

Russian Growing Influence in the Black Sea: Implications on Regional Security

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ABSTRACT

After world war 2, a cold war between west and USSR started and ended with the disintegration of USSR into multiple independent states. This event led to a major geopolitical shift and reshaped the politics of the region. Black sea is located at the center of these states, it is a gateway of Eastern Europe to global sea lanes of communication and Mediterranean and it links Europe to Caucasus and Middle East. Russia considers Black sea as significant for its geopolitical and strategic goals, driven by Moscow's perception of the region as crucial for its geostrategic objectives, presents a pressing challenge to regional security. The strategic significance of the Black Sea for the Russian federation raises concerns about potential repercussions as the nation pursues and safeguards its interests in the area. This complex situation raises concerns regarding military activities, geopolitical tensions, economic ramifications, and the potential for cross-border ramifications. The research highlights the various threats posed to regional security, shedding light challenges that have resulted as a consequence of evolving geopolitical landscapes in the Black Sea. Russia uses multifaceted approaches like military buildup, economic and diplomatic ties, political maneuvering, historical and cultural affiliations to achieve its interest and goals in the region. Research is divided into five chapters; first chapter provides synopsis of whole research conducted. In chapter two, the theoretical framework about the Russia endeavors in the region along with the implications on the region are discussed in the research along with the literature review is presented. The Chapter three gives the methodological approach of the research conducted giving detail about the material and approach used in the research. Chapter four of the research presents the details of findings and data, it examines the geopolitical and geostrategic goals of Russia in the Black sea, key mechanisms and strategies employed by Russia to grow its influence in the region along with its implications on the regional security. The last chapter of the research concludes the whole research.

Keywords: Black Sea, Regional Security, Russia

INTRODUCTION

Black sea region holds immense geopolitical significance. It is a gateway of Eastern Europe to global sea lanes of communication and Mediterranean and it links Europe to Caucasus and Middle East. This region brings together six coastal states Georgia, Russia, Turkey, Bulgaria and Ukraine. These states are building their military after Russian takeover of Crimea and invasion on Ukraine. The region is rich in cultural and ethnic diversity due to geographical closeness and history with Russia. Historical grievances could be used by Moscow to interfere in its neighbors' affairs and pressure regional governments into aligning itself with Russia. By turning regional NATO members into compliance which could intensely weaken the Alliance's

internal cohesion its credibility. Russia's strategic worldview has placed considerable importance on militarizing the Black Sea Region (BSR). Black sea has outsized importance in Russia's strategic worldview. Its occupation of Crimea and invasion of Ukraine have only increased this threat. Russia's interest and ongoing activity in the BSR will have serious implications for the United States, NATO, and European security. This region is a key intersection point of the global energy economy, exports of Russia's main commodity and for transit infrastructure. Today, it is a hub of intense conventional war, the most destructive in Europe after World War II. By observing the complex web of political, economic and military factors it is apparent that Black sea is not just a body of water but it is a stage of strategic activities that hold immense importance.

There are multifaceted factors crucial for assessing the complex dynamics shaping Russia's growing influence in the Black Sea and its broader geopolitical implications. In Kremlin's view, the historical ties with Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova places them in Russia's 'sphere of influence'. Russia's national security views Black Sea critical because it will connect Russia to Mediterranean and Middle East. The revival of Novorossiyan concept aids its expansionist perception. The territories in the south of Ukraine, along the northern Black Sea from Luhansk and Donetsk to Odesa were historically part of Russia in eighteenth century. The concept of Novorossiya has been expanded and they want their old empire again.



In order to project power into the Middle east, Europe and Mediterranean, Putin views Black Sea as a vital region. Russia's full-scale invasion on Ukraine is the pinnacle of Moscow's gradually increasing militarization of the Black Sea Region, which is clearly seen in the Kremlin's strategic worldview due to cultural and historical factors and it places primacy on the Black-sea region. This region is centerpiece of

Russia's militarization in recent years due to these strategic drivers. The state Armaments Program in 2011-2020 focused on the Black Sea Fleet and Southern Military District. The process of increasing military and improving capabilities contributed to Russian interference in the region including the invasion of Ukraine. When Putin came into power, Russia embarked on its journey of rebuilding its military power. Under Minister of Defense Anatoly Serdyukov in 2008, first military reforms were brought which sought structural reforms in military. ¹Military modernization includes the addition of warships to Russia black sea maritime and Anti-Ship and Anti- Air Capabilities.

Energy Projects and Economic Partnerships helps Russia to foster its ties with other states specifically neighboring states. Through Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) provides economic, political, and strategic benefits to Russia in the Black Sea region. It promotes economic collaboration among member states, providing opportunities for trade and investment. Russia is a major economic player in the region, it takes advantage from economic ties. The Black Sea region is a significant for energy transit, and it facilitates cooperation in the energy sector. Russia, as a major energy exporter get benefit from BSEC. Collaborative projects and agreements within the BSEC framework can contribute to the development of energy infrastructure, benefiting Russia's interests in the transportation and sale of energy resources. Economic ties in the Black Sea region strengthen Russia's power. Russia establishes economic relations that go beyond the energy industry through trade agreements, investments, and joint ventures. This economic dependency can be used as a diplomatic tool to improve relations with Black Sea countries. Furthermore, by establishing itself as an economic partner, Russia can strengthen its geopolitical position and it will help to neutralize potential opposition to its military and political activity in the region. Russia boosts its influence in the region through its economic footprint which is developed through energy projects, trade agreements and economic partnerships. Russia uses its soft power tactics, alliances and diplomatic moves to enhance its presence in the region. It helps to build its political clout in the region.

A significant geopolitical shift has occurred in Eurasia as Russia forged closer ties with China. This strategic partnership has not only strengthened Russia's position globally but also altered the balance of power in the region. The collaboration between Moscow and Beijing has created a counterbalance to Western influence, impacting the dynamics in the Black Sea as well. The convergence of Russian and Chinese interests contributes to a multipolar world order, challenging the traditional dominance of Western powers in global affairs.

These geopolitical maneuvers, both in collaboration with China and in the Middle East, have ripple effects that extend to the Black Sea region. Russia's diversified network of alliances and partnerships strengthens its geopolitical position, enabling it to navigate global power dynamics more effectively and assert its influence in regional theaters like the Black Sea. The interplay of these geopolitical strategies underscores Russia's multifaceted approach to securing its interests and shaping the geopolitical landscape in the broader Eurasian context.

In NATO'S strategic view three littoral states are very important which includes Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania. They have different views and perspectives on the regional security. The strategic importance of the Black Sea region is prominently highlighted in NATO's strategic concept. NATO allies make it clear that they will continue to back the interest countries in the region's Euro-Atlantic objectives. They will also

¹ Adrian A. Basora., n.d. "Putin's 'Greater Novorossiya' - The Dismemberment of Ukraine - Foreign Policy Research Institute." <https://www.fpri.org/article/2014/05/putins-greater-novorossiya-the-dismemberment-of-ukraine/>.

intensify efforts to improve their resistance against harmful third-party involvement and coercion, as well as to strengthen their capacities to address the specific threats and difficulties they confront.

Research Gap

The majority of academic research centered around historical, economic, and NATO involvement and influence in the region, however, the geostrategic significance of Black sea for Russian Federation and its growing influence in the Black sea region is understudied. This research is focused on the missing aspects such as growing impact of the Russian Federation, its political and strategic goals, implications for the regional states and its recognition of the geostrategic value of the Black Sea.

