

Russia-Türkiye Relations in the Black Sea Region from 2014 to 2022: Security and Political Implications for NATO

BY

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DEDICATION

I dedicated this thesis to my parents, **Mr. M. Riaz Mughal and Mrs. Safia Riaz and my brothers Mr. Zeeshan and Mr. Arslan** who have been my constant source of love and encouragement throughout my academic pursuits. Their unwavering support and belief in me have kept me motivated during the most challenging times.

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List of Abbreviations

BSEC	Black Sea Economic Cooperation
BSF	Black Sea Fleet
BLACKSEAFOR	Black Sea Naval Cooperation Task Group
BSR	Black Sea Region
CFE	Conventional Armed Forces in Europe
EFP	Enhanced Forward Presence
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NRF	NATO Response Force
OBSH	Operation of Black Sea Harmony
OSCE	The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe Treaty
PfP	Partnership for Peace
RSFSR	Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic
TFP	Tailored Forward Presence
VJTF	Very High Readiness Joint Task Force
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction

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Abstract

The geopolitics of the Black Sea Region has been evolving constantly since the Crimean Annexation where Russian aggression in trepidation of NATO's enlargement, has escalated to full scale Ukraine War. This setup has changed the security and political dynamics of the whole region. Russia's quest for Crimean Peninsula is centuries old to access Black Sea to execute power in its near abroad. In contrast, NATO has strong presence on the South-Western flank of Black Sea while Ukraine's aspiration of joining NATO, means north flank will be under the control of NATO which is an existential threat for Russia. In this respect Russia's assertive behavior and unilateral actions are visible. The only entity which is balancing Russia, is another regional power, Türkiye. While Türkiye is wisely using its exceptional power, the Montreux Convention to deal with the riparian and non-riparian states to stabilize Black Sea. Both Russia and Türkiye with contrast features design the critical geopolitics of the region. In this context, this research describes the events which has happened from 2014 to 2022 with the lens of the critical geopolitics. While its four pillars elucidate the developments which influence the main actors' policies. Qualitative research design is used which is explanatory in nature. Data is collected by both primary and secondary sources including archives, structured interviews, books, reports, research articles and blogs etc. This research is an attempt to understand the nature of relations between Russia and Türkiye, Türkiye's engagement with NATO and to find out the factors which impeding NATO's enlargement in the Black Sea Region.

Introduction

The Black Sea Region (BSR henceforth) has emerged as the hub of geo-strategic and geo-political activities in contemporary era particularly in the wake of events: Crimean Annexation and the Ukraine War. When Russia annexed Crimea in 2014 then international relations entered into new debates about Russia's assertive unilateralism which considered threat to the sovereignty of surrounding states. Russia justified itself regarding the action of attack as NATO's movement towards the Near-Russian sphere was perceived as the encroachment of Russia as there are three allies of NATO in the BSR which are named as Türkiye, Romania and Bulgaria. So further aggrandizement is considered as threat to Russian security and sovereignty. In 2022, Russia launched full scale war on Ukraine which escalates the peril of WWII. In this whole scenario, the entity which is playing very important role is Türkiye, a strong regional actor of the BSR. This region is treated as the center of different great policies: the European Neighbourhood Policy of the EU, NATO's enlargement policy of the US, and the Near Abroad Policy of Russia.¹

Historically, Russia has been involved in different conflicts generated at different times between Russia and other states over control of Black Sea. From 1768 to 1774, Russians and Ottomans were in war which resulted in the ratification of the Treaty of Kucuk Kaynarca, a peace treaty, ended the conflict between adversaries marked defeat of Ottomans, while Russians captured Crimea, Sea of Azov and Bessarabia and provided many concessions to Russia including direct access to oceanic region through Kerch and Azov ports. With the decline of Ottoman Empire, both authorities fought a bloody 1853-1856 Crimean War which ended when Russia signed the Treaty of Paris, accepting defeat in the Crimean War, made Black Sea as a neutral territory.²

¹ Ozgur Tufekci, and Cagla Bayram, "Turkey's Black Sea Vision and Its Dynamics", *Karadeniz Arastirmalari Merkezi*, 15, no. 57 (January 2018) 1-16., accessed on October 20, 2022, [02.Özgür TÜFEKÇİ \(karamdergisi.com\) http://www.karamdergisi.com/Makaleler/1492850975_02.%c3%96zg%c3%bcr%20T%c3%9cFEK%c3%87%c4%b0.pdf](http://www.karamdergisi.com/Makaleler/1492850975_02.%c3%96zg%c3%bcr%20T%c3%9cFEK%c3%87%c4%b0.pdf).

² Boris Toucas, "The Geostrategic Importance of the Black Sea Region: A Brief History", *Center for Strategic & International Studies*. Feb. 2, 2017, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/geostrategic-importance-black-sea-region-brief-history/>.

It involved other Major Powers, France and Britain joined Ottomans as they had apprehensions of Russia's emerging power, never wanted Russia as a hegemon. However, Russia did not succeed to get the control of Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits from Ottoman Empire. Control of these two straits was the primary motivation for Russia to enter in WWI but it resulted in the closure of straits by Germans and Ottomans, economic strangulation for Russia. Several attempts were made to redraw the map of regional water but in 1936, Türkiye signed the Montreux Convention and gained the control over the straits which assured the free route to military vessels of littoral states not at war with Türkiye. Non-Black Sea Powers were not permitted to move their warships to Black Sea.³

At the end of WWII, Russia enforced Türkiye to renegotiate the Montreux Convention so that they could share control over these two straits known as Turkish Strait Crisis. Russia increased military presence in the regional water and demanded to Turkish government for military bases on Turkish soil. This was the time when Türkiye called US for help, responded by sending US warships in the region. In 1952, Türkiye and Greece joined NATO. Throughout Cold War, an uncomfortable zone was developed in BSR among Türkiye, US, Russia and NATO.⁴

Ukraine developed an uneasy relationship with Russia since independence over the strategic Crimean Peninsula. They used Crimea as a persistent bargaining chip. Crimea was presented as a gift by President Khrushchev to Ukraine in 1954. Ukraine allowed Russia to access Sevastopol base on lease for 20 years and got concession on energy prices and cancellation of most of the Ukrainian debt in response to the Ukraine-Russia Friendship Treaty, in 1997.

Color Revolutions which occurred in Georgia from 2003 to 2004 and in Ukraine from 2004 to 2005 as a result leaders influenced by Russian regime were replaced by pro-West and pro- Euro Atlantic leaders. Bulgaria and Romania in 2004 also joined NATO in response to aggressive Russian regional policy. These events perceived by Russia as NATO

³ Boris Toucas, "The Geostrategic Importance of the Black Sea Region: A Brief History", *Center for Strategic & International Studies*. Feb. 2, 2017, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/geostrategic-importance-black-sea-region-brief-history/>.

⁴ Ibid.

intrusion into its traditional sphere of influence and enhanced its military presence in Black Sea.⁵

The Seizure of Crimea was the most important incident of 2014 by which Russia tried to maximize its power. By capturing Crimea, Black Sea not only turned into Russian lake but Russia also dominated the Sea of Azov. It is a small internal water body enclosed between Russia and Ukraine which connects to Black Sea through Kerch Strait, and on the other side, it is connected with Caspian Sea through Volga-Don Canal. Russia has used this water channel to move warships between Caspian Sea and Sea of Azov which shows its authority over a significant region of the world. Another attempt made by Russia to secure its interest in Crimean Peninsula is the construction of Crimean Bridge to link occupied peninsula to main land.⁶

Black Sea is bordered to the south by Türkiye, an important littoral state which shares a long coastline with two important straits, Bosphorus and Dardanelles which link Black Sea to Mediterranean Sea. Russia-Türkiye bilateral relations play an important role to stabilize the region where Russia is the most influential power and Türkiye enjoys independent control over the important straits. There is a regional power imbalance between Russia and Türkiye. Black Sea is the top priority for Russia as it is the entrance of the warm seas and a buffer zone between Russia and the West. Türkiye avoids competition with Russia due to its military superiority. In 2008, Russian-Georgian conflict and in 2014, Crimean annexation, followed a neutral policy and did not sanction Russia. Türkiye is very cautious over Russian ships classification and avoids favourable treatment to NATO vessels. The Montreux Convention is such an international treaty which allows Türkiye to govern Black Sea and Straits independently which nobody can question.⁷

⁵ Boris Toucas, "The Geostrategic Importance of the Black Sea Region: A Brief History", *Center for Strategic & International Studies*. Feb. 2, 2017, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/geostrategic-importance-black-sea-region-brief-history/>.

⁶ Luke Coffey, "Russian dominance in the Black Sea: The Sea of Azov". *Middle East Institute*, Sep. 25, 2020, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/russian-dominance-black-sea-sea-azov/>.

⁷ Ozgur Tufekci and Cagla Bayram, "Turkey's Black Sea Vision and Its Dynamics," *Karadeniz Arastirmalari Merkezi* 15, no. 57 (January 2018): 1-16, <https://doi.org/10.12787/KARAM1272>.

