategy.
7. Ultimately, these proposals may not lead to NATO membership for either Ukraine or Georgia, but neither country, nor their supporters within the alliance, would be worse off for trying any of them. Insofar as the Black Sea region is an area of intensifying geopolitical competition at the epicentre of the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific worlds, new efforts to enhance regional security cannot come too soon.

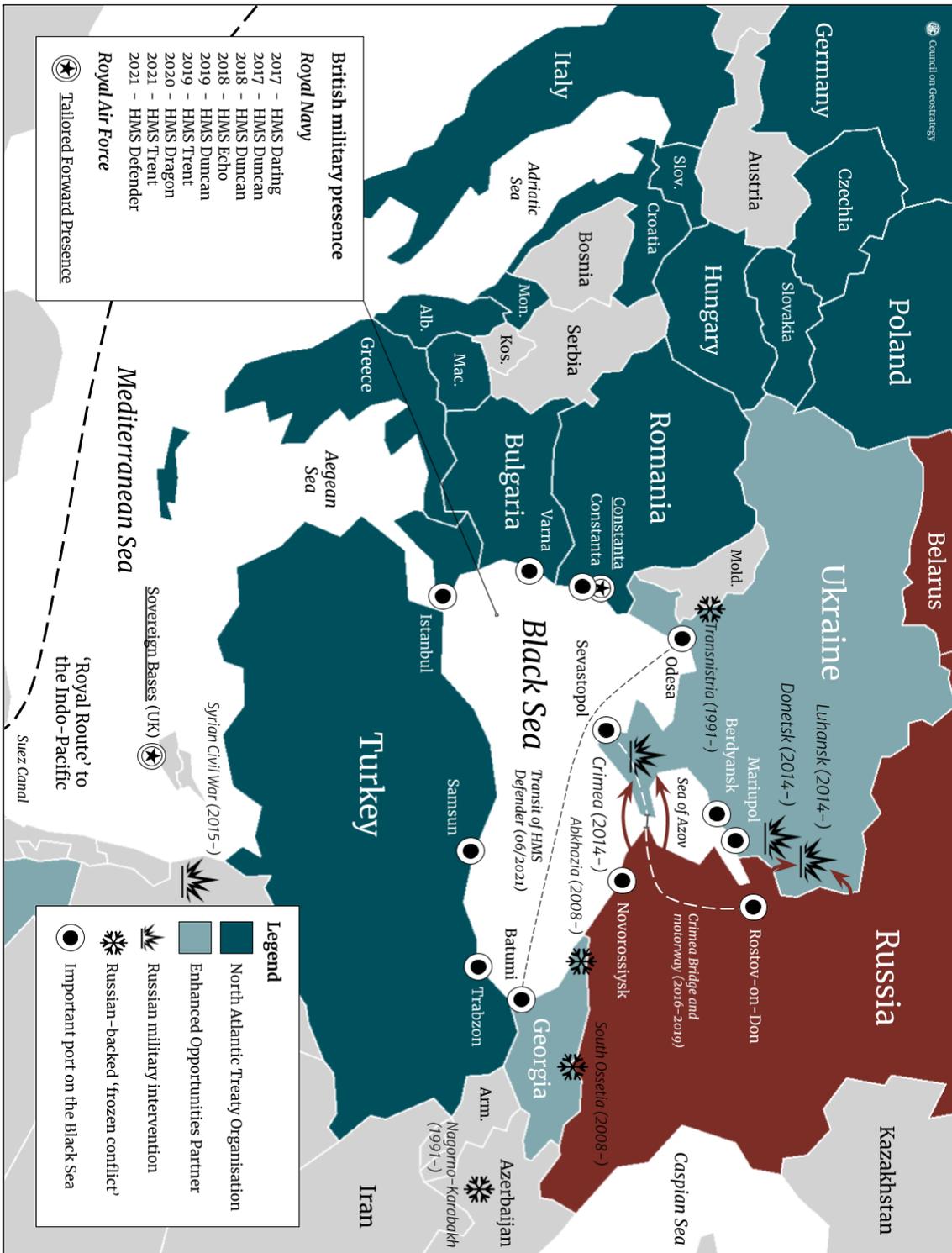


Map 1: Geopolitical centrality of the Black Sea region





Map 2: The Black Sea region



## 1.0 Introduction

The Black Sea region is at risk of becoming an anarchic environment where insecurity reigns amid Russian domination. Russia's military adventures, modulated build-ups – most recently in November 2021 – and destabilising proxy and covert operations have decisively changed the balance of power in the region. Not only are Georgia and Ukraine in further jeopardy, but the Euro-Atlantic order is under threat more generally. Indeed, if the Black Sea is allowed to become a 'Russian lake', then it might encourage other revisionist powers encroaching on the region, such as the People's Republic of China (PRC). As Map 1 shows, it will also have direct implications for access to the Eastern Mediterranean, a crucial region as European countries, not least the United Kingdom (UK), attempt to 'tilt' towards the Indo-Pacific.

The reach of the Euro-Atlantic structures – primarily the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), but also the European Union (EU) – into the Black Sea remains limited and lop-sided (see Map 2). Only three countries with Black Sea coastlines – Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey – are NATO allies, while two – Bulgaria and Romania – are EU members. Black Sea countries outside the Euro-Atlantic structures – Georgia and Ukraine – are likely to do no better than achieve NATO 'Enhanced Opportunities Partner' status or sign an 'Association Agreement' with the EU for the foreseeable future. Many regional bilateral and so-called 'plurilateral' initiatives have seen little success, in part because of the variety of interests and the lack of resources that the littoral states have, alongside the unrelenting attempts by Russia to disrupt cooperation.

NATO would seem an obvious vehicle for articulating a unifying vision for enhancing local security vis-à-vis Russia, especially because of its military strength and ability to deter threats to its members. Though NATO's 2008 Bucharest Summit saw Georgian and Ukrainian ambitions for acquiring a Membership Action Plan (MAP) stymied, the alliance nevertheless agreed that both countries 'will become members of NATO.'<sup>1</sup> Since then, Georgia and Ukraine have benefited from a raft of programmes, some sponsored by NATO, aimed at improving their security. In 2014, the alliance designated Georgia as an Enhanced

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<sup>1</sup> 'Bucharest Summit Declaration', North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, 03/04/2008, <https://bit.ly/3oR6ra9> (found: 23/11/2021).