Problem Statement

The escalating Russian influence in the Black sea, driven by Moscow's perception of the region as crucial for its geostrategic objectives, presents a pressing challenge to regional security. The strategic significance of the Black Sea for the Russian federation raises concerns about potential repercussions as the nation pursues and safeguards its interests in the area. This complex situation raises concerns regarding military activities, geopolitical tensions, economic ramifications, and the potential for cross-border ramifications

Objective of Research

1. To investigate the geo-political and the strategic significance of the Black Sea region.
2. To comprehensively analyze the threats to regional security and stability posed by Russia.

Research Questions

1. What specific geopolitical and strategic goals does Russia aim to achieve in the Black Sea region?
2. What key mechanisms and strategies has Russia employed to bolster its influence in the Black Sea region?
3. What are the potential implications of Russian influence on the regional stability and the geopolitical balance in the region?

Significance of Research

The study of Black Sea region will give insights of the strategic significance of black sea in the regional politics and the factors behind the growing influence of Russia in Black sea region and understanding the threats imposed to regional security. The research highlights the various threats posed to regional security, shedding light challenges that have resulted as a consequence of evolving geopolitical landscapes in the Black Sea. Through a detailed analysis, this study offers a nuanced understanding of the intricate interplay between geopolitical interests, security concerns, and the broader regional context in the Black Sea.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This work on "Russian growing influence in the black sea: implications on regional security" is based on Black Sea region and it will give insights of the strategic significance of black sea in the regional politics and the factors behind the growing influence of Russia in Black sea region and understanding the threats imposed to regional security. The research highlights the various threats posed to regional security, shedding light challenges that have resulted as a consequence of evolving geopolitical landscapes in the Black Sea. Through a detailed analysis, this study offers a nuanced understanding of the intricate interplay

between geopolitical interests, security concerns, and the broader regional context in the Black Sea. This chapter covers the literature review under different themes such as Black sea which discusses the significance of Black sea location and its connecting regions, the greater Novorossiia concept brings forth the traditional concept of Novorossiia of Russia, Russia policies in the neighboring states gives details about the strategies and policies developed by Russia to dominate the region, NATO interests and presence explains the interests and growing influence of NATO in the region, Russia as a revisionist state provides overview of aggressive actions carried by Russia in the region. Under these themes work offered by different authors are discussed with explanation.

Thematic Literature Review

Black Sea

From the perspective of security space the Black Sea has changed throughout the history, reflecting the balance of power in the region, the security actors involved and the military significance of the region for broader struggles. It has been a contested security region as part of wider geopolitical competition connecting maritime and land-based issues in the Caucasus, the Balkans, Central Europe and the Eurasian region.² Black sea is often contested by different powers which makes it a focal point in wider geopolitical competition. The region's strategic location has security ramifications beyond the borders, any event, rivalry or power competition has rippling effect across the borders. Black sea has an immense effect on the stability and security in Europe and Asia. This region is facing multiple challenges such as ethnic conflicts, historical grievances and under developed political system. Due to the presence of vast energy resources, energy corridor, transport and energy route, this region holds immense strategic significance.

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.³ 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 is a junction where various civilizations intersect.

Since classical times, the Black Sea region has been a 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.⁴

The Greater Novorossiyan Concept

Novorossiia refers to a large part of present day Ukraine on the north of the Black Sea. In 18th century it was under the control of USSR, Putin's description of Novorossiia 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 writes Basora and Fisher in their work.⁵ Novorossiia, or New Russia refers to a significant part of modern day Ukraine lying at the north of Black sea. Following the

² Neil J Melvin, 2018. "Introduction: The Black Sea as a Security Space." *Rebuilding Collective Security in the Black Sea Region*. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep19176.7>.

³ Sumer Kayser, "Geopolitics of the Black Sea." *Maritime security center of excellence* (2021).

⁴ <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/AC-Black-Sea-Strategy-ack-revised.pdf>

⁵ Basora, Adrian A., and Aleksandr Fisher. "Putin's 'Greater Novorossiia'—The Dismemberment of Ukraine." *Foreign Policy Research Institute, May 2* (2014): 1-8.

expansion of Russian empire this region became part of Russian empire in late 18th century. Historically, only Southern steeps of Ukraine was included in Novorossiya but currently under the rule of President Vladimir Putin the concept of Novorossiya expanded beyond its traditional boundaries including areas such as Kharviv. This concept reflects the agenda behind the Novorossiya under which President Putin seeks to overtake control beyond the traditional concept of Novorossiya. Putin aims to overtake territories that are significant from strategic and economic perspective which intensifies the regional rivalry and hate. Russia's new definition of Novorossiya concept includes a claim over more Ukrainian land, leading to dispute and tension over territory and national identity.

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 Medvedev. 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.⁶

Russia is not defined by its current borders but by its historical and cultural ties with its former soviet states writes Shinar⁷. 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. (Chaim Shinar,2017)

According to John O'Loughlin⁸ these efforts sought to revive a historic region called Novorossiya ("New Russia") on the northern shores of the Black Sea that was created by Russian imperial colonizers. When Putin decided to annex Crimea, the move was intuitively presented as a historic Russian territory rejoining the motherland and, further, as the correction of an arbitrary and capricious historical wrong as mentioned by Gerard Toal⁹.

"Novorossiya" is thus a unique term for Russian nationalism, nurturing simultaneously "red," "white," and "brown" readings of the events happening in eastern Ukraine according to Ma'rlene Laruelle¹⁰. Other realist scholars warned that failing to respect Russia's core interests - that is, its basic need for a buffer between its territorial landmass and the Western alliance foremost among them as mentioned by Adam Twardowski¹¹. Russia perceives the western forces in its nearby states as a threat for its security, due to historical rivalry Russia feels threatened of growing influence of West in its former Soviet states.

⁶ Kotoulas, Ioannis E. "Russia as a Revisionist State and the 2022 Invasion of Ukraine." *Publishing House "Baltija Publishing"* (2022).

⁷ Chaim Shinar, "Vladimir Putin's aspiration to restore the lost Russian Empire." *European Review* 25, no. 4 (2017): 642-654.

⁸ John O'Loughlin, Gerard Toal, and Vladimir Kolosov. "The rise and fall of "Novorossiya": examining support for a separatist geopolitical imaginary in southeast Ukraine." *Post-Soviet Affairs* 33, no. 2 (2017): 124-144.

⁹ Gerard Toal, 'The Novorossiya Project', *Near Abroad: Putin, the West and the Contest over Ukraine and the Caucasus* (Oxford, 2017; online edn, Oxford Academic, 12 Nov. 2020),

¹⁰ Marlene Laruelle, "Novorossiya: A Launching Pad for Russian Nationalists." (2014).

¹¹ Adam Twardowski, "The return of Novorossiya: Why Russia's intervention in Ukraine exposes the weakness of international law." *Minn. J. Int'l L.* 24 (2015): 351.

Russia's Policies in the Neighboring States

Russia has two major interests: Russian lands and people due to which frozen conflicts are strategically significant for Russia. These frozen conflicts allow Russia to exercise its 'sphere of influence' and stop states from aligning with NATO and west. Russia plays a different role in every frozen conflict like Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, Nagorno-Karabakh contested between Armenia and Azerbaijan and Transnistria in Moldova.¹² After the disintegration of USSR in 1990's many conflicts emerged among the ethnic minorities demanding independence from new states disintegrated from USSR. Along with Nagorno-Karabakh, Moldova's Transnistria region and two Georgian districts, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, are locked in "frozen conflicts" with the post-Soviet countries that claim sovereignty over them. Internationally, Nagorno-Karabakh, Transnistria, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia are still recognized as parts of Azerbaijan, Moldova, and Georgia, respectively. However, each has declared independence and set up its own de facto elected governments, relying on foreign support, primarily from Russia.