Its unique geography is marked as the strategic asset. Türkiye initiated BLACKSEAFOR in 1998 in order to enhance regional cooperation among military forces in Black Sea. It was naval initiative consisting only of littoral states, Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Türkiye and Ukraine, based on search and rescue operations in the sea, providing humanitarian assistance, mine clearance activities, environmental protection and goodwill visits. The purpose was to promote the peace and stability among littoral states.⁸ Since inception, its focus on geography and long-lasting relations with neighbouring states, are the two main components of security policy. During the Cold War, Türkiye supported NATO by coercing the Soviet navy, by joining Allied forces and by hosting critical NATO facilities. Türkiye considers NATO as the basis of transatlantic ties and Euro-Atlantic security. Türkiye is an important ally of NATO in Black Sea which plays a vital role in the protection of other allies.⁹

As NATO is the extension of US power and have had a proactive policy in the region. Emerging from WWII, it was established in 1949 by 12 Western states to avoid Soviet's aggression. NATO is a defensive alliance and its main goal is to provide security to its member states. NATO has been open to new members since its foundation, is called as the "Open Door Policy" mentioned in Article 10, of NATO's founding treaty. Any instability or hostility in BSR directly impacts the allies' states of NATO.

In 1997, NATO and Russia signed "NATO- Russia Founding Act" based on mutual relations, cooperation and security. The basic purpose of the act was that both of the entities would not consider one another adversaries. Under this agreement, Russia committed to develop a security structure for Europe. Russia would not threaten or use force against NATO Allies and any other state. But the commitment was broken by Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014.¹⁰

⁸ Ozgur Tufekci and Cagla Bayram, "Turkey's Black Sea Vision and Its Dynamics," *Karadeniz Arastirmalari Merkezi* 15, no. 57 (January 2018): 1-16, <https://doi.org/10.12787/KARAM1272>.

⁹ NATO, "NATO Declassified: Historical Events and Documents," NATO, accessed October 22, 2022, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/declassified_191048.htm.

¹⁰ Glenn Diesen, *Russia, NATO and Cooperative Security: Bridging the Gap* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 151, <https://books.google.com.pk/books?id=sfN9AgAAQBAJ&pg=PA151>.

Fig 1: Different Actors' Influence and Conflicts in the Region



Source: This picture is taken from Russia's buffer zone.¹¹

Problem Statement

The Black Sea Region is a unique sphere of conflict and cooperation where regional and extra regional actors execute their powers through security and political entities. Russia and Türkiye are two main regional players which have long history of confrontation but after Cold War, both states started to develop their relations. Despite the fact that Türkiye, being the member of NATO, has established a neutral policy towards Russia in response to two major incidents, Annexation of Crimea (2014) and Ukraine War (2022) while NATO condemns in the strongest possible terms the Russia's war of aggression. Russia and Türkiye's converging interests are creating security and political implications for NATO in the Black Sea Region. By evaluating critically, this research aims at analyzing implications which have left strong impact on NATO's role strategically and politically.

¹¹ https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Russias-buffer-zone-Image-Source_fig1_363156638

Research Objectives

- To understand the nature of bilateral relations between Russia and Türkiye in the Black Sea Region
- To evaluate Türkiye's engagement with NATO
- To discuss political roles of Russia and Türkiye in the regional politics
- To find out the factors impeding NATO's aggrandizement

Research Questions

Q1: What are the main features of Montreux Convention influencing the foreign policy of Russia and Türkiye in the Black Sea Region which enable them to maintain balance?

Q2: How are Türkiye-Russia bilateral relations affecting NATO's efficacy in the BSR?

Q3: Why has Türkiye been acting as a passive member of NATO in the BSR despite Russia's conflict with Ukraine?

Q4: How would current tensions in the BSR shape up the regional geo-politics?

Literature Review

It is significant for any research work to be based on the analysis of past literature as it serves as the base and foundation of the work and provides an in-depth insight into previously conducted studies. It allows the researcher to explore further areas of the topic under discussion to build better understanding. Different articles, websites and reports etc. are studied for this purpose.

Literature review is thematic in nature which has been divided in four sections. First theme elaborates theory and second is about the history of the BSR. Third category is comprised of Russia and Türkiye relations, since 2014, Crimean Annexation. The last category is about NATO's political and security influence in the oceanic region. The identified categories of literature reviews have been reflected in the form of a table as follows:

Figure 2. Themes of Literature Review

Theory	History of the BSR	Russia- Türkiye Relations Since 2014	NATO Political and Security Influence
Critical Geopolitics by Merje Kuus.	The Geostrategic Importance of the Black Sea Region: A Brief History by Boris Toucas.	Turkey-Russia Relations in 2001-2020: Deepening Partnership and Heightening Competition Amid Regional Restructuring by Muhammet Kocak.	Russia, NATO and Cooperative Security: Bridging the Gap by Glenn Diesen.
Critical Geopolitics: The Politics of Writing Global Space by Gearoid Tuthail.	Why did Russia give away Crimea sixty years ago by Mark Kramer.	Turkey-Russia Relations in the Twenty-First Century: Cooperation and Competition Amid Systemic Turbulence by Muhammet Koçak.	The Black Sea Region: A Critical Intersection, a Review by Pavel Anastasov.
Critical Geopolitics by Gearoid Tuthail	How Crimea's complex history with Russia dates back to the 19 th	Russia's Attack on Ukraine: The Montreux Convention and	NATO's role in addressing security threats and challenges in the Black Sea

	century by Alice Popovici	Turkiye by Yücel Acer	
Geopolitics and Discourse: Practical Geopolitical Reasoning in American Foreign Policy by Gearóid Ó Tuathail and John Agnew,	Russo-Turkish Wars: Causes, Consequences and Impact.	Friend and Foe: Russia–Turkey Relations before and after the War in Ukraine by Vicken Cheterian	Black Sea Security Deadlocks: NATO–Russia Confrontation by Maryna Vorotnyuk
Structural Geopolitics in Europe: Constructing Geopolitical Subjectivity for the EU and Russia by Pami Alto	The Turkey- Russia relationship in historical perspective by H William.	Conceptualizing Russia-Turkey Strategic Political Competition by Walid Abudalbouh, K. H., and Mohammed Abu Anzeh.	Security Relations in the Black Sea Region: Russia and the West after the Ukrainian Crisis by Nadia Alexandrova-Arbatova.

Source: Researcher has developed the table.

Merje Kuus explains the concept of Critical Geopolitics in contrast with Classical Geopolitics. Classical geopolitics defines politics as the practice of territory in which states and nations naturally struggle for power over territory and resources. The term Critical Geopolitics was first coined by Simon Dalby in 1990. It focuses on contemporary issues and challenges, emphasizing real world apprehensions instead of theoretical power structures. It highlights the power attributes and views state identity and interests as designed by foreign policy actions. It investigates statecraft as a complex set of actions and discourses, and challenges the idea of the state as a fixed entity. Additionally, popular geopolitics examines how geopolitical narratives permeate popular culture through media,

journalism, art, and activism, influencing formal geopolitical discourse. Critical geopolitics is concerned with the practice of power relations in specific spaces instead of power in general.¹²

Pami Aalto describes Structural Geopolitics in Europe and Russia about the status of Kaliningrad's governance. This study focuses on the main structural processes in Europe which are about the projects of constructing geopolitical subjectivity for the EU and Russia. These projects manifest themselves in the forms of integration efforts and great power politics. This study is based on the four pillars of Critical Geopolitics to analyze the contemporary geopolitical conditions, geopolitical thought, practical geopolitical reasoning in the making of foreign and security policy and the role of the mass media in construction of images of other people and places.¹³

Gearóid Tuathail and John Agnew suggest reconsidering geopolitics through the idea of discourse. According to them, geopolitics is defined as a broad practice in which scholars 'spatialize' international politics, presenting it as a sphere comprises of particular places, peoples, and events. They divide it into formal and practical geopolitics. US foreign policy is used to elaborate the concept, including an analysis of George Kennan's 'Long Telegram' and the 'Mr. X' article's depiction of the USSR. Thus, geopolitical reasoning, they conclude, paradoxically operates by being anti-geographical.¹⁴

Ozgur Tufeci and Duygu Bayram describe about Türkiye's Black Sea vision and its dynamics in this article. Since Montreux convention, how Türkiye has initiated an active regional policy to improve cooperation among all riparian states in the field of security, politics and economy. For this purpose, it has played a principal role in advancing regional initiatives in the region such as BSEC, BLACKSEAFOR and OBSH. Author focuses on the concept of new regionalism emerged in response to globalization.

¹² Merje Kuus, "Critical Geopolitics," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.013.137>.

¹³ Pami Aalto, "Structural Geopolitics in Europe: Constructing Geopolitical Subjectivity for the EU and Russia" (Department of Political Science and International Relations, University of Tampere, 2001), <https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/wps/aap01/aap01.pdf>.