Opportunities Partner, a status that Ukraine also obtained in 2020. Accordingly, both countries can participate in greater information exchanges as well as in more NATO military and training exercises. NATO thus has a positive role for improving security in the Black Sea region.

However, Enhanced Opportunities Partner status may be a permanent waiting room for Georgia and Ukraine as far as actual NATO membership is concerned. While some NATO allies, especially the UK, the United States (US) and Canada, have pushed ahead with arms transfers and/or programmes to help train the Ukrainian armed forces,<sup>2</sup> others – notably France and Germany – are unconvinced about enlarging the alliance any further.<sup>3</sup> They have preferred dialogue with Moscow or view Georgia and Ukraine as serious liabilities given their ongoing territorial disputes with Russia. In any case, although Georgia and Ukraine are likely to continue to push for NATO membership, they are unlikely to join the alliance anytime soon. In the meantime, Russia's aggression towards both countries seems interminable, with little to suggest that, at least in Ukraine's case, relations with Moscow will improve in the foreseeable future.

Consequently, this Policy Paper will explore the current geopolitical context of the Black Sea and expand on the implications for the Euro-Atlantic region. It will then identify three key areas where Georgia and Ukraine might develop closer plurilateral ties with like-minded NATO partners, particularly the maritime democracies – such as Canada, the UK and US – which have historically played a disproportionate role in underwriting the alliance. These measures include:

1. Enhancing the national resilience of countries adjacent to the Black Sea;
2. Geopolitically realigning the Black Sea region in keeping with the interests of free and open countries such as Ukraine and Georgia; and,
3. Discursively reframing the Black Sea region so that it is seen as geostrategically integral to both the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific theatres.

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<sup>2</sup> On UK assistance to Ukraine, see: Claire Mills, 'Military Assistance to Ukraine', House of Commons Library, 29/04/2021, <https://bit.ly/3oWkumT> (found: 23/11/2021).

<sup>3</sup> Robin Emmott and Sabine Siebold, 'NATO split on message to send Georgia on membership hopes', *Reuters*, 27/11/2015, <https://reut.rs/3xg588i> (found: 23/11/2021).

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In sum, this Policy Paper offers a new generation of geostrategic thinking for the Black Sea region, which both escapes entrenched narratives and offers solutions for a series of increasingly intractable problems.

## 2.0 The Black Sea as a geopolitical region

Early hopes, especially following Georgia's 'Rose Revolution' in 2003 and Ukraine's 'Orange Revolution' in 2004 and 2005, that the Black Sea region could take its place in the Euro-Atlantic order were first undermined by Russia's military against Georgia in 2008. But more devastating were events in 2014 when the Kremlin invaded Ukraine and annexed Crimea, before moving to assert control over the Azov Sea, consolidate its naval superiority in the Black Sea, and install a suite of land-based missile and air assets to project significant power across the area. In response, NATO's custodians – primarily the UK and US – attempted to consolidate the alliance and protect its most exposed flanks. In practice, this meant encouraging allies to commit to increased defence spending and looking north to enhance NATO's ability to defend Poland and the Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. There, NATO bolstered the Baltic Air Policing Mission and established an 'Enhanced Forward Presence' (EFP) of four battalion-sized battlegroups,<sup>4</sup> later defined by the UK, which provided the most troops to the most locations, as part of a 'tripwire' strategy.<sup>5</sup>

Although NATO's focus was on the Baltic, the Black Sea was not entirely overlooked. In 2016, the alliance established a 'Tailored Forward Presence' covering Romania and Bulgaria. It included a Black Sea Air Policing Mission to augment the two allies' national air forces, which would come to host fighters periodically from the alliance's strongest members, as well as a more persistent naval presence in the Black Sea (see Map 2 for the Royal Navy's efforts).<sup>6</sup> Without NATO's Article 5 guarantee, however, Georgia and Ukraine – comprising the northern and eastern side of the Black Sea – were all left to bear the primary responsibility for their own security, even if NATO has continued to reiterate, most recently in the alliance's Brussels Summit in 2021, 'the decision made at the 2008 Bucharest Summit' that Ukraine and Georgia will each 'become a member of the alliance with the...MAP

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<sup>4</sup> Alexander Lanoszka, Christian Leuprecht, and Alexander Moens (eds.), 'Lessons from the Enhanced Forward Presence, 2017–2020', NATO Defence College, 2020, <https://bit.ly/3HLlIXo> (found: 23/11/2021).

<sup>5</sup> 'Global Britain in a Competitive Age: the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy', Cabinet Office, 07/03/2021, <https://bit.ly/3vX8RGY> (found: 23/11/2021).

<sup>6</sup> 'Boosting NATO's presence in the east and southeast', North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, 26/04/2021, <https://bit.ly/3EoGfjT> (found: 23/11/2021).

as an integral part of the process'.<sup>7</sup> In particular, Ukraine has also received arms from a handful of NATO allies, including the UK and US, and benefited from military training programmes sponsored by the UK, US and Canada.<sup>8</sup>

Yet emerging trends in international politics might stymie this progress. Support for Ukraine's and Georgia's NATO membership remains official NATO – and vitally, UK and US – policy, but neither country is likely to join the alliance any time soon. Even the US may come to deprioritise the Black Sea region in the coming years: American policymakers are increasingly focused on the challenge posed by the rise of the PRC in the Indo-Pacific; consequently, the US has been 'rebalancing' towards the region for several years.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, so important has the Indo-Pacific become that several European countries have also begun to 'tilt' towards it, with Europe's leading military power – the UK – chief among them, a move undoubtedly accelerated by its search for new opportunities and markets after withdrawal from the EU.<sup>10</sup>

That said, the security of the Black Sea continues to matter for the broader Euro-Atlantic region. Indeed, and ironically, just as the UK and US have divided their attention globally to the benefit of the Indo-Pacific, the growth of Chinese investment and the expansion of the 'Belt and Road Initiative' (BRI) and Turkish and Iranian influence in the Black Sea speak to the continued geopolitical significance of the region. As Map 1 makes clear, the Black Sea region matters in its own right; it may even act as the litmus test for the maritime democracies' determination to uphold an open international order across the Euro-Atlantic and beyond.

