Emerging Insights

A New Security Order in the Black Sea
The Role of Georgia

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

RUSSIA'S WAR against Ukraine has fundamentally destabilised the Black Sea region and caused greater insecurity among the littoral states. The militarisation of the Black Sea as well as Russia's ambitions to strengthen its regional presence have led the transatlantic community to rethink its longstanding approach towards Russia and give greater emphasis to Black Sea security. Georgia, as a non-NATO member littoral state, with an ongoing Russian occupation of part of its territory and facing continual pressure from Moscow through myriad unconventional methods, is in a highly vulnerable position.

This paper analyses Moscow's approach to the Black Sea region and Georgia's role within Russian strategic thinking. It also outlines opportunities to fashion a new inclusive Black Sea security architecture and considers how Georgia can contribute to the emergence of a regional security community to contain Russia and to counter the political fragmentation and isolation that Moscow has promoted across the region in the past two decades. Such an approach offers the opportunity to turn Georgia's challenges into opportunities, and to increase Tbilisi's strategic importance for the transatlantic community.

THE BLACK SEA SECURITY CHALLENGE FOR THE TRANSATLANTIC COMMUNITY

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has transformed the Black Sea security environment.[1] While public statements of Russia's leadership in the days preceding the war indicate that the 2022 military operation is intended to destroy Ukraine as a state and nation, Moscow's current actions are part of a regional strategy that has cohered over the past two decades.[2] Russia's Black Sea policies, thus, form a key element of Moscow's wider revisionist

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1.   The Black Sea is a complex region that combines a central maritime zone with restricted access and the coastal zones of Russia, Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey and Georgia. The littoral areas of the six states link the Black Sea to the regional security complexes of Europe, Eurasia and the Middle East.

2.   In a speech on 21 February 2022, immediately preceding the war, and in a long essay published in July 2021, President Vladimir Putin portrayed Ukraine as an artificial nation and a historical mistake and denied Ukraine its right to exist as a sovereign state. See President of Russia, 'Article by Vladimir Putin: "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians"', 12 July 2021, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181>, accessed 30 September 2022 ; President of Russia, 'Address by the President of the Russian Federation', 21 February 2022, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828>, accessed 30 September 2022. Similar arguments about Ukraine have been made by former President Dmitri Medvedev. See Dmitri Medvedev, 'Why Contacts with the Current Ukrainian Leadership Are Meaningless', *Kommersant*, 11 October 2021, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5028300>, accessed 30 September 2022.

aims to re-establish its international position and overturn the post-Cold War European security order.[3]

Over the past two decades, Russia has steadily built up and extended its regional security presence in the Black Sea, threatening not only Ukraine, but all regional states.[4] Through its Black Sea strategy, Moscow has successfully driven a wedge across the region, undercutting efforts to strengthen Euro-Atlantic ties. At the same time, it has sought to fold the Black Sea into Moscow's orbit through extending its military, political and, latterly, economic control. These policies have been designed to isolate key states in the region – Ukraine, Moldova and those in the South Caucasus – in order to render them vulnerable to Russian influence operations and security pressure, and to question NATO's commitment to defend members Romania and Bulgaria. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has further damaged and fragmented the region.

Russia's Black Sea policies have profoundly altered Georgia's security, both internally and externally. The 2008 Russia–Georgia War marked a key shift by Moscow in its policy towards the Black Sea as it sought to counter Georgia's Euro-Atlantic ambitions. Since the war, Tbilisi has paid a high price for seeking to break away from Russia's regional sphere of influence, with 20% of its territory occupied. Moscow's actions have led to Georgia being a hostage to its proximity to Russia, lacking a border with the EU, and viewed by some of the EU states, such as France, as being in a different geopolitical category from Ukraine and Moldova.[5]

Uncertainty about the security commitment of the Euro-Atlantic community to Georgia has strengthened political forces in the country that have sought to balance the relationship with Moscow. The invasion of Ukraine has reinforced this tendency and risks leading to the further isolation of the country, which would also further consolidate the region as Russia's sphere of influence.

However, Russia's war against Ukraine has rejuvenated the security alliance between the governments of the US and Canada and European states, together with key international partners (Australia and Japan), notably through the multilateral mechanisms of NATO, the G7 and the EU, following a period of uncertainty about the cohesiveness and strategic purpose of the transatlantic community.

3.   Neil J Melvin, *Rebuilding Collective Security in the Black Sea Region*, SIPRI Policy Paper No. 50 (Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2018).

4.   Russia has used military might to undermine the territorial integrity of Georgia and Ukraine but it has also used various unconventional tools against EU member states to undermine their stability and has exerted pressure on Turkey through economic means.

5.   Clea Caulcutt, 'Macron Wants "Clear and Positive" Signal on EU Candidacy for Ukraine, Moldova', *Politico*, 15 June 2022.

The war in Ukraine is therefore a pivotal moment for Georgia and an opportunity to rethink its relations with the transatlantic community and its strategic posture. While a tense internal political landscape and increased political polarisation due to the war has furthered Georgia's isolation, and Russian naval actions have severed ties across the Black Sea, the war has also opened new opportunities to refashion Black Sea security with Georgia as part of a wider regional community. Georgia could play a more important role as a transit corridor for energy, transportation and trade through the Black Sea to the EU, bypassing Russia. Georgia has much to offer due to its geostrategic location, yet its limited maritime capabilities constrain its connections to the wider Black Sea region.

This paper argues that to counter Russia's concerted efforts to build a sphere of privileged influence over neighbouring non-NATO Black Sea countries, the EU and NATO allies must work with key regional partners, notably Georgia – alongside Ukraine and Moldova – to develop its own security strategy to contain Russia within the Black Sea. The aim should be to create a politico-military network of cooperative partnerships focused, in particular, on the Black Sea maritime space. While the NATO alliance must, inevitably, be at the core of such an approach, flexible ad hoc and coalition-of-the-willing security partnerships will need to be promoted beyond the Atlantic Alliance. These will notably involve the US and the UK through their bilateral relationships. Particular attention should also be devoted to building maritime security relations across the Black Sea linking NATO members Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania with non-NATO members Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova. As part of such a strategy, Georgia should look to overcome its current sea blindness to integrate its efforts, including with Ukraine, to strengthen regional security.