¹⁴ Gearóid Ó Tuathail and John Agnew, *Geopolitics and Discourse: Practical Geopolitical Reasoning in American Foreign Policy*, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2008), 16, eBook ISBN 9781315246512.

Türkiye views Black Sea as internal waters and provide security in the oceanic region and in the straits. It has unique right to control Black Sea through the Straits. Its geographical position provides a connection between East and West. Author also explains the nature of bilateral relations between Türkiye and Russia that how these status quo powers are preserving the current legal regime of the straits. Both states consider the oceanic region as their sphere of influence. NATO's movement towards the BSR after the membership of the Bulgaria and Romania, is perceived as the expansionist policy which will damage their interests in the region. Both states are against the Western expansion and avoid the involvement of the external powers.¹⁵

In fact, their bilateral relations are based on pragmatic external economic interests in recent years. Even conflicts are existing in the region but they have succeeded to build energy oriented economic relations. Both states are important economic partners of each other but imbalance is observed in their economic relations as Türkiye's dependence on Russian natural gas. But there is a historical geopolitical fact that their historical relations show that they both were adversaries.¹⁶

Neil J. Melvin, particularly focuses on the scenario which has developed after the capture of Crimean Peninsula in this policy paper. This incident has captured the attention of regional but extra regional actors as well because it has changed the political and security dimensions in the BSR. Russia is focusing on military modernization which shows Russia's unilateral assertiveness. Russia is improving political relations with Türkiye and particularly focusing on the NATO's developments in the oceanic region. After the Crimean Annexation, Russia is able to control the second significant place in Black Sea after the Turkish Straits. Full control of Kerch Strait and Sea of Azov, Russia has become the dominating power in the oceanic region.¹⁷

While on the other side, NATO members renewed their security commitment in Warsaw Summit 2016 and reiterated their solidarity to other littoral states and not recognizing

¹⁵ Ozgur Tufekci and Cagla Bayram, "Turkey's Black Sea Vision and Its Dynamics," *Karadeniz Arastirmalari Merkezi* 15, no. 57 (January 2018): 1-16, <https://doi.org/10.12787/KARAM1272>.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Neil Melvin, "Rebuilding Collective Security in the Black Sea Region", (Sweden: SIPRI, 2018).

Russia's annexation of Crimea. NATO declared its support for the security and stability of the littoral states. TFP, decision taken by NATO in the Warsaw Summit, is comprised of air, land and maritime components. TFP's maritime policy states that Bulgarian and Romanian ports will be used for NATO naval vessels, command and control arrangements in Black Sea. This oceanic region is important for NATO from two perspectives, first is its geographical position and second is the presence of Russia which wants to resurge in the post- Soviet space by using revisionist policy. NATO is reluctant about the Russian aggression in terms of annexation of Crimea and huge military buildup and perceived it as that Russia could impede NATO access to Black Sea and so isolate the water region from other allies. This situation seems dangerous for the security of other Black Sea's NATO members and also encircle the NATO partner countries Georgia and Ukraine, and interrupt the energy corridor through the Caucasus and Türkiye to Europe.¹⁸

Due to the limitations of the Montreux Convention, NATO has shifted its focus from Türkiye to Romania. While it is challenging for NATO to create a deterrence posture in Black Sea, because of the diverging threat perception for Russia as three states have different nature of relations with Russia which enforce them to follow different policies.¹⁹

Türkiye is a complex actor for NATO. It is not only committed to NATO but a regional power at the same time. It does not only support Georgian membership of NATO but it also allows a limited increase in NATO presence to balance Russia in the BSR. As Türkiye is playing a leading role in the security of the region so it does not allow Western military buildup which can be the reason of imbalance. Türkiye strictly follows the Montreux Convention which does not permit the stronger the influence of non- Black Sea forces in the region.²⁰

Ibrahim Karatas explains the foreign policy approach adopted by Türkiye which is truly based on national interests of the state. Türkiye is balancing relations with Russia in current scenario by non-alignment on Western sanctions. The failed coup of 2016 against the President Erdogan perceived as the regime change conspiracy by the West which

¹⁸ Neil Melvin, "Rebuilding Collective Security in the Black Sea Region", (Sweden: SIPRI, 2018).

¹⁹ Ibid., 57.

²⁰ Ibid., 58.

compelled him to play in realistic manner with the West but didn't close the doors for cooperation in the BSR. He also supports the sovereignty of Ukraine and has not left the state alone against Russian aggression. His balanced policy is based on preserving national interests without sacrificing moral values.²¹

Pavel Anastasov explains the NATO's concerns in the BSR and main security challenges to NATO. This oceanic region has three NATO members and two partner states so NATO is directly impacted by any instability or aggression in the region. The Warsaw Summit conducted in 2016, which highlighted Russia's unilateral actions as a danger to the stability and security of the region. Russia has adopted assertive unilateralism to project its power in the post-soviet space. The nature of threats is evolving because of the modernization of weapons, involvement of various actors and adoption of unique policies.

NATO is a political clout of member states which possess strong collective defense. Still NATO has certain limitations. The main challenges which NATO have to face in the BSR, are Russian military buildup, Russian malign influence (anti-NATO Agendas), protracted conflicts, Energy (in) Security and security of Lines of Communication. In response to these challenges, NATO has strengthened its deterrence and defense posture with Tailored Forward Presence (TFP) Measure. In addition to NATO standing forces with more ships, NATO has also established a Black Sea functional center after Crimean annexation which focuses on the regional specific security issues and maintains close contacts with regional navies.²²

This study elaborates the perspectives of Russia not only about West but about Russia as well. Russia perceives West direct threat to national security from NATO as it tries to encircle Russia by different means. NATO is violating the NATO-Russia Founding Act by increasing military presence in the post- Soviet space of Russia. Russia perceives Western strategies not only as a threat but also an attempt to promote democracy and other interests in its sphere of influence which create disturbance in its security environment. While

²¹ Ibrahim Karatas, "Erdoğan's Switch to Realism," *Daily Sabah*, August 24, 2022, <https://www.dailysabah.com/opinion/op-ed/erdogans-switch-to-realism/>.

²² Pavel Anastasov, "The Black Sea Region: a critical intersection", *NATO Review*. May. 25, 2018, <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2018/05/25/the-black-sea-region-a-critical-intersection/index.html>

Russia prioritizes its great power status like US as it has the ability to drive global events. Russia wants to preserve its near abroad space as buffer zone.

It also discusses the nature of foreign policy adopted by Türkiye that who is more beneficial or more threatening either West or Russia, a common practice of ‘Switching Partners’. US perspective about Türkiye having alternatives to relations while Türkiye relationship with Russia is not an alternative of US but Türkiye is able to maintain balance among the relationships with other actors. Turkish leaders have perception that they could manage Black Sea security with Russia. While Turkish participation in NATO exercises, is likely to be limited and offers to host noncontroversial military systems in order to secure relationship with Russia.²³

Tracy Wilkinson describes about the circumstances when Türkiye joined NATO and also discusses the current situation of role of Türkiye as a member of NATO. Türkiye’s support to the cause of Western Alliance by joining Korean War and the NATO offered full membership to Türkiye. After 1949, it was the first expansion of NATO in 1952. Türkiye holds a unique geopolitical position in the region at the junction of Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and the Caucasus. It connects Black Sea with Mediterranean Sea.

NATO is curious about Türkiye’s intentions in the region as it has friendly relations with Russia, neutral policy towards Russian aggression and refusal to the membership of Sweden and Finland to join the alliance. West perceives Türkiye as a Trojan horse while on the other side it supplies weapons to Ukraine and has also hosted peace talks between Russia and Ukraine which West sees as an opportunity for Türkiye to make its position better as a member state of Western Alliance.²⁴

Glen Segell studies the Regime of Straits in the context of Russia-Ukraine conflict. To govern the Straits independently, Montreux convention was signed in 1936, by Australia,

²³ Stephen J. Flanagan et al. “Russia, NATO, and Black Sea Security”, (Santa Monica:RAND, 2020), <http://www.rand.org/t/RRA357-1/>.

²⁴ Tracy Wilkinson, “So, why is Turkey in NATO, anyway? A look at the country’s complex history with the alliance”, *Los Angeles Times*. Jun. 29, 2022, <https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2022-06-29/so-why-is-turkey-in-nato-anyway/>.

Bulgaria, France, Japan, Greece, Romania, Yugoslavia, the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union and Türkiye. This agreement gives Türkiye control over access to key straits which are named as Bosphorus and Dardanelles, connect Black Sea with the Mediterranean Sea. This agreement plays a key role not only for the passage of ships but for the security policy of Türkiye as well.