During the time of the Soviet Union, Abkhazia and South Ossetia were autonomous regions within Soviet Georgia. When the Soviet Union collapsed, ethnic tensions turned violent, and Georgia lost effective control in the two regions as fighting raged. Thousands of ethnic Georgians fled their homes in South Ossetia and Abkhazia for other parts of Georgia. The regions have been unstable and supported by Russia ever since.¹³ Maintaining hostile relationship with west and improving relationship with china are the two most notable elements of Russian foreign policy under Russian President Vladimir Putin. For the past 30 years these have been key drivers in the Russian national security documents¹⁴. Russia's confrontational stance towards West and inclination towards China reflects the dual focus of Russian foreign policy under Putin leadership for its national security. This strategic alliance will counterbalance the western influence in the region through Chinese partnership to enhance its economic and geopolitical resilience. Over past thirty years these factors remained crucial for the Russia's international approach, shaping its strategy on global stage.

NATO'S Interests and Presence

NATO has assigned strategic importance to Black sea. Presence of NATO is increasing in the region and it's trying to grow its influence to counter Russia 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

¹² Stephen J Flanagan, and Irina A. Chindea, Russia, NATO, and Black Sea Security Strategy: Regional Perspectives from a 2019 Workshop. RAND NATIONAL DEFENSE RESEARCH INST SANTA MONICA CA SANTA MONICA, 2019.

¹³ Olesya Vartanyan. "Antagonizing the Neighborhood: Putin's Frozen Conflicts and the Conflict in Ukraine": International Crisis Group, 2020.

¹⁴ Eugene Rumer, and Richard Sokolsky. "Russia's National Security Narrative: All Quiet on the Eastern Front." (2022).

safeguard its allies and partners in the region. Through strengthening its presence and collaborations in the area, NATO wants to build stability, deter any potential threat. Steven Horrell and Ivanna Kuz¹⁵.

NATO and the wider transatlantic community have an interest in deterring or quickly resolving sovereignty challenges in the region that impinge on non-NATO countries' sovereign rights and abilities to align themselves with NATO and the West. The most recent reflection of the region's importance came from the NATO Warsaw Summit, which not only re-emphasized collective defense and deterrence, while reaffirming concrete steps such as the Readiness Action Plan and the defense investment pledge, but included numerous highlights of NATO's commitment to Black Sea security.¹⁶

NATO's interests in the Black Sea are driven by the need to counter Russian influence, ensure the security of energy routes, support regional allies, and maintain stability in Europe. Through naval deployments, air policing, military exercises, and infrastructure development, NATO demonstrates its commitment to the region's security and its readiness to respond to emerging threats. These activities underscore the strategic importance of the Black Sea in NATO's broader defense and security policy.

NATO's interests in the Black Sea region are not related to security but it also includes energy as well. The BSR is a central transit hub in the flow of oil and gas exports to Europe, the Mediterranean and beyond, having great potential to further linking Europe and Central Asia. Lord Mark LANCASTER (United Kingdom) Rapporteur¹⁷. Following the September 2001 attacks United States increased its involvement in the Black Sea region by introducing new initiatives in Georgia and Ukraine. At the same time, European Union and North Atlantic Treaty Organization went through enlargement process and major global political shifts. Due to approaches implemented for the security and stability in the region sparked rivalry and tension among the regional actors. After the Cold war, efforts to develop a cooperative security framework in the Black Sea region failed it lacked unified vision and structure where primary influence was held by regional stakeholders. The conflict between Russia and Georgia in 2008 exposed the shortcomings of security system for pacifying the region and preventing the region from internal and external conflicts.¹⁸

America can take a number of steps with NATO to safeguard its political, economic, and security interests in the region. Firstly, the U.S. should be a leader inside the Alliance in calling for the creation of a NATO Black Sea Strategy. The Alliance needs to develop meaningful ways of working with Black Sea littoral states to improve regional security Çelikpala Mitat¹⁹. Jonathan Masters²⁰ in his article said its three decades of independence, Ukraine has sought to forge its own path as a sovereign state while looking to align more closely with Western institutions, including the EU and NATO. In February 2022, Russia embarked on a full-scale invasion of Ukraine with the aim of toppling the Western-aligned government of Volodymyr

¹⁵ Steven Horrell, Steven and Ivana Kuz. "NATO — Back in the Black (Sea)?" Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA), 2022.

¹⁶ HORRELL, STEVEN. "A NATO Strategy for Security in the Black Sea Region." Atlantic Council, 2016. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep03475>.

¹⁷ Lord Mark LANCASTER, "troubled waters – how Russia's war in Ukraine changes black sea security" Preliminary Draft Report 2 May 2023.

¹⁸ Maisaia, Vakhtang. "The Black Sea Regional Security and Geostrategy Balance: A "New Cold War" Scenario." *Przegląd Strategiczny* 13, no. 16 (2023): 141-153.

¹⁹ Mitat Çelikpala, "Security in the Black Sea region." Commission on the Black Sea Policy Report 2 (2010): 23.

²⁰ Jonathan Masters, "Ukraine: Conflict at the crossroads of Europe and Russia." Council on Foreign Relations 1 (2022).

Zelenskyy . Europe needs a strong and cautious approach to counter balance the threats coming from Black sea region, it is restructuring its defense policy to counter treats beyond its borders ²¹

In order to improve its profile in the area the US has developed close bilateral security ties with regional actors such as Georgia, Ukraine, Bulgaria and Romania. Furthermore, successive US administrations have supported the role of the transatlantic alliance in the region. Indeed, the US attempt to develop a broader strategy towards the “wider Black Sea” region imparted a specific C Challenges 11 II importance to NATO enlargement. The US also supported NATO membership for both Ukraine and Georgia. However, this policy made it impossible for NATO to provide security in the Black Sea Region as a whole. Moreover, the Russian view that the US is pursuing a policy of deterrence designed to contain Russia has merely aggravated the tensions between Russia and other regional actors.²²

Russia as a revisionist state

The 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine is a clear and violent manifestation of Russian revisionism in its purest form and a crime of aggression according to international criminal law written by Kotoulas Ioannis E²³ .China and Russia are revisionist powers in as much as they share a commitment to creating a “post-West” global order which takes their as written by Angela Stent²⁴ interests into account and is conducive to authoritarian rule.

The 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine is a clear and violent manifestation of Russian revisionism in its purest form and a crime of aggression according to international criminal law, as it violates the fundamental principles of the Charter of the United Nations. Russian revisionism in its most radical dimension with the invasion aims to transform not only the regional balance of power and state relations, but also impose a new perception of inter-state relations on a global level with the emergence of post-imperial geopolitical spaces and zones of militarily projected influence by hegemonic actors.²⁵

Former Soviet States and Black sea

The Black Sea has been a theater of war and a pillar of economic potential. A repeated cycle of conflict and peace has been hovering over the region due to the complex relationship between Russia and Turkey, and the interests of reigning global powers of the time. Precarious stability has become the area’s main feature written by Dr. Panagiota Manoli²⁶ in his article. Turkey and Russia are two major players in the region and their relations are multifaceted characterized by cooperation on energy projects like Turkstream pipeline whereas they also share a bitter relation or rivalry over their stances in Libya and Syria.

²¹ Özer, Ercan. "The Black Sea economic cooperation and regional security." *New Trends in Turkish Foreign Affairs: Bridges and Boundaries* (2002): 149.

²² Çelikpala, Mitat. "Security in the Black Sea region." *Commission on the Black Sea Policy Report 2* (2010): 23.

²³ Ioannis E Kotoulas, "Russia as a Revisionist State and the 2022 Invasion of Ukraine." Publishing House “Baltija Publishing”

²⁴ Angela Stent, “Russia and China: Axis of revisionists." *Brookings Institution, February* (2020).