The paper first outlines the evolution of Russia's approach to Black Sea security as one of Moscow's core regional interests and identifies the impact of Russia's war against Ukraine for Black Sea security. It then charts Georgia's relationship to Black Sea security and outlines the existing national security policies. Third, it notes the principal lessons of Russia's war against Ukraine for regional security. Fourth, the paper outlines a future security architecture for the Black Sea with the goal of containing Russia in the region. The paper ends with a conclusion on the case for strengthening Black Sea security.

CONTEXTUALISING RUSSIA'S BLACK SEA STRATEGY

Historically, the Black Sea had been a key part of Imperial Russia's strategy for controlling and extending its borders, and a base from which to project power from its Eurasian heartland into the Balkans, the Middle East and the Mediterranean. In the 20th century, the reconstitution of much of the former territories of the Russian Empire as the Soviet Union – alongside the acquisition of further western territories, and the incorporation of Bulgaria and Romania into the Warsaw Pact after the Second World War – effectively turned the Black Sea into a Soviet lake, despite Turkey's presence and ambitions in the region. Contemporary Russian strategic thinking continues the tradition of viewing the Black Sea as central to Moscow's geopolitical

Figure 1: The Black Sea and its Geopolitical Environment

Source: Author generated.

interests, while a nostalgia for Russian regional dominance animates Russian decision-makers, notably President Vladimir Putin.

With the collapse of the Communist bloc in central Europe from the late 1980s and the breakup of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991, Russia's Black Sea position was dramatically curtailed. While this was largely accepted by the immediate post-Soviet leadership,[6] Russia retained a regional security presence through military forces in Moldova and across the South Caucasus. The Russian Black Sea fleet based in Sevastopol in Crimea remained a significant regional force.[7] The onset of a series of regional conflicts with the collapse of the Soviet Union – Transnistria in Moldova, Abkhazia and the so-called South Ossetia in Georgia, Nagorno Karabakh in Azerbaijan, and Chechnya and the wider North Caucasus in Russia itself – promoted a reorientation of Russian security policy to its borders and neighbouring states.

THE EMERGENCE OF RUSSIA'S CONTEMPORARY BLACK SEA STRATEGY

In the mid-2000s, political movements with strong transatlantic orientations overthrew the status quo political orders in Georgia and Ukraine through 'colour revolutions' in 2003 and 2004. Faced with a perceived threat to its

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6.   Melvin, *Rebuilding Collective Security in the Black Sea Region*.

7.   Ben Hodges, Steven Horrell and Ivana Kuz, 'Russia's Militarization of the Black Sea: Implications for the United States and NATO', CEPA, 22 September 2022.

leading regional political and security role, Russia moved to consolidate its Black Sea engagement to counter the influence of NATO and the EU. The Black Sea was transformed into an increasingly competitive political interface between the transatlantic community and Russia, with regional states variously aligned with the two competing security communities.[8]

The growing significance of the Black Sea for Moscow was signalled by the 2008 Russia–Georgia conflict. As of today, roughly two-thirds of Georgia's Black Sea coastline is cut off and placed under the control of Abkhazia, a Russian-occupied de facto state. Following the fighting, Russia moved to cement its influence throughout the South Caucasus by consolidating its military presence in Abkhazia and the so-called South Ossetia and strengthening its military alliance with Armenia.[9] The protracted conflicts and the lack of any security guarantees for Georgia have enabled Moscow to intimidate Tbilisi by using various unconventional and conventional means such as disinformation, economic pressure, cyber warfare and, most importantly, the 'borderisation' policy, entailing the gradual annexation of the Georgian land.[10] In 2020, as a result of Azerbaijan's defeat of Armenian forces in the second war over Nagorno–Karabakh, Moscow achieved its long-held aim of deploying a military force to the breakaway region.[11]

THE CENTRALITY OF THE BLACK SEA FOR RUSSIA'S STRATEGY

The consolidation of Russia's security grip on the South Caucasus from 2008 was a vital element of Moscow's effort to extend its Black Sea reach. At the same time, the maintenance of a fleet at Sevastopol in Crimea has been central to efforts to expand Russia's regional control and as the foundation for power projection.[12] In 2014, with the collapse of the Ukrainian government following the Maidan popular uprising, Russia annexed the whole Crimean peninsula. Moscow argued all previous security agreements with Ukraine concerning Crimea were void and launched a modernisation of its regional military forces, notably focused on the Crimean peninsula.[13] Russian security forces in the South Caucasus were further integrated into a command-

8.   Russia has not, publicly, adopted a Black Sea strategy but rather policymakers, notably Putin, have recognised that several core national security interests intersect in the region and, therefore, have approached the region in an integrated way. See Stephen J Flanagan et al., *Russia, NATO, and Black Sea Security* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2020), Chapter Two.

9.   Melvin, *Rebuilding Collective Security in the Black Sea Region*, pp. 11–13.

10.   Natia Seskuria, 'Russia's "Hybrid Aggression" Against Georgia: The Use of Local and External Tools', Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 21 September 2021.

11.   Joshua Kucera, 'Russia and Turkey Open Joint Military Center in Azerbaijan', *Eurasianet*, 2 February 2021.

12.   Angela Stent, 'Russia's Battle for the Black Sea: Why Moscow's Moves Could Determine the Future of Navigation', *Foreign Affairs*, 16 August 2021.