This convention is comprised of 29 Articles, 4 Annexes and 1 Protocol. Articles 2-7 consider the passage of commercial vessels and Articles 8-22 focus on the passage of war ships. Article 1 and 2 are about the freedom of passage and navigation. While the Montreux Convention was established in special geopolitical context in 1936, and remains unchanged since its adoption. But Soviet Union repeatedly challenged the convention during WWII and the Cold War. Türkiye has not signed the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea related to Straits Regime as Montreux Convention allows sovereignty over Straits administration. NATO's warships presence in Black Sea would escalate tensions between Türkiye and Russia. While Ukraine relied on Türkiye which govern the Straits with universal right as Ukraine wanted to limit the Russian warships presence in Black Sea through Türkiye.²⁵

Research Gap

There is plenty of research on Russia, Türkiye, Russia's politics towards Ukraine and other regional actors; particularly after 2024, there have been published abundant journalistic articles, research papers and academic accounts regarding the crisis between Russia and Ukraine. Mostly, content is produced by western authors, analysts and scholars but there are a few scholarly accounts by Pakistani authors. However, there is limited literature available discussing Russia-Türkiye relations in the wake of geopolitical tensions starting from 2014-2022. There are certain lacunas about policy decision making and relevant options for all the stakeholders in the region which need to be explored academically, with an unbiased approach. For Pakistan, such research gets more relevant as Pakistan has strong historical relations with Türkiye, cordiality with Russia, and strategic relations with NATO member states.

²⁵ Glen Segell, "Revisiting the Montreux Convention of 1936 in light of the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine", *TRENDS RESEARCH & ADVISORY*, 2022.

Core Argument

Russia, Türkiye converging interests in the BSR are changing the security and political dynamics in the wake of recent events, further challenging NATO's command and control and aggrandizement.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Geopolitics defined as a critical approach applied to world politics where geographical spaces are divided and enter into foreign policy making and geography is not natural but socially constructed.²⁶ The concept of Critical Geopolitics was first established by Simon Dalby in 1990.²⁷ It is based on the analysis of realpolitik and social discourse in the name of deepening democratic politics.²⁸ It deals with the geographical assumptions and designations that shape the world politics. Its objective is to elucidate that how political entities spatialize global politics and express it as a world is comprised of specific types of places.²⁹ It proposes that spatiality is not restricted to territoriality, but it expands beyond it either historically or in contemporary contexts.³⁰ It emphasizes on the multifaceted spatiality of power than the territorialized understandings of politics.³¹ State power is not restricted to or enclosed within the territory of the state but it is also exercised non-territorially or in space across networks. It is applied differentially to different subjects across various spheres.³²

Critical Geopolitics focuses on problem-based and present-oriented subjects but little concerned about the sources and structures of power whereas it emphasizes on everyday technologies of power relations. It determines that the sovereign state is not the foundation

²⁶ John Angrew, "The Origins of Critical Geopolitics," *The Ashgate Research Companion to Critical Geopolitics*, ed. Kaluss Doods, Merje Kuus and Joanne Sharp (Routledge, 2013) 19-32.

²⁷ Merje Kuus, "Critical Geopolitics," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.013.137>.

²⁸ Gearoid O Tuathail, "Understanding Critical Geopolitics: Geopolitics and Risk Society", *Geopolitics, Geography and Strategy*, ed. Colin S. Gray and Geoffrey Sloan (London and New York: Routledge, 2013).

²⁹ Merje Kuus, "Critical Geopolitics," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of International Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190846626.013.137>.

³⁰ Alexander B. Murphy, *The Sovereign State System as Political-Territorial Ideal: Historical and Contemporary Considerations*, *State Sovereignty as Social Construct* Cambridge, ed. Thomas J. Biersteker, Cynthia Weber (Cambridge University Press, 1996) 81–120.

³¹ Simon Dalby, "Environmental Security," (University of Minnesota Press, 2002), <https://www.upress.umn.edu/book-division/books/environmental-security>.

³² Ibid.

of discourse but the sovereignty, security, and identity. State identity and interest are shaped by foreign policy practices rather than preceding them. So, the key attributes of Critical Geopolitics are state interest and identity. Its focus is on the statecraft as a multitude of practices rather than the state which is not a primary entity of discourse. Critical Geopolitics is concerned with the process of power relations in specific spaces rather than the power in general.³³ School of Critical Geopolitics divides Geopolitics into Formal, Practical, Popular and Structural Geopolitics explained as follows:

Formal Geopolitics

Formal Geopolitical discourse is produced by academics either in institutions or political organizations which spatialize geopolitical thoughts in particular places and contexts. It is commonly mentioned as geopolitical tradition or geopolitical philosophy. Most of the policymakers describe geopolitics as a practice of twentieth century of thinking about statecraft that starts with the work of Friedrich Ratzel, Alfred Mahan, Rudolf Kjellen and Halford Mackinder as they spatialized geographic spaces in diverse manner.³⁴ Eurocentric perspective is dominant in geopolitical thinking while Russian and Japanese view is being neglected. Formal geopolitics construct ideas and thoughts which impact foreign policy.³⁵

Practical Geopolitics

It focuses on the geographical politics which is based on the daily practice of foreign policy. It discusses about the common geographical understandings and perceptions that how they structure foreign policy conceptualization and decision making.³⁶ Foreign policy decision makers use practical and pragmatic geopolitical approaches whenever they try to make spatial sense of the world. They indirectly use inherited form of the geographical spaces.³⁷

Popular Geopolitics

Popular Geopolitics focuses on the geographical politics which is shaped and argued by the different media entities which involves in the development of popular culture. It focuses

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 110.

³⁵ Ibid., 113.

³⁶ Ibid., 110.

³⁷ Ibid., 113.

on the social construction of peoples and places beyond the borders which are developed by national and transnational perceptions. Popular Geopolitics talks about the geopolitical concepts and notions which socialize in popular culture. Popular media entities like newspapers, magazines, reporters, film directors, cartoonists and social activists of different kinds play an essential role in the development of practical and formal geopolitics.

Structural Geopolitics

It emphasizes on the investigation of those features which contribute in the formation of foreign policy. It tells about how states conduct foreign policy. It explains current geopolitical situations, contemporary hegemonic struggles among dominant powers and projection of power across borders through security, political, and economic entities.³⁸

Application of Critical Geopolitics in the Black Sea Region

The multifaceted dynamics of the BSR can be best explained in the light of Critical Geopolitics. The water region has a very unique geography which connects the Middle East, Europe and Asia. This warm sea connects to Mediterranean Sea through Turkish Straits. Quest for Black Sea and Straits is centuries old. Geography of the BSR makes conflicts inevitable. Russia's ambitions in the BSR has not changed since 17th century. After the fall of the Soviet Union, its aspirations to control nearby spaces by geopolitical power to establish its sphere of influence, are evident in its surrounding's territorial disputes. Crimean Peninsula is a significant geographical space for Russia to execute its naval power in Black Sea. Russia becomes an abstract symbol of aggression and unilateral actions which creates instability in the region. After Crimean annexation, Crimea is territorially with in Ukraine but not the part of Ukrainian space and time. Ukraine serves as a projection zone of power for Russia and NATO's interests.

NATO's goal is to spread democracy in the BSR to challenge authoritarianism which exaggerates militarization so the region is narrated as the hub of great powers rivalry; while Türkiye's exceptional authority over straits makes it powerful regional actor. Türkiye follows pragmatic approach to deal with Ukraine, Russia and NATO. Türkiye's support to

³⁸ Gearoid O Tuathail, "Understanding Critical Geopolitics: Geopolitics and Risk Society", *Geopolitics, Geography and Strategy*, ed. Colin S. Gray and Geoffrey Sloan (London and New York: Routledge, 2013).

Ukraine obstruct Russian aggression while its cooperation with Russia hinders NATO's enlargement. In this context, different political structures have developed in the region. Narratives building by different media channels (electronic, social and print), think tanks, institutions and state officials play an essential role in foreign policy making. Regional states spatialize their interests according to the geographical development and political structures. NATO, in the presence of three member states and two partner states, is still competing with Russian unilateral actions. By applying four pillars of Critical Geopolitics, the factors are being determined which impede NATO's aggrandizement. This exposes power struggle among important actors, foreign policy dynamics, social construction of narratives and identities in the BSR.

Research Methodology

The undertaken study is conducted by using descriptive and explanatory qualitative research approaches. This has been hinged on deductive reasoning which uses Critical Geopolitics as theoretical underpinning for this research. The deductive reasoning guides the process of research from general understanding and broader idea of the undertaken phenomenon to find out a specific result. Since Critical Geopolitics has been employed as the most relevant theoretical framework, its application has helped the research to find out the factors under the four pillars as Formal, Practical, Popular and Structural Geopolitics which have been discussed in theoretical framework in detail and applied throughout the research.

The research method used for the thesis is Longitudinal Case Study as it is focused on a time span from 2014 to 2022. There have been employed combination of data collection methods starting with primary, secondary and tertiary sources. Primary sources are comprised of interviews of experts and academics and important official documents, while research papers, reports, books and newspapers are included in secondary sources. Tertiary sources include blogs, websites, and social media.