Should Russia be allowed to consolidate its position in the Black Sea region, it would almost certainly strengthen its reach into the Eastern Mediterranean, potentially threatening key NATO allies' interests in the Indo-Pacific, not least those of the UK (see Box 1). At the very least, NATO allies have a clear interest in preventing the Black Sea from becoming a Russian 'lake' or a Chinese franchise. Besides

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<sup>7</sup> 'Brussels Summit Communiqué', North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, 14/06/2021, <https://bit.ly/3oMTpTb> (found: 23/11/2021).

<sup>8</sup> See: 'SIPRI Arms Transfers Database', Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 15/03/2021, <https://bit.ly/3HPwkzG> (found: 23/11/2021).

<sup>9</sup> 'The Interim National Security Strategic Guidance', The White House, 03/2021, <https://bit.ly/3nHr3Cn> (found: 23/11/2021).

<sup>10</sup> 'Global Britain in a Competitive Age: the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy', Cabinet Office, 07/03/2021, <https://bit.ly/3vX8RGY> (found: 23/11/2021).

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being connected to the Mediterranean Sea, developments in and around the Black Sea also bear on the Baltic Sea, not least as any failure on NATO's part to show resolution in resisting Russian adventurism in one region may encourage challenges in the other.

## **Box 1: The geostrategic importance of the Black Sea to 'Global Britain'**

The UK is the most powerful country in Europe: it is armed with a guaranteed second-strike nuclear capability, the largest defence budget in NATO after the US, and the most powerful navy.<sup>11</sup> Britain also has a sovereign presence in three areas of the continent – the British Isles, Gibraltar and the Sovereign bases on Cyprus – meaning it has pervasive interests on both of Europe's maritime flanks. As Map 1 shows, control of these 'portals' provides the UK with pervasive influence: from the British Isles, the Royal Navy can act as lord of the North Atlantic, as well as the North and Baltic seas, while Gibraltar and the Sovereign Bases on Cyprus guard the two maritime entrances and exits to the Mediterranean, along which the 'Royal Route' to the Indo-Pacific stretches. Ultimately, these two portals can also control global access to the Black Sea.<sup>12</sup>

In March 2021, Her Majesty's (HM) Government published 'Global Britain in a competitive age', otherwise known as the 'Integrated Review'.<sup>13</sup> Confirming many years of British ministers reiterating the geostrategic centrality of the Euro-Atlantic region to British interests – starting with Sir Michael Fallon, as Secretary of State for Defence, in 2016<sup>14</sup> – the Integrated Review declared that 'the precondition for Global Britain is the safety of our citizens at home and the security of the Euro-Atlantic region, where the bulk of the UK's

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<sup>11</sup> For the latest defence spending figures, see: 'Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014–2021)', North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, 11/06/2021, <https://bit.ly/3r3JFii> (found: 23/11/2021).

<sup>12</sup> For more on Britain's capacity to control Europe's maritime littorals, see: Nicholas Spykman, *America's Strategy in World Politics: The United States and the Balance of Power* (New York City: Transaction Publishers, 2007 [1942]), p. 98.

<sup>13</sup> 'Global Britain in a Competitive Age: the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy', Cabinet Office, 07/03/2021, <https://bit.ly/3vX8RGY> (found: 23/11/2021).

<sup>14</sup> Speaking with the Wall Street Journal, Sir Michael stated: 'Although we are leaving the EU, we remain committed to European security. This is our continent and we will keep on working to help keep it safe. We are not stepping away.' Cited in: Julian E. Barnes, 'UK to Send Formidable Force to Eastern Europe', *The Wall Street Journal*, 26/10/2016, <https://on.wsj.com/3l1oNEh> (found: 23/11/2021).

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security focus will remain.<sup>15</sup>

However, while highlighting the UK's credentials as a Euro-Atlantic power deeply wedded to NATO, the review identified the growing geostrategic significance of the Indo-Pacific. The review emphasised that Britain would undertake a 'tilt' to the Indo-Pacific during the 2020s, to the extent that it would become by 2030 'the European partner with the broadest and most integrated presence in the Indo-Pacific – committed for the long term, with closer and deeper partnerships, bilaterally and multilaterally.'<sup>16</sup> As Map 1 and Map 2 show, to access the Indo-Pacific, a maritime domain, the Royal Navy has to pass along the 'Royal Route' through the Eastern Mediterranean, the Suez Canal and the Red Sea, just as the Carrier Strike Group did between April and November 2021 on its maiden operational tour. HM Government also plans to maintain standing naval commitments in the Gulf and Southeast Asia, as a contribution to collective security in the Indo-Pacific.

So, as the US refines its Euro-Atlantic presence over the coming years to enhance its footprint in the Indo-Pacific to compete with the PRC, the Black Sea region looks set to become more significant to the UK. The reason for this is simple: the growth of Russian – even Chinese – power in the Black Sea region, and beyond that, in the Eastern Mediterranean, has the potential not only to undermine NATO, but also to menace the 'Royal Route' to the Indo-Pacific. Any threat to that crucial maritime communication line would jeopardise HM Government's Indo-Pacific 'tilt', meaning that Britain's interest in the Black Sea region will probably intensify.

At the same time, it is incumbent on Ukraine and Georgia to convince their NATO partners that this is not simply a matter of normative duty or even support for states under threat from a common adversary. These countries should continue their efforts to demonstrate that they are desirable partners in their own right: by being committed to a deeper democratic transition and entrepreneurial in their efforts to build regional security and stability. Thus, Ukraine and Georgia ought to take more initiative to assure their own individual security interests in the Black Sea. That means identifying new potential partnerships and taking up new opportunities for improving connectivity between those littoral states which have security concerns about Russia.

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<sup>15</sup> 'Global Britain in a Competitive Age: the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy', Cabinet Office, 07/03/2021, <https://bit.ly/3vX8RGY> (found: 23/11/2021).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.



The problem is that many initiatives in the Black Sea region often see limited progress. At present, the main focus of regional cooperation has been the Organisation of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (OBSEC), which has working groups tasked with addressing functional issues relating to crime, agriculture, trade, environment, and customs. However, Russia's presence limits this body's capacity to address geostrategic concerns. Ukraine has undertaken strategic dialogues with its neighbours – in particular, Poland, Romania, and Turkey. Unfortunately, differences in ability and willingness have inhibited the development of meaningful defence cooperation.