13.   Keir Giles, *Assessing Russia's Reorganized and Rearmed Military,* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 3 May 2017.

and-control system centred on Russia's southern military district.[14] With the annexation of Crimea and the onset of conflict in eastern Ukraine, the Russian forces in Transnistria emerged as a potential second front against Ukraine and a means for Russia to achieve the Novorossiya (New Russia) project, linking up territories across southern Ukraine as far as Moldova.[15]

The extension of Russian military power in the Black Sea has been central to Russia's wider ambitions to project power into neighbouring regions, notably in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East.[16] The Black Sea Fleet and the Southern Military District have served as the primary base for deploying units for the military intervention in Syria from 2015.[17] Russian forces in the Black Sea also function as a key part of a renewed Russian military power projection capability into the Indian Ocean, building on existing or planned military facilities in Syria and the Red Sea.[18]

PUTIN'S PLAN TO FURTHER RECONFIGURE BLACK SEA REGIONAL SECURITY

On 24 February 2022, Russia launched a full-scale military invasion of Ukraine officially designed to 'demilitarise and de-Nazify Ukraine' and, in effect, to destroy Ukraine as state and nation.[19] Ensuring Ukraine's neutral status was also presented as a Russian goal alongside the long-term aim of preventing an expansion of the transatlantic security community and a modernisation of Ukrainian defence capabilities. If successful, Russia would have been able to achieve a radical rebalancing of the Black Sea regional security situation in its favour.

The February invasion appeared initially to have furthered Russia's regional goal, as Ukraine faced annihilation as a country. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky indicated that Ukraine would be ready to accept a neutral status and become a non-aligned and 'non-nuclear' state, with no foreign military bases

The extension of Russian military power in the Black Sea has been central to Russia's wider ambitions to project power into neighbouring regions

14. Melvin, *Rebuilding Collective Security in the Black Sea Region*, pp. 17–26.

15. Adrian A Basora and Aleksandr Fisher, 'Putin's "Greater Novorossiya" – the Dismemberment of Ukraine', E-Notes, Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2 May 2014, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2014/05/putins-greater-novorossiya-the-dismemberment-of-ukraine/>, accessed 12 September 2022.

16. Igor Delanoe, 'Russia's Black Sea Fleet: Toward a Multiregional Force', CAN Occasional Paper, June 2019.

17. Igor Delanoë, 'Russian Naval Forces in the Syrian War', Foreign Policy Research Institute, September 2020.

18. President of Russia, 'The Naval Doctrine of the Russian Federation Was Approved', 31 July 2022, <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/news/69084>, accessed 12 September 2022.

19. President of Russia, 'Address by the President of the Russian Federation', 24 February 2022, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>, accessed 12 September 2022; President of Russia, 'Address by the President of the Russian Federation', 21 February 2022, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828>, accessed 12 September 2022.

or contingents on its territory.[20] Subsequently, the human rights abuses perpetrated by Russian occupation forces on Ukrainian civilians and the failure of the Russian military to achieve its initial goals led to a collapse of further talks. Russia reverted to seizing territory by force and incorporating occupied regions into Russia, following the playbook of its operation in Ukraine in 2014.[21]

The February attack also served to further the isolation of Georgia and its estrangement from the Transatlantic community, which Moscow has pursued since the 2008 Russia–Georgia War. While NATO has gradually developed its security partnership with Georgia, the Alliance has been unprepared to offer a Membership Action Plan to Tbilisi.[22] In the absence of a credible security guarantee from NATO and lacking significant regional allies, Georgia has been vulnerable to Russian pressure, notably regarding the possible annexation of the regions of Abkhazia and the so-called South Ossetia.[23] As the war progressed, the Georgian government maintained a distance from Kyiv and did not enforce Western sanctions. Domestically, these actions deepened political polarisation and led to rising tensions between Georgia and its transatlantic partners as Tbilisi's commitment to Euro–Atlantic integration was questioned.[24]

Russia's military invasion also led to a wider regional pullback by the transatlantic community. Ahead of the war in Ukraine, President Joe Biden and other Western leaders were quick to signal that the US would not go to war for Ukraine, and by implication for other non-member states (Georgia). NATO, thus, abandoned its position of strategic ambiguity regarding security guarantees towards its Black Sea regional partners, which it had previously signalled through building up military assistance and training and conducting regular Black Sea military exercises.[25] At the same time, Turkey's decision to close the Turkish Straits to all warships, rather than just restricting access to naval craft of parties to the conflict as set out in the Montreux Convention, prevented non-regional powers

20. *BBC News*, 'Zelensky Says Ukraine Prepared to Discuss Neutrality in Peace Talks', 28 March 2022.

21. President of Russia, 'Signing of Agreements on the Admission of the DPR, LPR, Zaporozhye and Kherson Regions to Russia', 30 September 2022, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/69465>, accessed 12 September 2022.

22. Nini Gabritchidze, 'More NATO Aid for Georgia, but no Progress on Membership', *Eurasianet*, 1 July 2022.

23. Moscow's recognition in February 2022 of the independence of the two occupied regions of Ukraine, Donetsk and Luhansk paved the way for the former de facto leader of South Ossetia, Anatoly Bibilov, to announce a referendum on unification with Russia, once again threatening Georgia. See Joshua Kucera, 'Questions Surround South Ossetian Referendum on Joining Russia', *Eurasianet*, 16 May 2022.

24. Kornely Kakachia and Bidzina Lebanidze, 'Georgia's Crossroad After Crossroad: Paths of Risk and Resilience', PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 792, 6 September 2022.

25. Neil Melvin, 'The West Surrenders its Strategic Ambiguity in the Black Sea', *RUSI Commentary*, 21 December 2021.

from challenging Russia's maritime pre-eminence, further weakening NATO's Black Sea position.[26]

MOSCOW'S DRIVE TO CONTROL THE BLACK SEA MARITIME SPACE

Domination of the maritime Black Sea has been a goal for Russia's regional strategy to threaten NATO and non-NATO partners from the sea, but it has also allowed Moscow to divide the region and to isolate countries. The Black Sea Fleet and access to Sevastopol have been at the core of this policy. Already in its war with Georgia in 2008, Russia used its naval forces to attack the country and destroy its navy. In 2014, Russia's annexation of Crimea involved the seizure by Russia of about three-quarters of Ukraine's naval fleet, which was based there, along with support facilities and repair yards.[27]

With the onset of the war in 2022, control of the Black Sea maritime space was a key component of Russia's military plan and its economic strategy to cut Ukraine off from resupply by sea, strangle its trade and prevent Ukrainian grain exports. Initially, the Russian navy dominated the northern part of the Black Sea, between Crimea and Ukraine, tying down defenders to repel a possible amphibious assault. Russia also used its ships to launch missile strikes across Ukraine and to capture the Ukrainian outpost at Snake Island. These actions threatened Ukraine and provided Russia with a forward position near Romania. Russia also imposed a naval blockade on merchant shipping. Russia and Ukraine are also reported to have laid sea mines.[28]