For primary sources, there have been conducted twelve online interviews in which Dr, Igor Istomin from Russia and he is Associate Professor in the department of Applied International Political Analysis, MGIMO University. Dr. Taras Kuzio is from Ukraine, Professor of Political Science Department, National University of Kyiv-Mohyla

Accademy. Dr. Anna Ohanyan is from Washington, Distinguished Professor of International Relations, Stonehill College, Department of Political Science and International Studies. Dr. Paul D'anieri is a Professor of Political Science Department, University of California. Dr. Gloria Shkurti Özdemir is a Researcher in the Foreign Policy Directorate and Assistant Editor of Insight Türkiye, The SETA Foundation, Istanbul Türkiye. Dr. Marion Messmer is a Senior Research Fellow in the International Security, The Royal Institute of International Affairs, Chatham House, London. Dr. Tobias Kollakowski is a Research Fellow in German Institute for Defence and Strategic Studies, Kings College London. Ms. Samantha de Bendern is an Associate Fellow in Russia and Eurasia Programme at Chatham House, London. While three experts from Pakistan have contributed their analysis: Dr. Uzma Siraj is an Assistant Professor, Head of the Department of International Relations in Federal Urdu University, Islamabad, Dr. S. Bushra Batool is a Research Officer at Rabta Forum International and Visiting Faculty at Bahria University, Karachi and Dr. Imrana Begum is an Associate Professor at Department of Essential Studies in NED University of Engineering and Technology, Karachi. Dr. Piotr Pietrzak is an independent Political Analyst at Sofia University in Bulgaria.

The process through which these interviews have been included in the research is based on the list of authors who have worked on the relevant areas and topics. They were approached through the selected journal and research articles and reports etc. The requests of interview were emailed and on response of their availability and willingness, the interviews were conducted by using online medium including Google meet and WhatsApp. Some experts preferred to solve questionnaires and then mailed to the researcher.

There was visible bias against Russia from Dr. Taras Kuzio (Ukraine) due to the historical grievances and ongoing conflict.

The responses were slow due to several reasons like prior commitments, summer vacations, end of semesters, exams and last but not the least is internet connectivity issues. In some of the cases, the medium of online meeting was not accessible in Pakistan particularly in the case of Mr. Tobias Kollakowski from London who was using his official platform of communication.

In the light of core argument, the study has been conducted by investigating the interaction among independent variables, i.e. Russia, Türkiye; dependent variable, i.e. the BSR; and intervening variable, i.e. NATO.

Significance of the Study

Geo-political tensions are responsible for uncertainty and chaos in the BSR where major regional and non-regional actors are playing the power game through confrontation and cooperation which is affecting the security and political environment of the oceanic region.

Russia's core concerns are defending the Russian homeland, maintaining a sphere of influence, and shaping the future of the oceanic region. Crimean Annexation 2014, was a major incident which disturbed the West and perceived it as assertive unilateralism by Russia. While Russia wanted to control Crimea to execute power in the region through Sevastopol port which is very important for the maritime traffic in Black Sea. Regional and extra regional actors, condemned this act by Russia but kept the doors open for Russia to maintain security and stability and to stop any further aggression.

Russia wanted to maintain control on Ukraine and its foreign relations. That would make it unable to join NATO whose expansion into littoral states perceived by Russia as an encroachment on its interests. So Russia launched full scale war on Ukraine on 24th Feb. 2022, to hinder NATO'S aggrandizement.

While Türkiye is not only important regional player of the oceanic region but the member of NATO. It is the only state which started to enhance cooperation among all littoral states in the field of security and politics like BLACKSEAFOR (Naval Cooperation Task Group) and Operation Black Sea Harmony (OBSH). There are different perspectives about the foreign policy of Türkiye towards Russia and NATO. But Türkiye has its own interests to deal with these entities. After 2014, security and political environment is continuously changing which not only affects the BSR but the surrounding as well.

This study is beneficial for the researchers who are interested in the BSR's political and regional structure, great power rivalries, security environment and Russia-Türkiye relations amidst Russia-Ukraine War.

Delimitations

Since the undertaken research emphasizes on Russia-Türkiye bilateral relations, no other regional actor's foreign policy has been discussed. There has been sole focus on foreign policy of both countries impacting political and security dimensions of NATO. The specific strategies of military and navy have not been analyzed in the undertaken research. For the purpose of interviews, electronic connectivity means are used to reach out at foreign experts and academics.

Organizational Structure

The research is being divided into five chapters.

Chapter 1, **“History of Bilateral Relations of Russia and Türkiye”** describes history of bilateral relations of Russian and Ottoman Empires since 15th century where possession of Crimean Peninsula, Black Sea and straits were considered as the symbol of power. Different treaties were enacted between the rivals to resolve the BSR's conflict. Dissolution of the Soviet Union has changed the regional and political structure of the BSR.

Chapter 2, **“Russia's Foreign Policy towards Black Sea (Black Sea Centric Approach)”** describes the Russian foreign policy development in different time of history in quest of warm water to carry out naval operations and execute power. Practical, formal and popular geopolitics explains the formation of foreign policy in the space of the BSR.

Chapter 3, **“Türkiye's Role in the Black Sea Region”** describes the unique features of Türkiye which makes its special in the water body. Türkiye shares the long coastline of Black Sea, possesses control of two significant straits and regulate maritime traffic in Black Sea under the Montreux Convention. Türkiye spatialize its national its interests in the context of the BSR.

Chapter 4, **“Implications for NATO's Enlargement in the Black Sea Region”** explains the geopolitical structures and factors which together impede the Alliance's enlargement in the region. Though NATO has three allies but further expansion is challenging for NATO.

Chapter 5, “**Aftermath of Events in the Black Sea Region: Current Geo-Political Scenario**” describes current geo-political tensions among Russia, Ukraine and NATO. Moreover, it explains the complex interplay and geo-political landscape of the BSR. It has divided into four sections which are current geopolitical situation in the BSR, current Russia’s standing and regional interplay in the region and chances of nuclear war.

Conclusions and Recommendations: Given in the end.

Chapter One

History of Bilateral Relations of Russia and Türkiye

Major Powers are always involved in geopolitical race in order to occupy territory, govern natural resources and to command water entities to influence smaller states. State's authorities spatialize their national interests on the basis of geopolitical structures to differentiate between primary and secondary interests. BSR has long been the stage of contest between Ottomans and Russians as imperial powers to control important regional maritime routes. But after the collapse of Ottoman Empire, ratification of Montreux Convention of 1936 brought a stable regime as it provided sovereign rights to Türkiye over Turkish Straits and limit the role of extra regional actors by setting separate rules for battleships and merchant vessels. But the end of the Cold War changed the political and geographical dynamics of the region where pluralist culture originated. Russia's unilateral aggression in the form of wars in near abroad and increase in NATO members, again indulged the region in strategic competition. US sanctions in response to Ukraine- Russia crises has brought Russia and Türkiye near to each other to develop more sustainable relations.³⁹

This chapter describes the nature of bilateral relations between Russia and Türkiye since both states were empires where Black Sea was the hub of competition/ rivalry/ clash as Russia was always in the pursuit of warm water ports to execute its expansionism policy and influence the near abroad. In order to pursue its goals, Russia waged many wars against Ottoman Empire which are known as Russo-Turkish Wars in history to get control of Crimea, Black Sea and then Turkish Straits. Straits also served as an important element of military strategy. Whoever controlled traffic in straits could use it as a gateway for naval forces to navigate Black Sea while blocking the passage of rival powers. There is a series of treaties over the dispute of above mentioned entities which shows their significance for Russia.⁴⁰

³⁹ Sümer Kayser, "Geopolitics of the Black Sea," *Maritime Security Centre of Excellence*, Aug. 2021, <https://www.marseccoe.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Geopolitics-of-the-Black-Sea.pdf>.

⁴⁰ Kirilla A. Fursov, "Russia and the Ottoman Empire: The Geopolitical Dimension," *Russian Studies in History* 57, no. 2 (2018): 99.

The Ottoman Empire was the most significant among all Oriental bodies for Imperial Russia. Russia always wanted to develop relations with Ottoman Empire to secure its southern borders and for emphasizing its unique position as the only Christian Orthodox Empire. Their contact belongs to the 15th century when the Ottoman Empire became one of Muscovy's main trading partners. Then they became geopolitical rivals over the acquisition of Crimea. They fought first war in 1568–1570 under Ivan IV and then a series of wars started in 1677 and ended only with the disintegration of both empires by the end of WWI or immediately thereafter. Russia focused on Ottoman Empire for almost two and a half centuries and formulated its foreign policy in this context. Russia defeated Ottoman Empire in 1768–1774 that reduced the Ottoman Empire the “sick man of Europe”. However both empires maintained extensive trade relations and cultural interaction throughout the entire period.⁴¹

In this context, this chapter is analyzed with the lens of Critical Geopolitics which claims that geography and history are not just neutral or objective facts, but are socially and politically constructed. It suggests that both geography and history are shaped by power dynamics, political interests, and cultural narratives.⁴² Critical Geopolitics explores how political actors (Russian and Ottoman Empires) used these constructions to influence foreign policy, define national interests, and justified their actions in the BSR. Political forces influenced the geography like borders and history like historical events (wars and treaties).