²⁵ Kotoulas, Ioannis E. "Russia as a Revisionist State and the 2022 Invasion of Ukraine." *Publishing House “Baltija Publishing”* (2022).

²⁶ Panagiota Manoli, "Black Sea Regionalism in Perspective." *Centre for International and European Studies 2* (2011): 1-8.

According to Anna Czyż²⁷ former Soviet States are distancing themselves from their old imperial master. The war in Ukraine has accelerated the process of breaking out of Moscow's orbit and abandoning loyalty to Russian President Vladimir Putin's regime. States that are influenced by western states are supported by NATO and EU support nonintervention and sovereignty, whereas Russian policies reflect its own national interest of expansionism and regional dominance. The clashing identities between Russia and its neighbors also reflect broader normative conflicts. Russia's approach challenges the post-Cold War norms of sovereignty and territorial integrity upheld by Western-aligned states in the region. This divergence in norms creates a persistent state of tension and insecurity. While Russia seeks to revise the regional order to accommodate its historical claims and protect ethnic Russians, its neighbors and their Western allies aim to maintain the existing international norms and legal frameworks²⁸.

Esther Ademmer²⁹ said in his work that in recent years, the policies of the EU and Russia in their "contested neighborhood" have predominantly been analyzed from a geopolitical prism. Triggered by successive crises – starting with gas crises in Ukraine and the conflict in Georgia, and culminating with the recent crisis in Ukraine – academic debates have concentrated on EU-Russia rivalry.

Research Gap

The majority of academic research centered around historical, economic, and NATO involvement and influence in the region, however, the geostrategic significance of Black sea for Russian Federation and its growing influence in the Black sea region is understudied. This research is focused on the missing aspects such as growing impact of the Russian Federation, its political and strategic goals, implications for the regional states and its recognition of the geostrategic value of the Black Sea.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Regional Security Complex Theory

Regional security complex theory (RSCT) offers a framework for understanding the security dynamics with a specified geographic area, such as Black Sea region. It was developed by Barry Buzan and Ole Waever in 1990, RSCT helps to understand dynamics under which states interact with each other and how they perceive threats within a defined region. According to this theory, analyzing the global security through a regional lens will provide a theoretical base for the construction of world regions. A regional security complex means "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 of each other"³⁰. This definition is also close to other researchers dealing with the issue of regional security complexes. For example, D. Lake and P. Morgan support the assumption that the borders of the region are defined by security ties manifested in the mutual perception of opportunities, challenges, problems, and threats.

²⁷ Anna Czyż, "Post-Soviet Area in the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation." *Athenaeum. Polskie Studia Politologiczne* 71 (2021): 151-164.

²⁸ Kilroy Jr, Richard J., Abelardo Rodriguez Sumano, and Todd Hataley. "Security inequalities in North America: reassessing regional security complex theory." *Journal of Strategic Security* 10, no. 4 (2017): 1-28.

²⁹ Esther Ademmer, Laure Delcour, Katarzyna Wolczuk, and Muirhead Tower. "Beyond Geopolitics: An introduction to the impact of the EU and Russia in the "contested neighborhood"." *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 57 (2016).

³⁰ Sadurski, Leszek. "Regional security complex theory: Why is this concept still worth developing?." *Athenaeum. Polskie Studia Politologiczne* 75 (2022): 137-153.

According to the theory the security at regional level collectively co relates with the security of other states in the region which means that security concerns stays within the same region. This theory highlights that geographical closeness of states intensifies the security challenges due to various reasons like shared borders, history, culture, ethnicity, trade and territory. Due to such factors security of every state is interlinked to each other. States with super power are exempted from this scenario as they might interfere in other regions due to their power and resources every state doesn't have enough resources and power to think beyond its region. Barry Buzan and Ole Waever are highly notable for refining the definition of security more broadly from the context of social construct. They deconstruct security threats along with all their dynamics at the regional level before judging them at the global level. They believe that the regional level is the most vulnerable as most security complexities occur at this particular level.³¹

According to RSCT, the global security environment is split into further more regional security complexes and it also highlights the impact of interdependence, identity and norm on the regional security. Regional security complexes are formed due to geographic grouping of states that share similar or closely linked security perspectives and policies. These structures depend upon the shared relationship among the states that is shaped by historical, economic and military ties, political influence that determines how these states perceive and deal with security threats. Another key assumption of RSCT is the interdependence among states, implying that their security is connected to each other, policies and security of one state will impact the security of other neighboring states. The security dynamics are interwoven with each other, each state defense policies and strategic policies will impact others, it leads to security dilemma in which security of one state results in insecurity of other state. Identity and norms also play a major role in complexities of regional security. Identity refers to cultural, ethnic and religious elements that can either connect the people or in case of divergent identities it can lead to conflict. Whereas norms are set of rules and laws for regulating the conflicts.

Implementation

Applying the Regional Security Complex Theory to the Black Sea conundrum involves recognizing the region as a distinct security complex where states share common security concerns shaped by historical, geographical, and geopolitical factors. The Black sea region, consists of countries such as Russia, Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine which forms a regional security complex where security of each state is directly linked to another. The increased presence and military buildup of one state poses a direct threat to the sovereignty and security of neighboring countries, compelling them to reassess and improve their own security. Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, subsequent attack on Ukraine and military buildup intensified the security dilemma and instability in the region.

Various regional security structures of the Black Sea are shaped by historical tensions and diverse cultural backgrounds, underscore the need for a nuanced understanding of the geopolitical landscape.

As the primary state-centric actor, Russia's actions, including military presence and economic partnerships, significantly impact regional security concerns. The interdependence among Black Sea states becomes evident as Russia's assertiveness influences the security dynamics of neighboring countries, creating a web of mutual dependencies.

³¹ Tahir, Mariam. "REGIONAL SECURITY COMPLEX THEORY AND SOFT POWER: MAPPING CHINA'S ENGAGEMENT IN AFGHANISTAN." *Margalla Papers* 26, no. 2 (2022): 39-48.

The role of identity and norms contributes to the shaping of a unique Black Sea regional identity, influencing how states perceive and respond to Russia's influence. The RSC theory's assumptions offer a framework for comprehending the complexities of security interdependence and identity-based dynamics within the Black Sea region, essential for formulating effective regional security policies and strategies.

Regional Security Structures

Regional security structure can be defined as security structures among states within same geographical region. States existing in geographical proximity will interact more due to security concerns. Black sea can be regarded as a focal point for major players in region due to its geographical significance as energy trade route and military operations. Its bordered by states such as Russia, Romania, Turkey, Bulgaria and Ukraine. In Black sea there are states that are highly integrated and cooperative (Romania and Bulgaria) and some are fragmented and conflicting (Russia and Ukraine), their relationships are dependent upon their historical, economic and political ties. Historical grievances and alliances shaped the security structure of this region. The bordering states of black sea all together forms a regional security complex which includes states such as Russia, turkey, Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria and Georgia. For the formation of regional security complex three prerequisites must be fulfilled such as same geographical area, existence of differences between them, Black sea states are in the same geographical region³².

Interdependence

In international arena the geographical closeness of states creates an environment of interdependent security system among the states, security policy of every state is not independent of its neighboring state security. The Black sea region reflects the interdependence among states due to their geographical proximity, when Russia took over Ukraine and started to build its military including the modernization of Black sea fleet, it created a wave of insecurity among other littoral states such as Ukraine, Turkey, Romania, Bulgaria and Georgia. Due to their economic ties and shared borders they are enforced to respond to Russian adventures in the region. This region is very significant for energy trade route, pipelines carry Russian gas to Europe through the Black sea, it also connects eastern European countries with the market which makes this region a matter of shared security concern.