Faced with a superior force, Ukraine responded asymmetrically.[29] Drones, notably the Turkish supplied Bayraktar TB2, have provided maritime reconnaissance, and been used to strike ships and Snake Island.[30] Missiles, often used in conjunction with drones, have played a vital role. On 14 April 2022, the flagship of the Black Sea Fleet, the cruiser *Moskva*, was sunk following an attack by two Ukrainian Neptune anti-ship missiles.[31] Ukraine's naval capabilities have been enhanced by the supply of Harpoon missiles, which were used to sink a Russian supply ship.[32] The supply of Brimstone missiles has

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26. Cornell Overfield, 'Turkey Must Close the Turkish Straits Only to Russian and Ukrainian Warships', *Lawfare*, 5 March 2022.

27. Megan Eckstein, 'After 2014 Decimation, Ukrainian Navy Rebuilds to Fend off Russia', *Defense News*, 9 August 2021.

28. Lorenzo Tondo, 'Sea Mines: The Deadly Danger Lurking in Ukraine's Waters', *The Guardian*, 11 July 2022.

29. Christopher Miller and Paul McCleary, 'Ukraine Has Hobbled Russia's Black Sea Fleet. Could it Turn the Tide of the War?', *Politico*, 29 August 2022.

30. H I Sutton, 'Incredible Success of Ukraine's Bayraktar TB2: The Ghost of Snake Island', *Naval News*, 18 May 2022.

31. *BBC News*, 'Russian Warship: Moskva Sinks in Black Sea', 15 April 2022.

32. Shaurav Gairola, 'Ukraine Crisis: Denmark to Provide Harpoon Missile System to Ukraine', *Janes*, 24 May 2022; Tayfun Ozberk, 'Ukraine Strikes Russia's Vasily Bekh Rescue Tug with Antiship Missiles', *Naval News*, 17 June 2022.

made amphibious assaults much harder.[33] In October 2022, Ukraine launched an attack on Russian facilities and vessels in the Sevastopol harbour using a combination of maritime and air drones, further highlighting the potential of asymmetric approaches to challenge Russia's Black Sea naval forces.[34]

As a result of Ukraine's actions, the Russian Black Sea naval force has been marginalised. The Russian Navy has been forced to patrol well away from the Ukrainian coast or remain in port, with offensive operations limited to cruise missile launches. Even the most modern Russian frigates, the *Admiral Grigorovich*-class, have been forced to operate in a defensive manner, while Russia's submarines, its most potent Black Sea weapon, were reported to have been redeployed to the port of Novorossiysk in Russia.[35]

GEORGIA AND BLACK SEA SECURITY

The August 2008 war and the subsequent regional military buildup were Russia's first major step towards transforming the Black Sea into its own lake. Subsequently, Georgia's security thinking has been heavily focused on obtaining security guarantees from the transatlantic community.[36] A large majority of the population, 77%, is in favour of NATO membership aspirations, and support has been increasing since the Ukraine war.[37] As a NATO Enhanced Opportunities Partner, Georgia enjoys support in terms of increasing defence capabilities and implementing critical reforms in the security sector, and participates in joint military exercises that are highly valuable for the Georgian Defence Forces. Georgia contributed to the Resolute Support Assistance Force in Afghanistan and the Resolute Support Mission, and its overall contribution to international missions exceeded that of many NATO member states.[38]

> The August 2008 war and the subsequent regional military buildup were Russia's first major step towards transforming the Black Sea into its own lake

33. Thomas Newdick, 'Brimstone Precision-Guided Missiles Are Headed to Ukraine within Weeks', *The Warzone*, 28 April 2022, <https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/brimstone-precision-guided-missiles-are-headed-to-ukraine-within-weeks>, accessed 20 September 2022.
34. Luke Harding and Isobel Koshiw, 'Russia's Black Sea Flagship Damaged in Crimea Drone Attack, Video Suggests', *The Guardian*, 30 October 2022.
35. H I Sutton, 'Russian Navy Kilo Class Submarines Retreating from Crimea', *Naval News*, 14 September 2022.
36. Svetlana Alimova, 'PM Gharibashvili: NATO Membership to be Top Priority Enshrined in Georgian Constitution', *First Channel*, 17 March 2021, <https://1tv.ge/lang/en/news/pm-gharibashvili-nato-membership-to-be-top-priority-enshrined-in-georgian-constitution/>, accessed 20 September 2022.
37. *Interpress News*, 'NDI Poll: 83% of Respondents Approve Georgia's Goal to Join EU, 77% Support Joining NATO', 27 January 2022, <https://www.interpressnews.ge/en/article/117966-ndi-poll-83-of-respondents-approve-georgias-goal-to-join-eu-77-support-joining-nato/>, accessed September 2022.
38. NATO, 'Relations with Georgia', last updated 14 July 2022, <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_38988.htm>, accessed 20 September 2022.

Despite visible efforts and progress in the NATO–Georgia partnership, NATO's presence in the Black Sea remains limited. Following the 2014 Russian military incursion in Ukraine and annexation of Crimea, NATO established an Enhanced Forward Presence in the Baltic Sea region, while a Tailored Forward Presence was deployed in the Black Sea region. Yet, in light of Russia's increasingly aggressive policies, the Tailored Forward Presence, focused on the western littoral area, has been insufficient for ensuring Black Sea security and has left Georgia increasingly vulnerable to the Russian threat due to the dominant presence of the Russian Navy in Georgia's littoral waters.

Turkey, as the key NATO ally in the Black Sea, has been trying to play a balancing role, and has sought to compartmentalise its relations in the region. Turkey has maintained ties with Russia during the war while supplying Ukraine militarily. Ankara has also sought to maintain the Black Sea as a Russian–Turkish condominium, and to limit access by powerful external powers – notably the US. Thus, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has sought to avoid burning bridges with Moscow for political and economic reasons, to strictly follow the Montreux Convention to restrict Black Sea naval access, and to avoid taking any decisions that may cause long-term damage in Turkish–Russian relations.