This chapter is divided into following sections: i) Geographical Makeup of the Black Sea Region, ii) Significance of Treaties in the Context of the Black Sea Region iii) Treaty of Lausanne, iv) Montreux Convention, v) Turkish Strait Crises, vi) End of the Cold War.

1.1 Geographical Makeup of the Black Sea Region

The Crimean Peninsula is situated on the northern shore of Black Sea in Eastern Europe. To dominate Black Sea, possession of Crimea is must. Crimea is situated at the south of

⁴¹ Kirilla A. Fursov, “Russia and the Ottoman Empire: The Geopolitical Dimension,” *Russian Studies in History* 57, no. 2 (2018): 100.

⁴² Gearóid Ó Tuathail, *Critical Geopolitics: The Politics of Writing Global Space* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

Ukraine and almost completely encircled by the sea. It is also bordered by Black Sea and the Sea of Azov. So it is also viewed as an island sea. It is positioned at the south of the Kherson region of Ukraine and west of the Kuban region of Russia. It is connected to Kherson through Isthmus of Perekop and is separated from Kuban through the Strait of Kerch. It consists of a chain of islands and lagoons. Its unique geography provides it maritime and commercial pre-eminence. Therefore, Black Sea is dominated by Crimea. Crimea has very complicated history as it is ruled by different Empires. Many regional entities wanted to govern Crimea, in this context, it enjoys different historical status. Geographically, it is situated in the near borders of the former Soviet Union. It is among the oldest problematic territories along Black Sea coast.⁴³

On the western side of Black Sea, Romania and Bulgaria are situated. These states are the members of the EU and NATO which are at the opposite side to the geopolitical rival power, Russia. While Ukraine is located in the middle, both literally and figuratively. Türkiye is situated on its southern border and holds the longest coastline. Türkiye, an important member of NATO and has the aspiration to join EU, serves as a bridge between Europe, Central Asia and the Middle East. The Southern Caucasus lies in the East, between Russia and Türkiye. Whereas Georgia is the only littoral state which is situated in the Southern Caucasus and the neighbouring states of Armenia and Azerbaijan, also having the intentions to join NATO for security purposes.⁴⁴

The Crimean Peninsula has been a point of contention between Russia and Ukraine. Ukraine was controlling Crimea since 1954, a mistake by Russian President who presented it as a gift to Ukraine. At that time, Ukraine was the part of the USSR and Russia did not analyze the situation in context of the separation of Ukraine. After Catherine the Great, Russia colonized Crimea therefore had historical claims on Crimea. Russia found Sevastopol in 1783 which became the main port and home to Russia's BSF.⁴⁵

⁴³ Dharmendra Shahi, "Annexation of Crimea: A Geopolitical Analysis," *D. K. Sahi, International Journal of Research in Engineering, IT and Social Sciences* 12, no. 4 (2022): 1.

⁴⁴ Emmanuel Carneiro, "HOW INFLUENTIAL IS THE BLACK SEA IN RUSSO-TURKISH RELATIONS?", *The Catholic University of Portugal - Institute of Political Studies*, Sep. 2021, Lisbon.

⁴⁵ Annabelle Tismit et al. "Why Crimea is so important in the Russia-Ukraine War," *The Washington Post*, Aug. 18, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/08/18/crimea-russia-ukraine-war/> 2022,

Black Sea is significant due to the centuries-old trade routes along its coasts which have made the region a strategic hub between the Europe and the Caucasus as well as the foothills of Asia. This area becomes the center of important raw material exports for Russia in response to European sanctions against Russian hydrocarbons. At the same time, China is also focusing on the entire BSR in the context of BRI, also known as New Silk Road, because essential trade routes are there which cross the Europe, Mediterranean and North Africa. In particular, these commercial passages run either through Black Sea or through the Bulgaria and Romania in Eastern Europe. They also cross Russian natural gas and oil pipelines.⁴⁶

The East Europe is situated in between Baltic Sea and Adriatic while in the past, they were among the power competition of Europe and Russia. Through the Cold War, most of these states were under the rule of Soviet Union and regulated their matters under Soviet Union's foreign and security policy. Now, many of them have joined NATO and EU and are looking for a greater stake in the BSR through the Three Seas Initiative.

The BSR is also the hub of several territorial and ethnic conflicts, such as Transnistria and Moldova, South Ossetia and Abkhazia in Georgia, and the Karabagh Conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia. These conflict emerged when the Soviet Union collapsed and still exist as unresolved disputes. Russia wants to secure them through diplomatic and military means while West wants to resolve them under its Russia's strategy. It seems that these conflicts are directly impacted by any confrontation between Russia and NATO which impedes in the formation of any security structure.⁴⁷

In 1997, Zbigniew Brzezinski, has predicted the situation in 'the Grand Chessboard' that the major reason of instability in the post- Soviet space would be Crimea. The status of Crimea has certainly become the central element in Russia's ambitions to maintain and expand its imperial position.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Daria Isanchenko, Göran Swistek "The Black Sea as Mare Clausum," *German Institute for International and Security Affairs* 33, (2023): 2.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Pawel Kowal, "Crimea's past and its postwar future," *GIS*, Jan. 10, 2023, <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/crimea-ukraine-war/>.

1.2 Significance of Treaties in the Context of the Black Sea Region

From 15th century, Ottoman Empire was the sovereign body of the BSR, governing most of the region and under their rule, Black Sea was known as “Turkish Lake”. A steady decline of Ottomans began when Russia started to attack on surrounding territories. During 18th century, Ottomans suffered a great loss when Russia annexed Crimea in 1783, which was the decisive moment when Russia gradually expanded its influence in its near abroad territories and power shifted from Ottomans to Russians, became Black Sea power. Through Black Sea, Russia expanded its naval forces in Aegean and Mediterranean Sea. Power competition between Russians and Ottomans started from mid of 16th century and ended by the collapse of Ottoman Empire at the end of WWI.⁴⁹ These wars and treaties are viewed as historical and spatial legacies in the light of Critical Geopolitics. For instance, the borders established after major conflicts, colonialism or the disintegrations of empires, known as spatial legacies that continue to shape geopolitical dynamics. In the context of Critical Geopolitics, spatial legacies are seen as socially and politically constructed and are key to understanding how historical territorial arrangements continue to affect foreign policy. Klaus Dodds argues that geopolitical understandings are not simply about space or geography but are deeply embedded in historical processes and memory. He focuses on how states and political actors use historical events, such as wars, colonization, and territorial disputes, to construct geopolitical identities and justify foreign policy decisions.⁵⁰

1.2.1 Treaty of Kuccuk Kaynarja

Russia and Ottoman Empire confronted each other many times over the control of oceanic region which showed gradual southward extension of Russia and steady decline of Ottoman Empire. Russia initiated wars first in order to access warm water port on Black Sea which were under Ottoman’s control. Till 1768, Russia did not get any productive results in wars but after the war of 1768-74, Russia succeeded to capture Azov, Crimea and Bessarabia and then Bulgaria and peace was established by Treaty of Kuccuk Kaynarja

⁴⁹ Neil Melvin, “Rebuilding Collective Security in the Black Sea Region”, (Sweden: SIPRI, 2018).

⁵⁰ Klaus Dodds, *Geopolitics: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

which was a major disaster for Ottomans as under this treaty, Russia was allowed to establish navy on Black Sea and liberated Crimea from Ottoman's rule. By establishing the treaty, Russia gained a forward position on the north shore of Black Sea. It also succeeded to release Tatars, an action which was helpful in the absorption of the Crimea. Russia achieved a special position in Moldovia and Wallachia, even while these territories remained under Ottoman sovereignty. Russia got the freedom of trade by accessing Mediterranean Sea and Ottoman not only through land but Black Sea and Straits. Russia reaffirmed its right by accessing a stable diplomatic representation in the Ottoman capital of Istanbul. Russia also got the privilege to build embassies by choice in Ottoman Empire. Russia's international position was getting stronger in this way but Ottoman's down fall started.⁵¹

1.2.2 Treaty of Jassy

Russia had implemented more assertive policy after the settlement of Kuccuk Kaynarja which was not acceptable by Ottomans as they wanted Crimean Peninsula back. Ottomans wanted to preclude the Russian influence in Transcaucasia. On the other side, Russia wanted to expand more in BSR. Ottomans revanchist aspirations caused Russo-Turkish War of 1787-91. In early August 1787 the Turkish government issued an ultimatum to Russia, which based on the following demands like return of the Crimea, Georgia's recognition as a vassal state of the Turkish Sultan and consent to check the Russian trade ships passing through the Straits. Russia rejected the ultimatum and Türkiye waged war on Russia. It lasted for six years. Russia got convincing victories and forced Ottomans for negotiations. Russians and Ottomans signed a peace treaty named Treaty of Jassy on Jan. 1792 which ended the Russo-Turkish War. This treaty established the terms of Kuccuk Kaynarja Peace Treaty regarding the transfer of Crimea to Russia. Russia also expanded its control to the entire northern BSR. Their borders was pushed back along the Dniester River, but Russia returned the territories of Bessarabia, Moldovia and Wallachia to Türkiye.⁵²

⁵¹ Roderic Davison, "'Russian Skill and Turkish Imbecility': The Treaty of Kuchuk Kainardji Reconsidered", Cambridge University Press (2017).