Role of Identity and Norms

National identity refers to collective sense of belonging, shared culture, religion, history and ethnicity. National identities influence the state behavior and policies in the region. It plays a significant role in shaping the region security dynamics. Russian policies are highly influenced by their national identity, Russia's annexation of Crimea was based on their claim that they are protecting their ethnic Russians and historical ties. Russian expansionist endeavors are portrayed as they are historically theirs and they have to protect their legitimacy, in international arena its their justification. For Ukraine and Georgia, their national identities are closely tied to their sovereignty and independence from Russian influence. The annexation of Crimea and the support for separatist movements in Eastern Ukraine and in Georgia's breakaway regions (Abkhazia and South Ossetia) are perceived as direct threats to their national integrity and identity. These actions by Russia have solidified Ukrainian and Georgian resolve to align more closely with Western institutions like NATO and the EU, reinforcing their identities in opposition to Russian dominance.

³² GHENADE, Adrian, and O. N. U. Elena. "The theory of the regional security complex—Case study, the riparian states of the Black Sea." *BULLETIN OF "CAROL I" NATIONAL DEFENCE UNIVERSITY* 13, no. 1 (2024): 212-222.

Conversely, Ukraine and Georgia emphasize their sovereignty and national identity, which starkly contrasts with Russian expansionism³³.

The problem of conflicting norms over integrity, sovereignty and regional hegemony creates a conflict among regional states. States that are influenced by western states are supported by NATO and EU support nonintervention and sovereignty, whereas Russian policies reflect its own national interest of expansionism and regional dominance. The clashing identities between Russia and its neighbors also reflect broader normative conflicts. Russia's approach challenges the post-Cold War norms of sovereignty and territorial integrity upheld by Western-aligned states in the region. This divergence in norms creates a persistent state of tension and insecurity. While Russia seeks to revise the regional order to accommodate its historical claims and protect ethnic Russians, its neighbors and their Western allies aim to maintain the existing international norms and legal frameworks³⁴.

Patterns of Amity and Enmity

History shows that Russia's relations with neighboring states are cooperative and conflicting as well due to their economic and historic ties, it is characterized by complex patterns of amity and enmity. Turkey and Russia are two major players in the region and their relations are multifaceted characterized by cooperation on energy projects like Turk stream pipeline whereas they also share a bitter relation or rivalry over their stances in Libya and Syria. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 and invasion on Ukraine reflects the hostile relations and enmity in the region. Russia is taking active part in frozen conflicts(Nagorno-Karabakh) and Georgia also faces challenge from Russia.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Paradigm/Philosophy

Research epistemology is a field of philosophy that is related to nature, origin and scope of knowledge. In research, epistemology evaluates about how knowledge is acquired, what constitutes valid knowledge, and the underlying assumptions and beliefs that guide the research process. However, considering the multifaceted and dynamic nature of international relations, a combination of constructivist and critical theory approaches may provide a comprehensive understanding. This would involve exploring both the subjective perceptions of actors and the underlying power structures that influence and are influenced by Russian growing influence in the Black Sea which involves examining the nature and justification of the knowledge we seek to acquire about this geopolitical issue. From a positivist perspective the research will focus on observable and empirical data. Quantitative data on military spending and activities, economic investments are gathered under this method. Through statistical data trends and patterns are recognized which provides better understanding of Russia's military and economic structures.

Research Design

The research design opted in this research is comprehensive research design. The complexity of the topic requires a multidimensional approach to capture the various aspects involved in the research. The study

³³ Buzan, Barry, and Ole Wæver. "Security Complexes: A Theory of Regional Security." Chapter. In *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*, 40–82. Cambridge Studies in International Relations. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

³⁴ Kilroy Jr, Richard J., Abelardo Rodriguez Sumano, and Todd Hataley. "Security inequalities in North America: reassessing regional security complex theory." *Journal of Strategic Security* 10, no. 4 (2017): 1-28.

will use a multi-method research design using qualitative and quantitative methods to give a comprehensive analysis and nuanced understanding of the geopolitical, economic, and political dimensions of this issue. In this study employs qualitative method for collecting data to study the growing influence of Russia through political, military and economical means and Quantitative method will be used to get statistical information for the research. In order to gather data, I have collected data through various websites, online research articles, journals, newspapers and books. All collected data is presented in the chapter 4 and in chapter 5 will provide key findings and implications.

Data Organization

The thesis conducted delivers the information about the growing influence of Russia in Black Sea and its implications on regional security. Research is divided into five chapters; first chapter provides synopsis of whole research conducted. In chapter two, the theoretical framework about the Russia endeavors in the region along with the implications on the region are discussed in the research along with the literature review is presented. The Chapter three gives the methodological approach of the research conducted giving detail about the material and approach used in the research. Chapter four of the research presents the details of findings and data, it examines the geopolitical and geostrategic goals of Russia in the Black sea, key mechanisms and strategies employed by Russia to grow its influence in the region along with its implications on the regional security. The last chapter of the research concludes the whole research.

Research Approach

The research is based on qualitative methods of collecting data. Qualitative data will be collected through primary and secondary sources. Primary data will be collected through the official documents and secondary sources include research articles, opinion articles, journals, news and opinions of professors and policy experts. Descriptive qualitative method is used for conducting this research.

Theoretical Understanding

The theory of Regional Security Complex Theory RSCT is applied for better understanding of the regional dynamics of security. RSCT helps to understand dynamics under which states interact with each other and how they perceive threats within a defined region. According to this theory, analyzing the global security through a regional lens will provide a theoretical base for the construction of world regions. It will give in depth analysis of regional security complex, interdependence and role of identity and norms that shape the security dynamics in the region.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

Data is collected through primary and secondary sources. Primary data will be collected through the official documents and secondary sources include research articles, opinion articles, journals, news and opinions of professors and policy experts. Data is collected from following resources for the research.

- Research articles
- Newspapers
- Journals

- Books
- Online websites
- Research Ethics

This research strictly adheres to research ethics and protocols. Data is presented in the best way without any misinterpretation and misunderstanding. Any kind of fabrication, plagiarism, biasness or misrepresentation of data is avoided by giving proper attribution to the sources. Research is upholding the ethical standards and forwards the knowledge responsibly. Data is used in best possible way and no data has been misused.

DATA ANALYSIS, RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Russian geopolitical and strategic goals

Geopolitical Goals

Black sea holds immense significance in the region as it is a transit zone between East, West and North, South. It can be considered as a junction that connects Europe, Middle East and Asia. Russian foreign policy gives prime importance to Black sea in its foreign policy and geostrategic planning. Since the time of Tsars, Black sea served as a gateway for Russia towards warm water ports and till date it's still their objective. These political, economic and military reasons have called the Russian leaders to capture the Black Sea region in order to enhance its influence and authority in the region. From the end of the 16th century to the 20th century the Russian Empire carried out twelve wars with the Ottoman Empire which sought to raise its political and economic power particularly in the Crimean Peninsula. That is why the permanent base in Crimea would have made it possible to exercise the influence over the Kievan steppes, the plain of Northern Europe, the Astrahan region, and the Azov Sea. Russia has also been interested in controlling the Black sea, because the military ships need warm water ports that do not freeze in the winter and provides free passage to world commerce. The Russian port of the Murmansk on the Arctic Ocean and the Vladivostok on the Pacific Ocean cannot be used for half a year due to the ice marring trade and simultaneously immobilizing the Russian fleet to act as global naval power. The inability to have a hot port that provides open access to the world's ocean became a significant problem, which was regarded as a strategic weakness since the days of Peter the Great. The need to enter the Mediterranean and thereby into the Pacific Ocean, as well as into the Indian Ocean by capturing the Afghan territories, were the major and important goals of Russian imperialistic policy³⁵.