GEORGIA AND THE WAR IN UKRAINE

Georgia remains committed to joining NATO as the best way to deter further Russian aggression and to develop an effective national deterrence. While NATO membership would not solve Georgia's territorial disputes, it would provide effective deterrence against Russian policies of borderisation, continuing attempts to intimidate Georgia and the threats of escalation. It has, however, been more than a decade since the Bucharest Summit of 2008, and Georgia's membership prospects remain frozen.[39] Although the war in Ukraine has forced the West to rethink its policies, Georgia's NATO membership remains a distant prospect given scepticism from countries such as France and Germany. With the regional security dynamic changing quickly, Georgia's security thinking must go beyond NATO to identify ways to develop security ties within a Black Sea security framework.

Despite statements by senior Georgian politicians, stressing the importance of partnerships between the Black Sea littoral states, there is a lack of shared vision among key players.[40] Some of the existing cooperation formats – primarily designed to boost economic and trade links – such as the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (including Russia), the Black Sea

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39.   NATO, 'Bucharest Summit Declaration', 3 April 2008, <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm>, accessed 20 September 2022.

40.   Michael Peel and Henry Foy, 'Georgia's President Aims to Deepen Nato Ties on Black Sea Security', *Financial Times*, 24 January 2019; see also *Agenda.ge*, 'Georgian Defence Minister Raises Black Sea Regional Challenges at Atlantic-Black Sea Security Forum', 12 July 2022, <https://agenda.ge/en/news/2022/2660>, accessed 2 November 2022.

Trade and Development Bank, or the Georgia–Ukraine–Azerbaijan–Moldova (GUAM) framework – have not resulted in any meaningful output.[41] The war in Ukraine is an opportunity to rethink existing formats and replace them with more functional ones based on shared commitments and security concerns. Most importantly, given the particularly challenging security environment, the NATO member and non-NATO member littoral states must cooperate more closely.

At the time when Russia is attempting to dominate the Black Sea, it is important to create new opportunities to improve connectivity. Strategic projects such as the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan oil pipeline, the Baku–Tbilisi–Erzurum gas pipeline and the Baku–Tbilisi–Akhalkalaki–Kars railway have significantly boosted Georgia's strategic importance and had a positive impact on regional security. As the West is cutting links with Russia, alternative routes to Western markets for trade, transport and energy through the Black Sea and the South Caucasus are becoming increasingly important. Georgia can position itself as a key transit route and connectivity hub.

The highly anticipated and delayed Anaklia deep-sea port is one example of how Georgia can make itself a reliable transit route, benefiting from economic gains while at the same time enhancing its Black Sea geostrategic importance for NATO.[42] Given Georgia's vulnerabilities in the maritime space, strategic projects such as the Anaklia port could turn Georgia into a logistic hub in the Caucasus, attracting foreign direct investment into the country.

Given Turkey's leading role in the Black Sea, but also its balancing approach with Russia, finding ways to engage Ankara more in regional security as part of a strengthened transatlantic regional presence and to shift Ankara away from Moscow, are key challenges. Turkey has been one of the strongest supporters of Georgia's NATO integration, together with the UK, US and the Baltic States. Georgia and Turkey have a strategic partnership involving cooperation in military, economic and energy spheres. This creates an opportunity for Georgia to increase cooperation with Turkey bilaterally and multilaterally on strategic projects and to make Ankara a stronger stakeholder in Georgia's security. Georgia should also look to work closely with regional state groupings, notably those closely aligned with NATO.[43]

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41. Ben Hodges, 'The Black Sea … or a Black Hole?', Strategy Paper, CEPA, January 2021.

42. Maximilian Hess and Maia Otarashvili, 'Georgia's Doomed Deep-Sea Port Ambitions: Geopolitics of the Cancelled Anaklia Project', Foreign Policy Research Institute, October 2020.

43. Russia's war against Ukraine has promoted the revival of the sub-regional grouping, bringing together Georgia–Ukraine–Azerbaijan–Moldova (GUAM). This sort of cooperation is vital in the region and should form part of the developing network of ties making up a broader Black Sea security community. See Paul Goble, 'Putin's War in Ukraine Leading to Revival of GUAM', *Eurasian Daily Monitor* (Vol. 19, No. 148, 2022).

Having strong ties with Ukraine is pivotal for Georgia's Black Sea ambitions, not least because Kyiv is becoming a significant regional military power as a result of the war with Russia. Yet, in the past couple of years relations have been strained due to political disagreements and Russian efforts to divide the region.[44] The war has made the gap in relations between Kyiv and Tbilisi even wider. The Ukrainian government has often criticised Georgia for the lack of support for Ukraine and accommodating policies towards Russia.[45] The Georgian government has explained its policy of abstaining from joining sanctions against Russia, pointing to its own security concerns and need to avoid taking provocative steps towards Moscow, while Georgia does not have any leverage against Russia through its sanctions. No matter how complicated relations are, Georgia's future depends on the outcome of the war in Ukraine. Therefore, it is pivotal to set the past disagreements aside, work in concert to deter and contain Russian aggression, and to strengthen ties to NATO and key members of the Alliance.

Yet, under the current circumstances, when relations between the two countries have been deteriorating further and Ukrainian intelligence has even accused Georgia of helping Russians to evade sanctions,[46] it would take a lot of effort and political will for the two countries to cooperate.

Lacking a land border with the EU, the Black Sea serves as a bridge to the EU for Georgia. Cooperation with Bulgaria and Romania must remain equally important for Georgia. Romania has been a strong supporter of forging close cooperation within the Black Sea security framework. In light of the war in Ukraine, Romania's strategic importance in the region has further increased.[47] The recent decision to sign a declaration on strategic partnership between Georgia and Romania is a positive development that must be used by Tbilisi to improve Georgia's connectivity within the region. Romania, Georgia and Azerbaijan are already working on a strategic project involving the construction of an electric cable in the Green Electricity Corridor connecting the Caspian Sea to the Black Sea and the EU.[48] Georgia has had a solid trading relationship with Bulgaria, yet it is important to scale up the cooperation, particularly with regard to communications, transport and energy fields.