## 3.0 Rethinking geostrategy in the Black Sea region

The nettlesome situation in the Black Sea calls for a fresh geostrategic approach towards the region from countries internal and external to the area. Simply put, rather than thinking primarily in terms of a big generational project like NATO membership, Ukraine and Georgia and their supporters should also pursue smaller initiatives that are new or build upon existing modes of strategic cooperation. Some of these initiatives may not succeed, but they are worth trying, with Ukraine, Georgia, and their partners not being made worse off for their efforts. Though they should not dilute their ambitions to join NATO, Kyiv and Tbilisi ought to enhance their national resilience, cultivate closer bilateral and plurilateral relationships, and discursively reframe their own region. These initiatives may not necessarily thwart particular scenarios of aggression, but they could help Ukraine, Georgia, and their supporters to tilt the balance of probabilities in their favour vis-à-vis Russia, allowing them to buy time, to improve general deterrence, and to build confidence, both within Ukraine and Georgia and without.

### 3.1 *Enhancing resilience*

Ultimately, regardless of their alliances and guarantees, all nations must be able to rely on themselves for their own security. European and North American sanctions signal displeasure and impose costs, monitors for the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) identify and publicise violations, and diplomats will express their grave concerns, but the countries of the Black Sea region wish to be their own security guarantors as much as they are able.

Although Ukraine and Georgia in particular face a constant threat from Russian conventional and proxy military forces, the primary threat comes from ‘grey zone’ or non-kinetic challenges. From subversion and corruption to disinformation and outright terrorism, through this ‘political warfare’ Moscow has been seeking to make both Kyiv and Tbilisi less capable of resisting its political pressure and less legitimate in the eyes both of their own people and their partners. In this context, strengthening their capacity to resist such threats is not



only important in its own terms, but also provides greater deterrence by denial, making aggression less appealing by being less likely to succeed. Moscow – and especially those ‘entrepreneurs of subversion’ who operate semi-autonomously, hoping to win the Kremlin’s favour – is less likely to embark on operations unlikely to succeed, both because they are a waste of resources and because failures undermine its own credibility and capacity to intimidate.<sup>17</sup>

Ukraine arguably faces a more extensive and current direct military threat than Georgia. It also has greater scope to be able to resist and deter overt Russian aggression. In this respect, although Ukraine has been especially successful in the reform and rearmament of its armed forces, there are also several practical initiatives whereby Kyiv’s partners could provide support which could have an appreciable impact on the country’s capacity to resist both military and non-military aggression:

### 3.1.1 Support the military

There is already an extensive array of military assistance programmes, from the UK’s Operational ORBITAL training mission and the British-led multinational Maritime Training Initiative for the Ukrainian Navy, through to Canada’s Operation UNIFIER and the major US commitment which ranges from training to materiel (and which accounts for 90% of Ukraine’s foreign military aid).<sup>18</sup> What started as a crisis response operation in 2014–2015 is now in a position to mature to a wider and full-scaled programme to assist Kyiv with building a reliable defensive capacity able to deter further military aggression – from the land as well as from the sea. The areas which could be targeted in the future could also be extended to denying Russia some of its particular advantages in the theatre, such as additional naval, as well as airpower and electronic warfare capabilities.<sup>19</sup> In addition, the strongest NATO partners, such as the UK, could establish small logistics hubs in Ukraine, so that they have assets pre-positioned to facilitate support.

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<sup>17</sup> Mark Galeotti, ‘Controlling Chaos: How Russia manages its political war in Europe’, European Council on Foreign Relations, 01/09/2017, <https://bit.ly/3xhxu2b> (found: 23/11/2021).

<sup>18</sup> According to NAKO, the Independent Defence Anti-Corruption Committee. See: ‘How US Military Aid Has Helped Ukraine Since 2014’, NPR, 18/12/2019, <https://n.pr/3CIzotJ> (found: 23/11/2021).

<sup>19</sup> See: Sergey Sukhankin, ‘Blind, Confuse and Demoralise: Russian Electronic Warfare Operations in Donbas’, Jamestown Foundation, 27/08/2021, <https://bit.ly/3DLVsoG> (found: 23/11/2021).

While more and newer equipment will generally be part of this, such as the sale of British Brimstone missiles and warships,<sup>20</sup> the most important assistance at this stage will likely be less in providing hardware but in developing practical strategies to resist foreign aggression, and the command and control systems and military culture best able to implement them. Equally, joint military exercises such as RAPID TRIDENT and THREE SWORDS could also be expanded, not only to provide further training and progress towards smooth interoperability with partner militaries, but also as a continued demonstration of the allies' commitment towards upholding their Ukrainian partner's sovereignty.

### 3.1.2 Address the intelligence battlefield

What Moscow cannot accomplish by overt force, it seeks to achieve through covert means, and this is especially the case for Ukraine. While the Georgian services are also deserving of further assistance, the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) is the front line in this political war. Although it has undoubtedly had real successes and experienced a degree of reform, it is generally accepted that this is still very much a work in progress.<sup>21</sup> Building on existing programmes to address remaining concerns around professionalism, corruption and accountability would seriously strengthen Ukraine's defences against Russian subversion and disruption. There are also technical capabilities, especially in cybersecurity and analysis, in which a relatively small investment in assistance would have a disproportionate impact on the ground.

The British and other NATO intelligence communities, coordinating their efforts through the International Advisory Group,<sup>22</sup> should prioritise strengthening the SBU, as well as the Foreign Intelligence Service (SZR) and the other elements of Ukraine's

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<sup>20</sup> See: Deborah Haynes, 'UK signs deal to help boost Ukraine's navy in the face of increased threat from Russia', *Sky News*, 16/11/2021, <https://bit.ly/3FB2gpA> (found: 23/11/2021) and Larissa Brown, 'Britain in talks to sell missiles in first arms deal with Ukraine', *The Times*, 21/10/2021, <https://bit.ly/3qZDhZb> (found: 23/11/2021).

<sup>21</sup> Fredrik Wesslau, 'Guarding the guardians: Reforming Ukraine's security service,' *Security and Human Rights Monitor*, 20/07/2021, <https://bit.ly/30LuAGJ> (found: 23/11/2021).