Annexation of Crimea in 18th century and again in 2014 reflects their historical ambitions unchanged. By taking over Crimea they secured their naval base in Sevastopol which will help them to maintain their influence in Black sea region. This is because Russian interests are mainly concerned with the different degrees of political and economic control they wish to exercise over each of the coastal States, the need to ensure control of the Black Sea for further oil and gas exports and other sea transport through the Novorossiysk port, and to avoid a security void vis-à-vis NATO which could pose a threat to the South-West front of Kremlin. In order to achieve these goals, Russia has decided to employ diplomatic, informational, political, cyber and economic resources which are backed up by a steadily growing military power. To predict the likelihood of force application in the Black Sea region, Moscow considers many

³⁵ Dumitru, Ilie-Răsvan. "Russia's geopolitical determinations in the Black Sea." *Bulletin of "Carol I" National Defence University (EN)* 02 (2021): 27-39.

factors³⁶. One of the major strategic aim of Russia is to counter growing NATO influence in the region, it considers it as a direct threat to its sovereignty and dominance. In this region many states are NATO members and others are willing to join NATO, Russia seeks to prevent it neighboring states from western influence. Russia's actions in the Black sea reflects their agenda of regional dominance and to expand its economic presence in the region. It uses multiple techniques to maintain its dominance and force the regional states to comply with them. Russian interest are focusing firstly on the need for obtaining different level of political and economic power in each coastal State that allow keep the control of the whole Black sea area for oil and/or gas export and other sea transportation via Novorossiysk port and secondly on avoiding any security deficit toward NATO that can potentially endanger the South West flank of Kremlin³⁷.

Establishing Regional Dominance

Russia's endeavors for attaining the regional dominance is derived by its strategic, economic, military and political imperatives. Black sea connects Europe, Asia and Middle East and holds geopolitical significance. Controlling this region will give strategic benefit and whoever controls this region will have the ability to project power all over the region and beyond. Looking at the geographical area covered by the Russian Federation, it is clear that there is a Eurasian state. The Black Sea is one of the most strategic points of the Eurasian states and Russia is the gateway to the Mediterranean Sea. In addition, due to its geopolitical and geostrategic importance, namely the security of Russia starts there. For historical, geographical, military, economic and political reasons, Russia sees itself as the natural leader of the Black Sea.³⁸ For this reason, Russia uses multiple tactics to establish its regional dominance such as cultivating alliances and partnerships with Black sea countries, countering western influence and promoting regional organizations and initiatives aligned with Russian interests.

Russia focuses on building its alliances for enhancing its influence in the region and countering the growing western influence, it uses multiple tactics like hard power (military build-up and collaborations), economic relations (Trade and Energy) and soft power tactics. Through blend of these approaches Russia ensures it regional dominancy and project power over the region and beyond. Turkey is one of the most dominant and significant regional players, due to its strategic location it has the ability to control the sea traffic in Black sea but it shares a complicated relation with Russia. Their relations are multifaceted characterized by cooperation on energy projects like Turkstream pipeline whereas they also share a bitter relation or rivalry over their stances in Libya and Syria. The Turkstream pipeline is the prime example of cooperation, through this project Russia gas is brought into Turkey and Europe. Turkey also purchased S-400 defense system missiles from Russia and they actively engage into joint military operations. Diplomatic relations are also seen over the conflicting regions like Syria and South Caucasus.

Armenia is one of the closest ally of Russia due to their historical ties and strategic needs, they are part of Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), and Armenia is also part of Eurasian Economic Union (Euu) 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

³⁶ Dumitru, Ilie-Răsvan. "Russia's geopolitical determinations in the Black Sea." *Bulletin of" Carol I" National Defence University (EN)* 02 (2021): 27-39.

³⁷ Dumitru, Ilie-Răsvan. "Russia's geopolitical determinations in the Black Sea." *Bulletin of" Carol I" National Defence University (EN)* 02 (2021): 27-39.

³⁸ Yermekbayev, Adilbek, A. Khairuldayeva, and Zh Medetkhanov. "Russia's Geopolitics in the Black Sea Region." *Халықаралық қатынастар және халықаралық құқық сериясы No4 (92)* (2020).

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.

The political importance of the Black Sea to Russia, two states, Ukraine and Georgia come as the priority issue. The most important common feature of these two states is their anti-Russian and pro-Western policies, especially after 2000. Because the policies pursued by these two states could change the balance of power in the Black Sea, and therefore the Kremlin has sought to control everything³⁹. Before 2014, Ukraine and Russia enjoyed friendly relations but after annexation of Crimea by Russia their relations turned into rivalry. Russia supports the separatist movements in eastern Ukraine Donetsk and Luhansk. Georgia is pro-western so it naturally shares a bitter relation with Russia, Russia exerts its influence on Georgia through its breakaway regions Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Bulgaria and Romania are NATO members; they have strained relations with Russia due to their pro-western stance. Russia has two major interests: Russian lands and people due to which frozen conflicts are strategically significant for Russia. These frozen conflicts allow Russia to exercise its 'sphere of influence' and stop states from aligning with NATO and west. Russia plays a different role in every frozen conflict like Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, Nagorno-Karabakh contested between Armenia and Azerbaijan and Transnistria in Moldova.⁴⁰ After the disintegration of USSR in 1990's many conflicts emerged among the ethnic minorities demanding independence from new states disintegrated from USSR. Along with Nagorno-Karabakh, Moldova's Transnistria region and two Georgian districts, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, are locked in "frozen conflicts" with the post-Soviet countries that claim sovereignty over them. Internationally, Nagorno-Karabakh, Transnistria, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia are still recognized as parts of Azerbaijan, Moldova, and Georgia, respectively. However, each has declared independence and set up its own de facto elected governments, relying on foreign support, primarily from Russia.

During the time of the Soviet Union, Abkhazia and South Ossetia were autonomous regions within Soviet Georgia. When the Soviet Union collapsed, ethnic tensions turned violent, and Georgia lost effective control in the two regions as fighting raged. Thousands of ethnic Georgians fled their homes in South Ossetia and Abkhazia for other parts of Georgia. The regions have been unstable and supported by Russia ever since⁴¹. Maintaining hostile relationship with west and improving relationship with china are the two most notable elements of Russian foreign policy under Russian President Vladimir Putin. For the past 30 years these have been key drivers in the Russian national security documents⁴². Russia's confrontational stance towards West and inclination towards China reflects the dual focus of Russian foreign policy under Putin leadership for its national security. This strategic alliance will counterbalance the western influence in the region through Chinese partnership to enhance its economic and geopolitical resilience. Over past thirty years these factors remained crucial for the Russia's international approach, shaping its strategy on global stage. Russia desires to maintain its status of great power in the region by maintaining its influence on the

³⁹ Yermekbayev, Adilbek, A. Khairuldayeva, and Zh Medetkhanov. "Russia's Geopolitics in the Black Sea Region." *Халықаралық қатынастар және халықаралық құқық сериясы No4 (92)* (2020).

⁴⁰ Stephen J Flanagan, and Irina A. Chindea, Russia, NATO, and Black Sea Security Strategy: Regional Perspectives from a 2019 Workshop. RAND NATIONAL DEFENSE RESEARCH INST SANTA MONICA CA SANTA MONICA, 2019.

⁴¹ Olesya Vartanyan. "Antagonizing the Neighborhood: Putin's Frozen Conflicts and the Conflict in Ukraine": International Crisis Group, 2020.