> The war has made the gap in relations between Kyiv and Tbilisi even wider

44. Nini Gabritchidze, 'Amid War, Bitter Exchanges Continue to Spoil Tbilisi-Kyiv Relations', *Eurasianet*, 4 May 2022.

45. Giorgi Lomsadze, 'Ukraine Recalls Ambassador from Georgia', *Eurasianet*, 1 March 2022.

46. OC Media, 'Ukrainian Intelligence Accuses Georgia of Allowing Russia to Dodge Sanctions', 5 April 2022, <https://oc-media.org/ukrainian-intelligence-accuses-georgia-of-allowing-russia-to-dodge-sanctions/>, accessed 28 October 2022.

47. Civil.ge, 'Georgia Signs Strategic Partnership Declaration with Romania', 12 October 2022, <https://civil.ge/archives/511418>, accessed 28 October 2022.

48. Andrei Chirileasa, 'Romania Talks Power, Internet Cables Under the Black Sea with Georgia', *Romania Insider*, 12 October 2022, <https://www.romania-insider.com/romania-georgia-talks-power-cables-black-sea>, accessed 28 October 2022.

Developing maritime security cooperation is a priority for Georgia given its vulnerabilities and geostrategic position. In 2008, Russia launched air and sea offensives and destroyed most of the Georgian navy. Following the war, given the level of damage, the decision was made not to rebuild the navy and, instead, to merge its remnants with the Border Police Coast Guard.[49] NATO military assistance subsequently has focused on the land and air warfare aspects of national defence. Ukraine's ability to effectively challenge Russia's naval forces points, however, to opportunities for Georgia to take on a new role in Black Sea maritime and naval security, notably in partnership with other regional and extra-regional states. While the Coast Guard takes an active part in multilateral training and exercises, Georgia currently lacks maritime defence capabilities.

Developing naval and civilian maritime capabilities and building the partnerships to operate as part of a Black Sea maritime security community should now be a national security priority. Yet, setting such a priority requires appropriate budgetary resources. Georgia falls short in this aspect. The only realistic way at this point is to work with the West and primarily the US and the UK. Given existing challenges in the Black Sea, Georgia has a solid ground to convince partners to invest in developing its maritime capabilities to enable Tbilisi to join forces with Romania and Ukraine, as well as Turkey, the US and the UK, to limit Russia's Black Sea naval position.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR A NEW BLACK SEA SECURITY ORDER

In response to Moscow's actions, the transatlantic community has begun to reconfigure its Black Sea engagement. At the June 2022 Madrid NATO Summit, the Alliance committed to building up its military forces in Romania and Bulgaria.[50] In June, the EU granted Ukraine, together with Moldova, candidate status for accession to the EU (with Georgia granted the perspective to become a member with the decision recommending candidate status deferred until certain conditions are met).[51] Russia's attack against Ukraine

49.   Luke Coffey, 'The U.S. Must Ensure NATO's Door Remains Open to Georgia and Ukraine', Middle East Institute, 27 May 2021, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/us-must-ensure-natos-door-remains-open-georgia-and-ukraine>, accessed 28 October 2022.

50.   NATO, 'Madrid Summit Declaration', 29 June 2022, <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_196951.htm>, accessed 20 September 2022.

51.   European Council, 'European Council Conclusions on Ukraine, the Membership Applications of Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, West Balkans and External Relations 23 June 2022', press release, 23 June 2022, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/06/23/european-council-conclusions-on-ukraine-the-membership-applications-of-ukraine-the-republic-of-moldova-and-georgia-western-balkans-and-external-relations-23-june-2022/>, accessed 20 September 2022.

has led to members of the Alliance supplying Ukraine with large amounts of military equipment and supplies, training and economic support.

Russia's attack on Ukraine is likely to mark the highpoint of Moscow's Black Sea regional strategy. Ukraine's effective resistance and the new NATO military commitments will mean that Moscow's future Black Sea actions will have to overcome an increasingly well-armed and organised Ukrainian military, closely connected to strengthened NATO regional forces. The war has highlighted that Russia's domination of the maritime space, which is crucial for its wider regional strategy, is far from assured and can be countered.

Even in the event that Moscow is defeated in Ukraine and is confronted by a shift in the regional balance of forces, Russia will remain a Black Sea security threat, with the potential to attack and destabilise its neighbours. While NATO's new regional focus on defence and deterrence offers a strengthening of the western shore of the Black Sea, the Alliance's regional reach is constrained by the lack of political consensus on further eastern enlargement. The transatlantic community has yet to articulate a clear security vision for the Black Sea as a whole, leaving key parts of the region, notably Georgia, vulnerable to continuing Russian aggression. This suggests that to limit Russia's future ability to destabilise the region, the transatlantic community should develop and begin to implement its own Black Sea security strategy without delay. Such a strategy should be built around four pillars.

CONTAINING RUSSIA IN THE BLACK SEA

With Russia's war against Ukraine ongoing, the future security position of the Black Sea region remains in flux and largely contingent on the outcomes of the war. Nevertheless, some important conclusions can already be drawn from the conflict and its impact on regional security. Russia's actions have confirmed that the Moscow leadership is wedded to an expansive regional security agenda that not only involves the use of military force against regional states but also the annexation of neighbouring territories into Russia as part of an expanding Russian State and Russian World (Russkii Mir), and an effort to rebuild Russia as a global power.[52] The transatlantic community cannot hope to respond effectively to Russia's Black Sea agenda unless it adopts a strategy designed to contain and counter Moscow across the region. Given the security geography of the Black Sea, this will require that key regional partners Ukraine, Georgia and potentially others (such as Moldova) are an integral part of the strategy.

NATO's geopolitical centre of gravity in the Black Sea is shifting from the Turkish Straits to the northwest of the region. This is because of the increased

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52. President of Russia, 'Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of September 5, 2022 No. 611, "On Approval of the Concept of the Humanitarian Policy of the Russian Federation Abroad"', 5 September 2022, <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202209050019?index=1&rangeSize=1; http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/69465>, accessed 20 September 2022.