<sup>22</sup> A joint body established for this purpose in 2016 by the European Union Advisory Mission (EUAM), the EU Delegation to Kyiv, the NATO Liaison Office and the US Embassy. See: 'Security Service of Ukraine: EUAM answers 13 questions on the ongoing reform', *EUAM*, 25/06/2021, <https://bit.ly/3nIk8IV> (found: 23/11/2021).

intelligence community, not least because there is also much for them to learn from the Ukrainian experiences. This will, of course, require the Ukrainian government to put sufficient political weight behind a reform process which is inevitably complex and controversial, and accept that the current security threats make such reform a more immediate need, not something to tackle in some future time of peace.

### 3.1.3 Police for security

Modern, effective, legitimate and accountable police and public order forces are also an integral part of ‘hybrid defence’.<sup>23</sup> Again, while there has been meaningful reform, there is more that can and should be done, and again there is ample scope for closer partnerships with Euro-Atlantic services which have especially relevant experiences. In particular, services such as the British Police Service of Northern Ireland, the Italian Carabinieri and the French Gendarmerie, all of which have become accustomed to scalable operations from regular street policing to securing divided communities, can build on their existing cooperation agreements to help Kyiv and Tbilisi develop the kind of forces which strengthen both national security and system legitimacy.<sup>24</sup>

### 3.1.4 Administer justice as security

In the context of political war, the real and perceived weaknesses of the judiciary preserves a number of systemic vulnerabilities which an aggressor can exploit, from oligarchic power (despite Ukraine’s narrow new ‘anti-oligarch’ law, which is itself open to charges of being politicised) to delegitimising generalised corruption.<sup>25</sup> Western nations offer not one but several models for relatively effective judicial systems and could provide inspiration, training, and practical assistance.

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<sup>23</sup> Mark Galeotti, ‘Time to think about “hybrid defence”’, *War On The Rocks*, 30/07/2015, <https://bit.ly/3HMGSQb> (found: 23/11/2021).

<sup>24</sup> Elisabeth Braw, ‘Forget UN Peacekeepers: Send in the Gendarmes’, *Foreign Policy*, 11/11/2020, <https://bit.ly/2ZgoMVn> (found: 23/11/2021).

<sup>25</sup> Balázs Jarábik and Mikhail Minakov, ‘Ukraine’s Hybrid State’, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 22/04/2016, <https://bit.ly/3DQ7ZYb> (found: 23/11/2021).

### *3.2 Regional realignment*

Calls for Kyiv and Tbilisi to engage in regional cooperation have become commonplace since 2014. Ukraine and Georgia obviously should continue to work with like-minded partners to advance common interests, be they political, economic, or military. However, what should underpin regional cooperation is a broader effort at realignment.

Regional realignment requires more than simple policy coordination between Ukraine, Georgia, and their partners – whether they are in its immediate neighbourhood or in the broader Euro-Atlantic community – to realise shared goals. It means mutual policy adjustments aimed at joint action. Cooperation in this spirit is a longer-term political project that serves to embed Ukraine more deeply into the Euro-Atlantic order – though not necessarily in NATO – at least in the near future. After a period of regional realignment, the Black Sea region would become intrinsic to the Euro-Atlantic area in the same way that the Baltic and Mediterranean seas are today, while Ukraine and Georgia would end up with a similar relationship to NATO as Sweden or Finland.

Practically, this geopolitical realignment would involve several initiatives layered at different regional stratifications, whether focused specifically on the Black Sea region, at the subregional level in Central and Eastern Europe, or the Euro-Atlantic most broadly.

#### **3.2.1 Develop a mechanism for tracking and punishing maritime infractions**

The military balance in the Black Sea has been upended in the last decade with Russia's annexation of Crimea, its closing of the Kerch Strait, and its militarisation of those areas. These developments obviously affect Ukraine most directly. Yet they also impinge upon the security of Georgia and Romania, as well as, to an arguably lesser extent, Bulgaria and Turkey. After all, Russia has used its naval dominance to usurp international law, whether to undertake provocations against transiting ships, spoofing attacks, or other activities that affect maritime safety. Russian vessels have also switched off transponders and there has been an increase in live-fire exercises, increasing the risk of a deadly incident in the Black Sea.

A shared interest exists in bolstering maritime governance, even if it means working around existing organisations such as OBSEC. Because Russia has stepped up its violations of international maritime law in the Black Sea, a first step that other regional states can take is to create a mechanism to identify, track, and potentially punish such infractions via sanctions if members are politically inclined to do so.<sup>26</sup> Unfortunately, the OSCE is not well-placed to perform this role, not least because of Russia's manipulation of the organisation in its disputes against Ukraine and Georgia. A new body could be created, one that can involve extra-regional maritime democracies, to ensure the robustness of international law.

### **3.2.2 Focus geopolitical initiatives to draw in extra-regional maritime democracies**

Over the years, the littoral states in the Black Sea region have tried many initiatives to improve their connectivity, often encountering little operational success. In Romania's case, for example, it may be due to a lack of resources, whereas, for Bulgaria, it may be an unwillingness to do anything that could be interpreted as too 'anti-Russian'.<sup>27</sup> Regardless, the region suffers from a collective action problem.

Local actors can and should continue their efforts at building regional cooperation themselves, but one reason that explains the acuteness of the collective action problem may be that there is no one actor that can sufficiently galvanise cooperation within the region. Other than Russia, Turkey may be the largest state in the region, but its military presence in the Black Sea is limited and admittedly its attention is pulled elsewhere in the Middle East and the Caucasus.<sup>28</sup> As such, it is worth drawing in extra-regional maritime democracies to help build much-needed connections.

One initiative could involve the formation of a trilateral comprising Poland, Ukraine, and the UK, three countries with bilateral

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<sup>26</sup> For a somewhat similar proposal, see: Ben Hodges, 'The Black Sea...or a Black Hole?', Centre for European Policy Analysis, 21/01/2021, <https://bit.ly/3kZelxa> (found: 23/11/2021).

<sup>27</sup> See: Valentin Naumescu, 'Stability, ambiguity and change in the discourses of NATO allies in the Black Sea region: The cases of Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey', *Croatian International Relations Review*, 23:80 (2017).