⁴² Eugene Rumer, and Richard Sokolsky. "Russia's National Security Narrative: All Quiet on the Eastern Front." (2022).

regional states, it sends a clear message to regional states and international community that its strength and capabilities cannot be challenged and it will continue to protect its interests.

Expanding Economic Presence

One of the most important consequences of the end of the Cold War in the Black Sea region is undoubtedly the economic sphere. The Black Sea region, which economically was in second place as the boundary line between the Western and Eastern bloc during the Cold War, after its completion and accession countries such as Bulgaria and Romania, in the process of integration with the West, began to acquire strategic importance. This led to the rapid growth of trade relations between the countries of the region, and the economic development that they began to carry out a positive contribution to the economy of the region⁴³. Black sea is hub of energy and trade, as it connects Europe and Caspian region, Black sea itself is rich of natural resources such as oil and natural gas. Hydrocarbon transportation was one of the most significant in economic development.

Economics plays a pivotal role in Russia's approach to the Black Sea, benefitting its broader strategic objectives. Through energy exports and infrastructure projects, trade and economic integration, investment in regional infrastructure, energy diplomacy, tourism, and financial aid, Russia weaves a complex web of economic dependencies. These efforts not only bolster its regional influence but also provide the economic leverage needed to counter Western influence and ensure the stability and security of its geopolitical interests in the Black Sea region. Black sea is vital for geo-economic strategy of Russia, Russia uses Black sea energy corridors for export and wants to take control over the Black sea. The main goals of Russia in the Black Sea region are: (1) regional dominance in the political, economic and cultural spheres; (2) growth in energy exports and increase in energy prices for hydrocarbons; (3) creation of nuclear power plants; (4) construction of new pipelines to Europe; (5) peaceful and sustainable growth of the region, since in the event of instability, the demand for energy falls. These goals are very important for Russia in the Black sea region.

Energy Projects and Economic Partnerships helps Russia to foster its ties with other states specifically neighboring states. Through Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) provides economic, political, and strategic benefits to Russia in the Black Sea region. It promotes economic collaboration among member states, providing opportunities for trade and investment. Russia is a major economic player in the region, it takes advantage from economic ties. The Black Sea region is a significant for energy transit, and it facilitates cooperation in the energy sector. Russia, as a major energy exporter get benefit from BSEC. Collaborative projects and agreements within the BSEC framework can contribute to the development of energy infrastructure, benefiting Russia's interests in the transportation and sale of energy resources. Economic ties in the Black Sea region strengthen Russia's power. Russia establishes economic relations that go beyond the energy industry through trade agreements, investments, and joint ventures. This economic dependency can be used as a diplomatic tool to improve relations with Black Sea countries. Furthermore, by establishing itself as an economic partner, Russia can strengthen its geopolitical position and it will help to neutralize potential opposition to its military and political activity in the region. Russia boosts its influence in the region through its economic footprint which is developed through energy projects, trade agreements and economic partnerships. Russia uses its soft power tactics, alliances and diplomatic moves to enhance its presence in the region. It helps to build its political clout in the region.

⁴³ Yermekbayev, Adilbek, A. Khairuldayeva, and Zh Medetkhanov. "Russia's Geopolitics in the Black Sea Region." *Халықаралық қатынастар және халықаралық құқық сериясы No4 (92)* (2020).

Through port of Novorossiysk, Russia manages to export crude oil and petroleum to global markets and its one of the largest export terminals for Russia. Russia's investment on this port benefits their economy and enhances the flow of Russian energy exports. Similarly, the Turk stream pipeline is the prime example of cooperation, through this project Russia gas is brought into Turkey and Europe, bypassing Ukraine. It reduces the Russian dependency on the Ukrainian route and it gives more control to Russia over the European energy supplies. The largest economic tool Russia can bring to bear in the Mediterranean, or anywhere, is its vast supply of oil and natural gas. Energy exports have consistently totaled half of its export earnings worldwide. Russia has used its position as the key oil and gas supplier repeatedly against its closest neighbors, such as Ukraine, through rewards and punishment, to keep them in line with its policy choices.⁴⁴

Political Maneuvering

Russia's political maneuvering in the Black sea region is mainly aimed to achieve 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. 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 Turkey 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. Russia after taking over Crimea in 2014 actively engaged into supporting the separatists in Donetsk and Luhansk in Eastern Ukraine by providing them military and financial support. Russia feared that Ukraine might join NATO which will be a direct threat to Russian security so it decided to invade Ukraine in 2022.

Strategic Goals

Russia's strategic goals in Black sea are very clearly defined and they are aimed at growing as a regional power, build its military, secure its economic interests and counter western influence in the region. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation under Vladimir Putin sought to reincorporate Ukraine into its territory and extend its dominance over the Black Sea region. Today, its control of Crimea and the northern waters of the Black Sea, although contested, gives it leverage over the Ukrainian, regional, and international economies, as well as strategic advantages for the projection of military force across the region. The states surrounding the Black Sea generate nearly \$3 trillion in gross domestic product (GDP), include more than 300 million people, and "host assortments of interconnectors that facilitate trade and energy flows between Europe, Eurasia, and the Middle East, and globally beyond. "The Black Sea is a maritime conduit for much of the world's grain supply, and the ongoing conflict in Ukraine has contributed markedly to rising prices for food, fuel, and fertilizer, with Russia's invasion causing an "unprecedented shock" to the global food system⁴⁵.

⁴⁴ Pritchett, Joanna. *Less Than a Full Deck: Russia's Economic Influence in the Mediterranean*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2021.

⁴⁵ <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/A-security-strategy-for-the-black-sea.pdf>

Black sea holds immense significance as it serves as a focal point for its strategies and interests whether it military, economic or geopolitical. Russian policies and strategies are designed to keep Black sea under its influence and control since the time of Tsars as it is connecting Europe, Asia and Middle East. Most of the trade is carried through Black sea, it is rich with oil and other natural resources. It is necessary for Russia to have access to warm water ports for economic and military operations. Russia wants to limit the littoral states from integrating into the western economic and security structures, as it will pose direct threat to Russia due to shared borders.

Military Buildup

Black sea region holds immense geopolitical significance. It is a gateway of Eastern Europe to global sea lines of communication and Mediterranean and it links Europe to Caucasus and Middle East. This region brings together six littoral states Georgia, Russia, Turkey, Bulgaria and Ukraine. These states are building their military after Russian takeover of Crimea and invasion on Ukraine. The region is rich in cultural and ethnic diversity due to geographical closeness and history with Russia. Historical grievances could be used by Moscow to interfere in its neighbors' affairs and pressure regional governments into aligning itself with Russia. By turning regional NATO members into compliance which could intensely weaken the Alliance's internal cohesion its credibility. Russia's strategic worldview has placed considerable importance on militarizing the Black Sea Region (BSR). Black sea has outsized importance in Russia's strategic worldview. Its occupation of Crimea and invasion of Ukraine have only increased this threat. Russia's interest and ongoing activity in the BSR will have serious implications for the United States, NATO, and European security. This region is a key intersection point of the global energy economy, exports of Russia's main commodity and for transit infrastructure. Today, it is a hub of intense conventional war, the most destructive in Europe after World War II. Russia's full scale invasion on Ukraine is the pinnacle of Moscow's gradually increasing militarization of the Black Sea Region, which is clearly seen in the Kremlin's strategic worldview due to cultural and historical factors and it places primacy on the Black sea region. This region is centerpiece of Russia's militarization in recent years due to these strategic drivers. The state Armaments Program in 2011- 2020 focused on the Black Sea Fleet and Southern Military District. The process of increasing military and improving capabilities contributed to Russian interference in the region including the invasion of Ukraine. The Black Sea Fleet has historically been a strategically important part of the Russian Navy, ensuring Russia's military security in the Black Sea and Mediterranean Sea regions. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia inherited a large part of the Soviet Black Sea Fleet and it also leased most of the ships claimed by Ukraine under bilateral agreements of 1997 and 2010. The main port for the fleet remained at Sevastopol, Crimea, under an agreement with Ukraine. The other main base was Novorossiysk in Russia.⁴⁶ The militarization of Crimea by the Russians aimed to consolidate control over the Black Sea and bolster the force projection and the strategic interests of Russia towards the Eastern Mediterranean and North Africa and the Middle East. Russian intentions are to project and change the balance of power in Europe and Mediterranean through a consolidated control in the Black Sea. The Republic of Crimea and Sevastopol were included into the Southern Military district. All the essential civil services had been subsumed to this military effort aiming to support the development of the lodgment area.⁴⁷ Putin has embraced a nationalist approach and justified the militarization of Russia's

⁴⁶ Kuimova, Alexandra. "Russia and Black Sea security." (2018).