⁵² Presidential Library, "RUSSIA AND TURKEY SIGNED THE TREATY OF JASSY", *Boris Yeltsin Presidential Library*, <https://www.prilib.ru/en/history/618929>.

1.2.3 Treaty of Bucharest

In 1806, again war erupted when pro-Russian governors of Moldovia and Wallachia were removed by Ottomans. Russia was unwilling to attack by large forces but in prospect of Franco-Russian War in sight, Russia decided to take a quick decision on its southern frontier and in 1811-12, Russia forced Ottomans to surrender Bessarabia when Treaty of Bucharest was established.⁵³

1.2.4 Treaty of Edirne

Russia had captured the entire northern coast of Black Sea. Russia fought subsequent wars with Ottomans to gain influence in the Balkans, get the control of the Dardanelles and Bosphorus Straits, and expand its area of influence into the Caucasus. The Greeks' struggle for independence initiated the Russo-Turkish War of 1828–29. Before Türkiye appealed for peace, Russian forces got the advantage of the war and proceeded towards Bulgaria, the Caucasus, and northeastern Anatolia and got the control itself. Russia got the eastern shore of Black Sea in the result of the Treaty of Edirne, established in Sep. 14, 1829 and Russia also got sovereignty over Georgia and parts of Armenia which Türkiye recognized.⁵⁴

1.2.5 Treaty of Paris

The war of 1853–56, is recognized as the Crimean War, it was started when the Russian emperor Nicholas I tried to get further concession from Türkiye. Great Britain and France by taking the side of Türkiye joined the conflict in 1854, however, and the Treaty of Paris was established on March, 1856, which ended the war. It was a serious diplomatic loss for Russia.⁵⁵ Russia was forced to demilitarize Black Sea, no weapons on coastline. It was major disaster for Russia as its naval power could weaken in the region, no longer could threaten the Ottoman Empire by naval fleet. Russia was also forced to return the city of Kars and all other Ottoman territory which was under its possession. So Russia returned

⁵³ Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Treaty of Bucharest, Russo-Turkish History, "Russo-Turkish Wars |Causes, Consequences & Impacts" Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Treaty-of-Bucharest-1812>.

⁵⁴ Encyclopaedia Britannica, s.v. "Treaty of Edirne," accessed June 9, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Treaty-of-Edirne>.

⁵⁵ Encyclopaedia Britannica, s.v. "Russo-Turkish wars," accessed June 9, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Russo-Turkish-wars>.

the territory of Moldavia and Wallachia back to Ottomans. Russia was forced to left its demands of a protectorate for Christians living in the Ottoman Empire under this treaty, thus it was considered the abolition of main purpose which engaged Russia in war in the first place. But the major stakeholders of the treaty also allowed Russia to get back the region consisting of Sevastopol, Balaklava, Kerch, Kinburn and many other areas which had been occupied by the Allied troops during the war. It was also resulted in the reopening of Black Sea for international trade and commerce as it was important for all parties to carry out smooth trade operations. An international commission was created on the premise of establishing a free and peaceful navigation of the Danube River for the purpose of commerce.⁵⁶

1.2.6 Treaty of Moscow

It was the first treaty to develop friendly relations between Soviet Union and Türkiye on March 16, 1921. Leaderships of both entities signed this treaty.⁵⁷ It is also known as Treaty of Brotherhood. This treaty was comprised of 14 articles regarding the right of peoples of self-determination, brotherhood of nations, border declaration, uninterrupted trade and war of prisoners where Article V was based on the regime of straits.

According to the treaty, in order to ensure the opening of the straits and passage for commercial ships of all nations, both Contracting Parties agree to hand over the final elaboration of the international status of Black Sea and its straits to the future committee consisting of delegates from all Black Sea coastal nations, under the condition that the decisions made by said committee will impinge on neither Türkiye's full sovereignty, nor on Türkiye's security and the security of its capital city of Constantinople. Both Contracting Parties recognize the fact that all the treaties concluded between them up to this point are in keeping with their mutual interests. For this reason, they hereby agree to annul these previous treaties and render them void. The Government of the RSFSR hereby declares, in

⁵⁶ Jessica Brain, "The Outcome of the Crimean War", *HISTORIC UK*, <https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofBritain/Outcome-Crimean-War>

⁵⁷ Merve Aydoğan, "Turkey marks continental anniversary of Moscow Treaty," Anadolu Agency, (blog), March 16, 2021, accessed May 25, 2024, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/turkey-marks-centennial-anniversary-of-moscow-treaty/2177558>

particular, that it considers Türkiye free from any monetary or other obligations originating from any international pacts concluded between Türkiye and the Tsarist government.⁵⁸

1.3 Treaty of Lausanne

Ottoman Empire had lost its dominance of Black Sea in 1774 when they decided to join Poland in a war against Russia. Catherine the Great secured Crimea as a Russian protectorate as well as freedom of passage through the Straits for its commercial shipping. The status of Straits remained questionable for great powers throughout the history. But the ‘ancient rule’ of keeping the Straits closed to all military vessels sustained until the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923, only a year after the Soviet Union came into existence. The treaty allowed the freedom of passage for all vessels even for warships, but only during times of peace. It also established an International Straits Commission to manage the several provisions of the treaty, which included demilitarization.

Türkiye was not satisfied with the clauses of treaty. In 1931, Türkiye was anxious about the demilitarization clause which was incompatible with Türkiye’s legitimate right of self-defense. The League of Nations which provided collective security system, started to collapse when Germany started to remilitarize and Italy invaded Abyssinia and then Ethiopia. Türkiye’s concerns increased after this major disaster and it decided to reopen the issue of the Straits at Montreux conference.⁵⁹

1.4 Montreux Convention

As time passed, fragility of Ottoman Empire increased while other Western Powers became strengthen which were eager to resolve the straits dispute as Ottomans enjoyed complete authority over straits until the Treaty of Kuccuk Kaynarja. As mentioned above, many treaties were established for peaceful governance of Straits. With the London Straits Convention concluded on July 13, 1841, the straits regime was largely internationalized and the Ottoman Empire was obligated not to allow warships to pass through the straits during peacetime. With the Armistice of Mudros signed on October 30, 1918, the Ottoman

⁵⁸ Official document translated from Russian, Treaty of Moscow: March 16, 1921, Georgii Chicherin, Yusuf Kemal, Djelal Korkmasov, Dr. Riza Nur, Ali Fuad. <http://western-armenia.org/TreatyofMoscow.php>.

⁵⁹ Colleen Graffy, “Who will control the Black Sea?” *GIS*, Oct. 11, 2022, <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/black-sea-russia-turkey/>.

Empire completely lost control over the Dardanelles and Bosphorus Straits. The Lausanne Straits Convention signed at the Lausanne Peace Conference, but it lacked the clauses which could completely change these circumstances in favor of Türkiye. Türkiye had to undermine its sovereignty and control over the Straits under the convention's provisions. While the Lausanne Convention provided the right of free passage to the ships of all the States, it also allowed to control the water passage to the International Straits Commission and demilitarized the land 25-30km on either side of the water entities, including the Sea of Marmara. Furthermore, the convention put the commission under the auspices of the League of Nations. This was a major concern for Türkiye in the years following the Lausanne Straits Convention due to its highly negative provisions that brought considerable restrictions on Türkiye's jurisdiction and control over the Straits. The developments happening in the surrounding of Türkiye like rise of the expansionist ambitions of Mussolini's Italy, Hitler's Germany, and Imperial Japan in the 1930s enforced Türkiye to demand for a better status for the Straits. Britain not only considered the concerns of Türkiye but also supported them. A new convention was signed in 1936 by nine states, including Türkiye which established a new legal regime for the Straits of Dardanelles, Bosphorus and Sea of Marmara.⁶⁰

Türkiye enjoyed sovereignty over Turkish Straits under Montreux Convention of 1936 which defined rules and regulations for the passage of warships. Military vessels of non-regional states were being restricted through Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits. It applied limitations on the military vessels of non-riparian states passing through the straits in terms of the tonnage, number of vessels, and the duration of a visit and requirements for pre-notification of any passage. Non-regional states were not allowed to pass submarines through the Turkish Straits, while regional states' submarines movement was strictly restricted. Transit restrictions also prevent aircraft carriers from passing through the Straits.