<sup>28</sup> On Turkish policy towards the Black Sea since 2014, see: Mitat Çelikpala and Emre Erşen, 'Turkey's Black Sea predicament: challenging or accommodating Russia?', *Perceptions*, 23:2 (2018).



strategic partnerships and dialogues with one another.<sup>29</sup> From London's perspective, this grouping brings in a NATO ally that is directly contiguous to Ukraine and perceives Russia in a similar way. For both Kyiv and Warsaw, it will signify a deepening of the UK's involvement in NATO's east, further embed Ukraine in the Euro-Atlantic order, and help re-emphasise Eastern Europe in European strategic discourse. One task of this trilateral group could be to consider the relationship between the Baltic and Black seas, and whether there are any lessons to be learnt for how to understand or to manage the threat posed by Russia. Some of these lessons are essentially technical, relating to the use of joint forces, 'tripwire' deployments and plurilateral strategic cooperation, whereas others might focus on narratives and rhetorical strategies used by the Kremlin.

Another, more ambitious, initiative could be the creation of a grouping inspired by the British-led Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF), which draws together northern European states stretching from Iceland to the Baltic states.<sup>30</sup> Those countries use the JEF to train together and to build interoperability, not least in the maritime domain. A similar partnership – a Joint Naval Force (JNF) – centred on the Black Sea with a specific mandate to deter threats to regional security could be established, involving the extra-regional maritime democracies, such as Canada, the UK, and the US, which could contribute aerial and naval forces in a manner consistent with the Montreux Convention. Potentially headquartered in Ukraine, a JNF with a mandate covering the Black Sea would be a useful asset for contributing members to deter further Russian aggression. The UK could play a leadership role in the JNF so as to help spur greater cooperation, at least in the maritime domain, among the interested Black Sea littoral states.

### 3.2.3 Enlarge the Three Seas Initiative

As a grouping established in 2015, the Three Seas Initiative (TSI) already exemplifies the need for regional realignment. Although the TSI is not an EU initiative, all of its existing members are EU member states and so can draw on its funds to undertake major infrastructural

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<sup>29</sup> For example, the UK formed defence agreements in 2018 with Poland and in 2021 with Ukraine.

<sup>30</sup> For a primer on the JEF, see: Sean Monaghan, 'The Joint Expeditionary Force: Toward a Stronger and More Capable European Defence?', Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 12/10/2021, <https://bit.ly/3FFXJLY> (found: 23/11/2021).



projects. Though there is a reluctance to see TSI as a geopolitical entity, the fact of the matter is that the completion of the Nord Stream II natural gas pipeline between Germany and Russia provides new impetus for Ukraine and several of its western neighbours, as well as Georgia, to work more in concert with one another in the energy domain.

Consequently, Ukraine should continue to seek not just observer status but ultimately formal membership of the TSI. For its part, the TSI should welcome Ukraine's interest. Kyiv's participation makes sense for reasons that go beyond geography: Ukraine has a shared interest in acquiring energy independence as well as improving digital and transport infrastructure. If Ukraine were to join, then its inclusion could help improve connectivity between ports on the Baltic and Black seas as well as cutting motorway distances between northeastern and southeastern Europe – a key objective of the TSI.<sup>31</sup>

To be sure, the TSI is not without its problems for Ukraine. Even as a member of the TSI it would not be able to draw on EU funds as the TSI's current twelve members can. It would perhaps have to do more to co-finance joint projects, thus placing new fiscal demands on Kyiv. The diversity of the TSI itself is a potential liability as it could thwart meaningful integration. For example, TSI member Hungary now takes Russian natural gas directly in a move that has drawn sharp criticism from Ukraine.

Nevertheless, the opportunity presented by TSI is too important to ignore. Ukraine can make itself a vital enough partner that it cannot remain excluded. To do so it should make investments in border infrastructure as well as in green and digital technologies. The Energomost project – which would involve Ukraine exporting electricity produced by its Khmelnytskyi nuclear power plant to Europe – also overlaps with the TSI's overarching objective of achieving energy independence.<sup>32</sup>

Additionally, since its formation, the TSI has drawn in two extra-regional 'partners': Germany and the US.<sup>33</sup> Given their

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<sup>31</sup> See: Przemysław Żurawski vel Grajewski and Andreana Baeva Motusic, *Adriatic-Baltic-Black Sea: Visions of Cooperation* (Warsaw: Institute for European Studies, 2017), p. 10 and Sorin Ioniță, Bartosz Bieliszczuk, Krševan Antun Dujmović, Daniel Szeligowski and Tadeusz Iwanski, 'Why is Ukraine Interesting for the Three Seas Initiative: Expert comment', New Europe Centre, 19/10/2020, <https://bit.ly/3FFXRIs> (found: 23/11/2021).

<sup>32</sup> 'Energoatom stresses importance of Ukraine-EU energy bridge', *Nuclear Engineering International*, 09/12/2020, <https://bit.ly/3oWxJMe> (found: 23/11/2021).

<sup>33</sup> 'Three Seas Story', Three Seas Initiative, No date, <https://bit.ly/3oX8TUo> (found: 23/11/2021).



geostrategic interests in the region, it would make sense for both Canada and the UK to achieve similar status. It could also provide a mechanism for the provision of British and Canadian financial assistance in support of the region's infrastructure, a point particularly pertinent to the UK insofar as its financial contributions to EU structural funds were withdrawn when it left the bloc.<sup>34</sup>

### 3.2.4 Create a Black Sea Forum

As mentioned, many plurilateral initiatives have been attempted by countries surrounding the Black Sea. The considerable disagreements between Black Sea NATO allies and partners are well known. However, a forum modelled on the 'Northern Future Forum' between the UK and Baltic and Nordic countries could provide a platform to ease tensions and draw like-minded regional nations together in a common alignment. This forum could be initiated by Ukraine and Turkey, with support from Poland and the UK. Russia would not be a member so long as it continues to use, or threaten to use, military force against Ukraine or any other country surrounding the Black Sea.