NATO commitment to Romania and Bulgaria, but fundamentally because Ukraine will likely emerge from Russia's invasion as a significant land force, employing NATO standard equipment, and likely capable of deterring future Russian attacks. If not a member of the Alliance, Ukraine will be operating in close coordination with NATO regional forces.[53] Ukraine will, thus, emerge as the regional pivot for efforts to contain Russia.

While these developments will limit the possibilities for Russia to attack NATO territory, to extend its control into Ukraine and to control maritime areas in the northeast of the Black Sea, Russia will likely continue to be a regional threat through its powerful maritime forces and position in the South Caucasus. If Russia is to be effectively contained, the transatlantic community must design a regional approach that addresses Russian naval strength and incorporates non-NATO members, notably Ukraine and Georgia, into that strategy.

CHALLENGING RUSSIA'S MARITIME ADVANTAGE

In the 2022 Maritime Strategy, Russia signalled that it retains significant naval ambitions in the Black Sea, the Sea of Azov and the Eastern Mediterranean as 'important areas' where the Russian navy must secure national interests from an economic and security point of view.[54] Although Ukraine has been able to curtail Russia's dominance of the sea and air around its coast, the Russian Black Sea fleet remains a significant force of 30–40 frontline warships. The deployment of *Gorshkov*-class frigates equipped with cruise and hypersonic missiles to the Black Sea and the four modernised *Kilo*-class submarines provides Russia with a capability to threaten the region, and beyond.

NATO has sought to counter the Russian naval threat through regular Black Sea patrols as well as naval exercises, such as the annual *Sea Breeze* Exercises with Ukraine.[55] Access for NATO naval forces is, however, constrained by the Montreux Convention, which places considerable constraints on the transit time, tonnage, numbers and types of warships that can enter the Black Sea. In connection with the current war in Ukraine, Turkey has closed

53.   Anders Fogh Rasmussen and Andrii Yermak, 'The Kyiv Security Compact: International Security Guarantees for Ukraine: Recommendations', 13 September 2022, <https://www.president.gov.ua/storage/j-files-storage/01/15/89/41fd0ec2d72259a561313370cee1be6e_1663050954.pdf>, accessed 23 September 2022.

54.   President of Russia, 'Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of July 31, 2022 No. 512: On the Approval of the Maritime Doctrine of the Russian Federation', 31 July 2020, <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/48215>, accessed 23 September 2022.

55.   US European Command, 'Exercise Sea Breeze 2021', 12 July 2021, <https://www.eucom.mil/article/41418/exercise-sea-breeze-2021>, accessed 23 September 2022.

the Turkish Straits to all navies, not just belligerent states, placing NATO at a disadvantage.[56]

Ukraine's action against Russian maritime forces highlights, however, that Moscow's ability to operate its naval forces can be significantly constrained even without the use of high-end NATO warships.[57] Given uncertainty over Turkey's willingness to permit access to the Black Sea by NATO naval forces, the focus should be on building up appropriate naval capacities in Romania and Bulgaria, strengthening the regional deployment of NATO airborne anti-submarine and anti-ship capabilities, building up key maritime capabilities in Ukraine, and creating new maritime capabilities for Georgia, with the assistance of the US, the UK, Turkey and other NATO allies, that are linked to those of Ukraine and NATO forces.

BUILDING A TRANSATLANTIC BLACK SEA SECURITY COMMUNITY

The current NATO strategy to deter Russian aggression in the Black Sea region, with the focus on territorial defence and deterrence, is insufficient to contain Russia regionally. Further, the three NATO Black Sea member states – Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey – have been unable to establish a common Black Sea security approach to counter Russia's threat, reflecting political differences and varying threat assessments.[58] While Ukraine and Georgia may eventually join NATO and the EU, their membership prospects remain uncertain and distant. The NATO security framework is, therefore, unlikely to be sufficient for building security throughout the Black Sea region.

Containing Russia in the Black Sea can, thus, only be effective if it is structured around a variable geometry security architecture involving NATO and its Black Sea members (and the EU around resilience), extra-regional NATO members operating in a bilateral way, and key NATO partner nations (Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova). The approach should build politico-military cooperation across these groups around an enhanced NATO land and air presence, notably in Romania and Bulgaria as well as countries neighbouring Ukraine (Poland, Slovakia and Hungary). This should be supported with an ongoing commitment

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56. Jim Zanotti and Clayton Thomas, 'Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: Turkey's Response and Black Sea Access Issues', *Congressional Research Service Insight*, IN11885, 11 March 2022.

57. H I Sutton, 'Ukraine Is Turning the Tide Against Russian Navy in Black Sea', *Naval News*, 6 July 2022.

58. Prior to the war of 2022, Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey had different threat perceptions and relations with Russia. While Romania saw Russia as a threat, Bulgaria was less concerned, while Turkey sought to balance with Russia in the region. Following Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, discussions within NATO were launched about building up an Alliance permanent Black Sea naval force, involving the three-member state forces. Bulgaria ultimately opposed this initiative, together with Turkey, reflecting Ankara's longstanding position of limiting the role of NATO in the Black Sea. See Melvin, *Rebuilding Collective Security in the Black Sea Region*, p. 58.

to NATO Black Sea naval deployments, and with measures to enhance military maritime capabilities of NATO Black Sea countries, and ad hoc groupings to strengthen cooperation with Georgia and Ukraine on key capabilities, and possibly other states (Moldova and those of the South Caucasus).

In developing such an approach, existing experiences drawn from NATO's Framework Nation Concept are relevant.[59] The framework is designed to promote regional specialisation in contexts where not all nations have equal capabilities, and while one (NATO) nation will lead, not all participants need be NATO members and there is no requirement for unanimity for cooperation or action.[60]

DEVELOPING KEY BLACK SEA SECURITY CAPABILITIES

The war against Ukraine has highlighted that Russian forces are vulnerable, including in the maritime domain. In seeking to advance regional containment through the creation of a Black Sea security community, the focus should be on building up integrated capabilities:

- The periodic deployment of NATO warships to the Black Sea offers advanced capabilities but the need for access through the Turkish Straits limits the utility of this approach.[61] More must be done to develop the naval capabilities of Romania and Bulgaria, including through submarines.[62] NATO should ensure that it can bring sufficient airborne anti-submarine, anti-surface and ISR aircraft to the region.
- After 2014, the US, the UK and other NATO allies helped Ukraine to rebuild its navy focusing on a 'mosquito fleet' based on acquiring small, fast vessels to protect inshore waters.[63] Ukrainian naval forces should be further developed around the original idea of the mosquito fleet, including being armed with anti-ship missiles and torpedoes. Georgia should also aim to develop similar capabilities, though clearly in smaller numbers, that are interoperable with Ukraine, and with both sets of forces training with NATO maritime forces.[64] Ukraine

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59. Sean Monaghan and Ed Arnold, 'Indispensable: NATO's Framework Nations Concept Beyond Madrid', CSIS Briefs, 27 June 2022.