⁴⁷ <https://www.newstrategycenter.ro/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/NSC-NUPI-Russian-Policy-in-the-Black-Sea-Region.pdf>

strategy as being designed simply to defend against Western political destabilization and sophisticated military threats.⁴⁸

RUSSIAN INFLUENCE AND REGIONAL STABILITY; ACCESSING GEOPOLITICAL IMPLICATIONS; CASE STUDIES AND EXAMPLES

The regional order in the black sea region is being redefined due to geopolitical struggle and affecting the geopolitical identity and relations among states. Mediterranean and Black sea are considered as one geopolitical space where regional powers are playing their rivalries for their interests. Turkey controls the strait of Bosphorus and Dardanelles and is key actor in the region. For Russia, Black sea plays a crucial role due to its strategic significance and for projection of power over the region. Russia seeks to take advantage of frozen conflicts, instability and by using trade and energy as a political tool. Russia's endeavors in the Black sea are forcing states to integrate with the NATO and EU. Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania are already members of NATO, Georgia and Ukraine are aspirants to join NATO. 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.

Russia's adventures in the region are derived by its historical ambitions of regaining its lost territories and counter the western influence. Black sea holds great importance strategically, whoever controls the Black sea will have the ability to project power over the region. It's one of the most significant trade route that connects Europe, Asia and Middle East. After successful annexation of Crimea in 2014 Russia embarked on a journey of rebuilding its military and taking back its lost territories, in fact it led to revival of Novorossiia concept under which it will regain more territories than originally lost in past. Invasion of Crimea strengthened the Russia's military presence and effected the regional stability as well. It created an environment of instability in the region, relations severed with Ukraine and international community. Russia supported the separatist movements in the Eastern Ukraine, played active role in the frozen conflicts and finally it invaded Ukraine in 2022. It wanted to keep these regions divided and unstable and prohibit them from joining any western economic or security structure. These events led to instability in the region which also effected the broader international community.

Annexation of Crimea 2014

In response to Euro-maiden protests and ousting of pro-Russian president Viktor Yanukovich, Russia finally decided to invade and take over Crimea. It justified its invasion as a way of protecting its people which are related to them ethnically and historically. Moscow maintains a historical claim to Crimea. The Russians colonized Crimea during the reign of Catherine the Great, and they founded Sevastopol — the peninsula's main port and largest city — to be the homeport for the Russian Black Sea Fleet. Following the establishment of the Soviet Union, Crimea was a part of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic until 1954, when it was transferred administratively to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic⁴⁹. After invasion a referendum was done 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

⁴⁸ Flanagan, Stephen, and Irina Chindea. "Russia, NATO, and Black Sea Security Strategy." In *Regional Perspectives from a 2019 Workshop*. Santa Monica. 2019.

⁴⁹ Pifer, S. "Crimea: Six Year after Illegal Annexation. Brookings." (2020).

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 placed sanction over Russia.

Kerch Strait Incident 2008

The Black Sea is an almost landlocked body of water, accessible to the Mediterranean Sea via the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits, both controlled by Turkey. The Black Sea has access to the similarly landlocked Sea of Azov via the Kerch Strait, located between Crimea and Russia. The Black Sea allows warm water access between the North European Russian territory through Kerch and the World Ocean through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits. For these reasons, control over these straits is of strategic importance for the regional powers⁵⁰. Russian forces in November 2018 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. By creating the Kerch strait bridge, it connected Crimea to mainland Russia, this move solidified the Russia's foothold of the region. Though this move was condemned by international community and various sanctions were imposed on Russia.

Invasion of Ukraine

Invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, was a huge shock was for the world, it was first full scale attack after the world war 2. By invading Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin has made plain that he now rejects the foundational principle of the post-World War II order—namely, that international boundaries may not be changed with force alone. Putin foreshadowed his willingness to upend the global order in 2007, during a speech at the Munich Conference on Security Policy. There, he announced that he was “convinced that we have reached that decisive moment when we must seriously think about the architecture of global security. “He directed his criticism at the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), especially the United States, which, in his words, “has overstepped its national borders in every way” and tried to create a “unipolar world” with “one center of authority, one center of force, one center of decision-making. “In this world order, he said, “no one feels safe.”⁵¹ 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 west.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

One of the major strategic aim of Russia is to counter growing NATO influence in the region, it considers it as a direct threat to its sovereignty and dominance. In this region many states are NATO members and others are willing to join NATO, Russia seeks to prevent it neighboring states from western influence as it will impose a direct threat to Russia's sovereignty and security, it will also challenge its traditional

⁵⁰ Kirilova, Neli. "Control of the Black Sea Straits: The Kerch Incident." *PRO PUBLICO BONO: MAGYAR KÖZIGAZGATÁS; A NEMZETI KÖZSZOLGÁLATI EGYETEM KÖZIGAZGATÁS-TUDOMÁNYI SZAKMAI FOLYÓIRATA* 11, no. 3 (2023): 137-160.

⁵¹ Brunk, Ingrid Wuerth, and Monica Hakimi. "Russia, Ukraine, and the future world order." *American Journal of International Law* 116, no. 4 (2022): 687-697.

Novorossiya concept. Russia's actions in the Black sea reflects their agenda of regional dominance and to expand its economic presence in the region.

Russia's strategic goals in Black sea are very clearly defined and they are aimed at growing as a regional power, build its military, secure its economic interests and counter western influence in the region. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian Federation under Vladimir Putin sought to reincorporate Ukraine into its territory and extend its dominance over the Black Sea region. It invaded Crimea for securing the ports for its black sea fleet, it ensures its naval presence in the region. Later in 2022 it invaded Ukraine by full military invasion and took control of the major areas and cities. Today, its control of Crimea and the northern waters of the Black Sea, although contested, gives it leverage over the Ukrainian, regional, and international economies, as well as strategic advantages for the projection of military force across the region. Black sea holds immense significance as it serves as a focal point for its strategies and interests whether it military, economic or geopolitical. Russian policies and strategies are designed to keep Black sea under its influence and control since the time of Tsars as it is connecting Europe, Asia and Middle East.

Most of the trade is carried through Black sea, it is rich with oil and other natural resources. It is necessary for Russia to have access to warm water ports for 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, the global security environment is split into further more regional security complexes and it also highlights the impact of interdependence, identity and norm on the regional security. Regional security complexes are formed due to geographic grouping of states that share similar or closely linked security perspectives and policies. These structures depend upon the shared relationship among the states that is shaped by historical, economic and military ties, political influence that determines how these states perceive and deal with security threats.

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 bolstered 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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