## 3.3 Reframe the Black Sea region

Efforts to integrate Ukraine and Georgia and other non-NATO partners surrounding the Black Sea more closely into the Euro-Atlantic order should be combined with a good dose of 'discursive statecraft'. Discursive statecraft refers to attempts to reframe and redefine geopolitical narratives, either to prevent a competitor's worldview from gaining ground or to seize the initiative and reframe an area or reposition other countries – hostile or friendly – in accordance with one's own interests.<sup>35</sup> Examples at the geostrategic level would include the maritime democracies' construction of the 'Euro-Atlantic region' in the aftermath of the Cold War, the PRC's so-called 'One Belt, One Road' initiatives, and Japan's articulation of the 'Indo-Pacific' – a new

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<sup>34</sup> See: John Bew and Gabriel Elefteriu, 'Making Sense of British Foreign Policy After Brexit', Policy Exchange, 19/07/2016, <https://bit.ly/3FGGwJ3> (found: 23/11/2021).

<sup>35</sup> For more on discursive statecraft, see: James Rogers, 'Discursive statecraft: Preparing for national positioning operations', Council on Geostrategy, 07/04/2021, <https://bit.ly/3moToN7> (found: 23/11/2021) and James Rogers, 'Discursive statecraft: Responding to national positioning operations', Council on Geostrategy, 21/06/2021, <https://bit.ly/3cEmbrg> (found: 23/11/2021).



geopolitical theatre – alongside the normative assumption that it should be ‘free and open’.<sup>36</sup> These discursive acts are not just wordplay. They are designed to control meaning, to compel people to frame issues, phenomena or regions in certain ways, and to deactivate alternative forms of framing. If successful, discursive statecraft can institutionalise particular narratives to the extent that they drown out alternatives, enable geopolitical transformation, or maintain the status quo.

The idea of a ‘Black Sea region’ has existed since at least the early 2000s, when attempts were made to redefine the Black Sea as a central point of gravity to draw together those countries formerly under Soviet control (or influence) and connect them to the Euro-Atlantic structures, which, through Turkey, already spanned the region.<sup>37</sup> However, these attempts were only partially successful, largely because the major Euro-Atlantic powers were preoccupied with the enlargement of NATO and the EU to the first and second waves of applicants, located in other parts of Europe. Russia’s counter-narratives have also had a disruptive impact, sowing discord and confusion.<sup>38</sup> With the onset of intensifying geopolitical competition, the time is ripe to initiate a new round of discursive statecraft in the Black Sea. This ought to be both endogenous and exogenous to the region; in other words, Georgia and Ukraine should lead, but it should also involve countries supportive of their integration into the Euro-Atlantic order.

### 3.3.1 Resist ‘hegemonist’ narratives more effectively

Just as it has targeted the UK and US – and English speaking strategic elites – by spreading myths designed to confuse and ultimately ‘deactivate’ Euro-Atlantic geopolitical discourse, the Kremlin has also attempted to position the Black Sea region as part of a ‘near abroad’

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<sup>36</sup> For more on Japan and the Indo-Pacific, see: ‘Achieving the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)” Vision’, Ministry of Defence (Japan), No date, <https://bit.ly/3DKBR8n> (found: 23/11/2021).

<sup>37</sup> For example, see: Ronald D. Asmus, ‘Westernise the Black Sea region’, *Project Syndicate*, 04/09/2004, <https://bit.ly/3l18qYe> (found: 23/11/2021) and Ronald D. Asmus, ‘Developing a New Euro-Atlantic Strategy for the Black Sea Region’, *Insight Turkey*, 6:3 (2004).

<sup>38</sup> For an example of some of these narratives, see: Duncan Allan et al., ‘Myths and misconceptions in the debate on Russia’, Chatham House, 13/05/2021, <https://bit.ly/30QD7ID> (found: 23/11/2021).



where Russia has ‘privileged interests’.<sup>39</sup> By extension, the Russian kleptocracy attempts to deny the sovereignty of Black Sea nations, particularly Georgia and Ukraine.<sup>40</sup> Naturally, these Russian narratives are rejected by the countries in question, as well as by their Euro-Atlantic supporters, but often in an impulsive and non-strategic manner.

Instead, regional countries, supported by the extra-regional maritime democracies, should articulate a positive counter-narrative that acknowledges Moscow’s genuine interests in the region – after all, Russia is a Black Sea country. At the same time, they should energetically ensure that all legitimate countries are positioned as subjects rather than objects. This means that they should robustly emphasise their own sovereignty and right to self-determine their own affairs. Besides resisting Russian ‘hegemonist’ narratives, this would also draw support from other countries supportive of the principles of non-interference and national sovereignty.

### 3.3.2 Uphold freedom of navigation

For the Kremlin, the Black Sea is merely a Russian ‘lake’, while the Sea of Azov is nothing more than a connected ‘pond’. So determined are the Russian authorities to normalise their professed ownership that they have defied the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which Russia ratified in 1997 (see Box 2). To begin with, the Kremlin has made illegitimate and excessive claims on Ukrainian territorial waters, most recently in April 2021 when it declared that certain offshore spaces adjacent to Crimea were off-limits to foreign warships.<sup>41</sup> Equally, the Russians have attempted to deter regional powers from challenging their claims with an aggressive naval and air

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<sup>39</sup> For an overview of the concept ‘near abroad’, see: Gerard Toal, *Near abroad: Putin, the West, and the contest over Ukraine and the Caucasus* (New York City, New York: Oxford University Press, 2017). The phrase ‘privileged interests’ was first used by Dmitry Medvedev, then President of Russia, in 2008. See: Dmitry Medvedev, ‘Interview given by Dmitry Medvedev to Television Channels Channel One, Rossia, NTV’, President of Russia, 31/08/2008, <https://bit.ly/3CKjr6m> (found: 23/11/2021)

<sup>40</sup> See: Vladimir Putin, ‘Article by Vladimir Putin “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians”’, President of Russia, 12/07/2021, <https://bit.ly/3xectFH> (found: 23/11/2021) and Dmitry Medvedev, ‘Почему бессмысленны контакты с нынешним украинским руководством’ [‘Why contacts with the current Ukrainian leadership are meaningless’], *Коммерсантъ* [Kommersant], 11/10/2021, <https://bit.ly/3cD871n> (found: 23/11/2021).

<sup>41</sup> ‘Russia’s plan to restrict foreign warships near Crimea will keep Kerch Strait open – RIA’, *Reuters*, 16/04/2021, <https://reut.rs/3l2xbTZ> (found: 23/11/2021).



presence, particularly in the Sea of Azov (frustrating Ukrainian access to its ports in Mariupol and Berdyansk), but also across large tracts of Black Sea waters which should otherwise be under Ukrainian jurisdiction or international in nature. This approach is designed to encourage the perception that Russia's military preeminence and legal control – *de facto*, if not *de jure* – go hand-in-hand and that a new Russian-backed maritime regime exists in the region.