60. The UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force has, for example, evolved from conducting military exercises into a mechanism for joint strategic planning and for regular ministerial and even summit meetings. It is also part of the security guarantees that are protecting Sweden and Finland as they transition to full NATO membership.

61. Zanotti and Thomas, 'Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: Turkey's Response and Black Sea Access Issues'.

62. Xavier Vavasseur, 'Romania's Submarine Ambitions: Which Impact for the Black Sea Region?', *Naval News*, 20 July 2022.

63. Xavier Vavasseur, 'SAFE Boats Contracted for Six More Mk VI Patrol Boats for Ukraine', *Naval News*, 2 October 2021.

64. Grace Howard, 'Georgia Is the Key to the Black Sea', *Proceedings* (Vol. 146/5/1, 407, May 2020).

could invest in adding weapons, lengthening deployments and acquiring ships that could patrol the more open waters of the Black Sea in coordination with NATO and other partner forces. Ukraine could acquire additional corvettes and, eventually, frigates.[65]

- The UK is assisting Ukraine to develop autonomous mine-hunting capabilities.[66] This support should be extended to Georgia to develop an interoperable capability between Kyiv and Tbilisi.
- Land-launched anti-ship cruise missiles have been effective against Russian naval forces. Such capabilities could be offered to Georgia, for example, the Ukrainian Neptune and US harpoon missiles.[67]
- Georgia could be provided with air defence systems, such as AMRAAM and Sky Sabre, to intercept Russian ship-launched cruise missiles and to provide protection to its anti-ship missile systems.
- Ukraine's use of drones has been an important part of neutralising Russian naval forces. Georgia should develop its own capabilities for maritime drones to strengthen its ISR, and also to strike naval targets. Turkey could assist Georgia to develop this capability. The UK, and others, should assist Georgia in developing the capability to deploy maritime drones capable of conducting ISR and attacking Russian vessels.
- The strengthening of regional ISR capabilities offers an opportunity for intelligence sharing among members of a Black Sea security community. This could be complemented by joint efforts to strengthen maritime domain awareness across the Black Sea, through the provision of modern radars and the coordination of information through fusion centres, and through ensuring interoperability.
- Support for the development of Georgia's coast guard should be continued and extended to provide protection to ports and critical infrastructure, including from cyber attacks.[68]
- Due to the uncertain prospects of NATO membership, it remains highly important to increase Georgia's links to the reinforced NATO presence being established on the western littoral of the Black Sea following the Madrid NATO Summit through secondments and military exercises and training.
- The Kremlin has been using various tools such as disinformation, economic pressure and cyber threats to coerce Georgia and create uncertain internal political dynamics that threaten the country's European and Euro-Atlantic integration aspirations. NATO could establish a Centre of Excellence in countering hybrid threats in Tbilisi, highlighting the Alliance's commitments to Black Sea security.

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65. Tayfun Ozberk, 'Turkish Shipyard Launches Ukraine's 1st MILGEM Corvette', *Naval News*, 3 October 2022.

66. Ministry of Defence and Jeremy Quin, 'UK Signs Agreement to Support Enhancement of Ukrainian Naval Capabilities', 23 June 2021.

67. Adam Taylor and Claire Parker, '"Neptune" Missile Strike Shows Strength of Ukraine's Homegrown Weapons', *Washington Post*, 15 April 2022.

68. George Allison, 'NATO Conducts Talks, Training with Georgia', *UK Defence Journal*, 17 October 2022.

STRENGTHENING BLACK SEA SECURITY

For two decades, Russia has sought to implement a Black Sea strategy designed to establish a sphere of influence in the region and to undercut and push back the transatlantic community. The 2022 war against Ukraine was designed to further this strategy. However, Russia's aim to destroy Ukraine has failed, and Russia is likely to emerge from the war as a diminished security actor. NATO is strengthening its Black Sea presence, notably in Romania and Bulgaria, while Ukraine is emerging as a major regional military force and a pivotal country for the future of Black Sea security.

Despite the setbacks in Ukraine, Russia's political and military leadership is committed to sphere of influence policies in the Black Sea and Russia will continue to be a capable regional military force. Further, the regional fragmentation that Moscow has promoted remains a challenge that undermines efforts to contain Russian expansionism. Georgia, in particular, has become increasingly isolated from the transatlantic community, cut off from the Black Sea and vulnerable to further aggression by Moscow.

The transatlantic community should now design a regional response to contain Moscow's efforts to dominate its neighbours through force. Russia's failings in the war against Ukraine have highlighted important vulnerabilities, notably regarding its effort to dominate the Black Sea maritime space. There is, as a result, an opportunity to promote a Black Sea security community that stretches across the region to limit Russia's abilities. Given the complex geopolitical and security challenges of the Black Sea, a flexible multilateral approach is likely to offer the most effective way forward. This would allow for a variety of ad hoc partnerships among NATO (notably the US, the UK and Turkey) and non-NATO states to develop around providing key capabilities to support Black Sea security within a broad framework for coordination.

For Georgia, such a Black Sea strategy would provide a means to enhance its security through countering the vulnerabilities and isolation promoted by Russia and to reverse the drift away from the transatlantic community. Crucially, it would provide a means for Georgia to cooperate with other regional states, notably Ukraine, and key extra-regional powers on Black Sea security, as well as enhance existing ties to NATO and the EU. Georgia will, however, require international assistance with provision of new capabilities, particularly those relating to naval and maritime security.

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