## Box 2: The Kremlin's threat to UNCLOS

Now as competition in the international order intensifies, some states have chosen to openly contest, selectively reinterpret, or discreetly subvert freedom of navigation. We saw this with HMS Defender's passage through the Black Sea earlier this year in June...Such activity undermines...UNCLOS – and threatens our collective security and prosperity.<sup>42</sup>

– Sir Stephen Lovegrove, 2021  
UK National Security Adviser

In response, and in accordance with the Montreux Convention, countries supportive of an open international order should counter the Kremlin's maritime claims by calling out their unlawfulness and by upholding a persistent (if not permanent) naval presence of their own in the Black Sea (see Map 2 for a list of recent visits by the Royal Navy). In keeping with the marker laid down by HMS Defender in June 2021, maritime democracies such as the UK and US should continue to assert 'innocent passage' in Ukrainian territorial waters (particularly those claimed by Russia) or, with the blessing of the Ukrainian Government, naval operations which go beyond innocent passage, otherwise known as 'Freedom of Navigation Operations' (FONOPS).<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Stephen Lovegrove, 'Sir Stephen Lovegrove speech at IISS Manama Dialogue, November 2021', Cabinet Office, 20/11/2021, <https://bit.ly/3nS2H9f> (found: 23/11/2021).

<sup>43</sup> For a distinction between 'innocent passage' and FONOPS, see: Joseph A. Bosco, 'Are Freedom of Navigation Operations and Innocent Passage Really the Same?', *The Diplomat*, 27/02/2016, <https://bit.ly/3l2yqSW> (found: 23/11/2021).

### 3.3.3 Systemically ‘centre’ the Black Sea region

As efforts are made to link the Baltic and Black Sea regions discursively, the integrated space should simultaneously be recast and ‘centred’ not as Europe’s ‘eastern flank’ – distant and peripheral – but as the ‘gateway’ into the continent, not only for Russia, but also the PRC with its ambitious BRI.<sup>44</sup> In addition, Turkey’s increasingly assertive and autonomous regional policies emphasise that the Black Sea should be seen as a Euro-Atlantic ‘gateway’ into the Middle East. Moreover, this also bears on the UK’s ‘tilt’ to the Indo-Pacific: if Moscow is allowed to dominate the region, it would almost certainly strengthen its position in the Eastern Mediterranean, potentially jeopardising the main maritime ‘gateway’ between the British Isles and Northern Europe and the Indo-Pacific (via the Suez Canal) (see Map 2).

Countries supportive of an open international order in the Black Sea would do well to learn from Japan’s discursive strategies. When faced with the rise of an increasingly revisionist PRC, Japan sought to enlarge its geostrategic neighbourhood and enlist help by drawing in like-minded countries to shape it. Thus, just as Japan linked the Pacific and Indian oceans to form a cohesive ‘Indo-Pacific’ – which, in a double move, it then insisted should be ‘free and open’ – the Black Sea should be intrinsically connected to the Baltic and, beyond that, the Eastern Mediterranean. Whenever one of the three geopolitical theatres is invoked, the others should be considered too. And, just as they are considered together, the three integrated fronts should be articulated to the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific theatres to remind the largest NATO members of the Black Sea’s geostrategic importance.

### 3.3.4 Generate a Black Sea Strategy

At the broadest regional level, NATO should still figure in the strategic ambitions of Ukraine and Georgia, but expectations as to its focus on the region must be realistic. The alliance does not have a coherent strategy with respect to the Black Sea, let alone a clear path forward for either country to acquire even a MAP.

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<sup>44</sup> Importantly, this does not mean that the PRC’s BRI should be welcomed; rather, it means that the region stretching from the Baltic to the Black Sea should be understood as a ‘gateway’ – a place of geostrategic significance.

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Those allies with strong interests in the Black Sea region should take the lead and try to draft a NATO Black Sea Strategy. Like other initiatives that concern the Black Sea, these members could include not only the littoral states, but also the three Baltic countries, Poland, Canada, the UK, and the US. To the extent possible, Ukraine and Georgia could leverage their status as Enhanced Opportunities Partners to take part in such discussions, with the understanding that their non-membership of NATO means that they may not have any final input in, or a veto on, what is included in the strategy.



## 4.0 Conclusion

With Russia's annexation of Crimea and military presence in and near eastern Ukraine, its creation of virtual protectorates based on 'frozen conflicts' in Abkhazia and South Ossetia (see Map 2) – territories most countries recognise as part of Georgia – and its wider campaign of destructive activities in Eastern Europe more generally, the Black Sea region has experienced at least seven years of geopolitical flux. Under these circumstances, Ukraine's subsequent decision to move closer to the Euro-Atlantic order, particularly NATO, is inherently understandable. NATO has promised to offer Ukraine – as well as Georgia – a MAP since at least 2008; however, continued opposition from certain NATO allies means it is unlikely that Ukraine and Georgia will join the alliance anytime soon.

In the interim, although Ukraine and Georgia should not abandon their NATO ambitions, they would do well to consider other options to resist Russian aggression and integrate the Black Sea region closer into the maritime democracies' geostrategic projects in the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific, respectively. By making themselves more resilient, Ukraine and Georgia, and other regional powers, could enhance their collective ability to deter hostile and revisionist states' attempts to undermine them. Through a strategy of regional realignment, Ukraine and Georgia, with the support of like-minded NATO partners, could further draw the Black Sea region into the Euro-Atlantic order. And through sustained and coordinated discursive statecraft, Ukraine, Georgia and their like-minded NATO partners, could better dislocate Russia's hostile and revisionist narratives and impose their own.

Ultimately, these proposals may not lead to NATO membership for either Ukraine or Georgia, but neither country would be worse off for trying any of them. Insofar as the Black Sea region is an area of intensifying geopolitical competition at the epicentre of the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific worlds (see Map 1), new efforts to enhance regional security cannot come too soon.



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<sup>45</sup> Maps from WorldMapGenerator are released under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. See: WorldMapGenerator, <https://bit.ly/3HR6ACX> (found: 21/11/2021).

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