1.5 Turkish Strait Crises

Montreux Convention was fully in favor of Türkiye which was not acceptable for Russia. During WWII, Türkiye stayed neutral but at the end of the war, Russia started to compel

⁶⁰ Yücel Acers, "Russia's attack on Ukraine: The Montreux Convention and Türkiye", *International Law Studies* 100, (2023): 287

Türkiye on the joint control of Straits and territorial concession along Georgian- Turkish border which Türkiye denied and resulted in Strait Crises. Amidst the war, Türkiye restricted civilian crew of the Soviet fleet to cross the Strait which provoked Russia and tensions rose between adversaries. Türkiye started to negotiate this dispute frequently with US diplomats which annoyed Russia and it submitted a memorandum to Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs that Türkiye's approach to dealing with the Strait no longer represented the security interests of the regional states. The memo concluded that the Straits regime was no longer credible and called for the Montreux Convention to be reconsidered and rewritten at a new international conference.⁶¹

Türkiye was not strong militarily enough to deter Russia so Türkiye called the US for support and joined NATO in 1952, thereby establishing one of the main pillars of the European security orders in Cold War and post-Cold War periods. Black Sea largely became Russian Lake due to the Soviet annexation of different territories before, during and after WWII and the BSR became a security entity of the Warsaw Pact in 1955, with the exception of Türkiye's coast and the Turkish Straits.⁶²

1.6 End of the Cold War

With the fall of the Soviet Union, Warsaw Pact also dissolved which changed the political and security arrangement across Black Sea dramatically. The wider region experienced a relatively intense birth into the post-Cold War era. New states emerged like Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova. But the BSR became the hub of unresolved disputes like in Georgia, Moldova, Armenia and Azerbaijan. Russia's foreign policy regarding the BSR was based on revisionist approach which further aggravated the conflicts in its near abroad like war with Georgia (2008), Crimean (2014) and then Ukraine (2022).⁶³

Among territorial and ethnic disputes, another strategic issue emerged; deletion of nuclear weapons from Ukraine. In 1994, Ukraine agreed to remove its nuclear capability in exchange of security guarantee from Russia under Budapest Memorandum. It was a

⁶¹ Academic Accelerator, "Turkish Strait Crises", *Academic Accelerator*, <https://academic-accelerator.com/encyclopedia/turkish-straits-crisis>

⁶² Neil Melvin, "Rebuilding Collective Security in the Black Sea Region", (Sweden: SIPRI, 2018).

⁶³ "TROUBLED WATERS- HOW RUSSIA'S WAR IN UKRAINE CHANGES BLACK SEA SECURITY," DEFENCE AND SECURITY COMMITTEE, Preliminary Draft Report, May. 2, 2023.

successful policy but still there was an uncomfortable relationship between Russia and Ukraine over Crimea. Both states had split the Soviet's BSF, 81% for Russia and 19% for Ukraine under the Treaty of Friendship. In exchange, Russia canceled most of the Ukrainian debts and concession on energy prices. Russia also took Sevastopol base on lease for twenty years.⁶⁴

Conversely, the end of the Cold War was not only a test but a chance as well for Türkiye. Two incidents happened which changed Türkiye's approach towards the region. Firstly, its role on NATO's southern flank reduced due to the collapse of the Soviet Union and secondly, the EU Community vetoed its request for membership in 1989, these circumstances made Türkiye ambiguous about future relations with West. In this respect, Türkiye grasped the chance to craft its own 'unipolar moment' in the BSR and formulated regional policy. It was based on the idea that regional political stability could be achieved through economic cooperation.⁶⁵ Türkiye took the initiative and started regional developments in the form of BSEC in 1992.⁶⁶ Its purpose was to enhance economic cooperation, regional stability, peace and security.

Along with regional developments, the BSR's states started to interact with the Euro-Atlantic system as it was a feeling of liberty from the Soviet's Communism system at the end of the Cold War when the region was suffering from insecurity and instability.⁶⁷ The regional states joined NATO sponsored PfP in 1994. An era of multilevel cooperation started in the region.⁶⁸ Both former empires, conclusively oppose the diffusion of Western advancement into the region.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Boris Toucas, "The Geostrategic Importance of the Black Sea Region: A Brief History", *Center for Strategic & International Studies*. Feb. 2, 2017, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/geostrategic-importance-black-sea-region-brief-history/>.

⁶⁵ Isachenko, Daria, "Turkey in the Black Sea region: Ankara's reactions to the war in Ukraine against the background of regional dynamics and global confrontation," *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik*, 12 (2023): 7, May 28, 2024, https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/research_papers/2023RP12_Turkey_BlackSeaRegion.pdf.

⁶⁶ Ozgur Ozdamur, "The Black Sea Region in the New Turkish Foreign Policy," *Edam- Centre for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies*, (2011): 6.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Duygu Sezer, "The Changing Strategic Situation in the Black Sea Region," *Bundesministerium für Landesverteidigung*, https://www.bmlv.gv.at/pdf_pool/publikationen/03_jb00_26.pdf.

⁶⁹ Ognyan Minchev, "Major Interests and Strategies for The Black Sea Region," *Institute for Regional and International Studies*, Sep. (2006): 10.

Türkiye was already the member of NATO but preferred regional cooperation in the region. While, later Bulgaria and Romania joined the Alliance in 2004. Georgia and Ukraine's aspirations to joined the NATO, threaten Russia which resulted in three major conflict with neighbouring states.

Conclusion

The BSR has historically served as a battlefield between empires, making it a focal point of geopolitical rivalry. Russian and Ottoman empires fought many wars for the control of the region. Their history comprises of a series of treaties which shows how both empires were anxious to get the control of Black Sea, Crimea and Turkish Straits. A regional chaos had been seen since Montreux Convention brought the stability. Türkiye became NATO ally at the start of the Cold War which blocked Russia from further provocation. A power vacuum was created with the fall of the Soviet Union in the BSR as Russia became weak and instability and insecurity prevailed which created disorder in the region. The end of the Cold War also marked as the new age of regional dynamics, changed the relationship status between Russia and Türkiye. Türkiye took it as an advantage and started regional developments which welcomed by Russia. Other regional states not only joined regional cooperation but also started to interact with the Euro-Atlantic system.

Chapter Two

Russia's Foreign Policy towards Black Sea (Black Sea Centric Approach)

Dr. Marion defined Black Sea that it allows access to certain shipping routes, it's been important for grain transport, transport of goods and other type of shipments so it is economically really important port. Strategically, it is important for Russian navy and also historically, a lot of Russian foreign policy has been framed in this idea that Russia is trying to or may be return to its historical homeland and Crimea is playing a very important role in this narrative how Russia understands itself.⁷⁰

According to former president, Boris Yeltsin (1996):

Russia will not be Russia without the Black Sea ... This is not only a question of history, not only of national feelings and prestige. Russia needs a fleet in the Black Sea to reliably protect its Black Sea lands and the North Caucasus.⁷¹

According to Dr. Anna ,when analyzing Russian foreign policy, many scholars and analysts mostly tend to focus on Putin in particular, his personalized style.⁷² Russia has five key foreign policy objectives: to preserve security; to decrease the external influences and perceived interference in its internal affairs; to assert Russia's right to act as a sovereign Great Power; to prevent further incursions into its sphere of influence; to reassert itself as a global power.⁷³ So in the BSR, Russia's ambition to rule Black Sea again, compel it to adopt an aggressive approach. Since 2014 to 2022, Russia has gained more physical coastline on Black Sea. Russia's quest for Black Sea is centuries old.

⁷⁰ Dr. Marion Messmer is working as Senior Research Fellow, International Security, The Royak Institute of International Affairs, Chatham House, London. The researcher conducted online interview through Google Meet on June 13, 2024. The transcription of interview is attached as Annexure 7.

⁷¹ Isachenko, Daria, "Turkey in the Black Sea region: Ankara's reactions to the war in Ukraine against the background of regional dynamics and global confrontation," (Berlin, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 2023), 16.

⁷² Dr. Anna Ohanyan is working as a Professor of International Relations, at Department of Political science and International Studies in Stonehill College, Washington. The researcher conducted online interview through Zoom on June 17, 2024. The transcription of interview is attached as Annexure 8.

⁷³ Chatham House, "The Black Sea Region: New Conditions, Enduring Interests," January 16, 2009, London, seminar summary, held in conjunction with the Nicolae Titulescu European Foundation, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Russia%20and%20Eurasia/160109blacksea.pdf>.

Amidst the Cold War, it was known as “Soviet Lake” as Russia had strong hold over Black Sea except Türkiye’s coastline. But Russia lost its control over significant corridors after its dissolution. Black Sea became trivial for the West but for Russia, according to Dr. Toucas, ‘but it remained instrumental in shaping Russia’s concept of near abroad’.⁷⁴ With respect to the Russia’s objectives in Black Sea, there is no evidence of prioritizing Black Sea in official documents like Military Doctrine and Maritime Doctrine but it is demonstrated through Russia’s geopolitical actions which it spatialize in Black Sea.⁷⁵

To elucidate Russia’s imagery of the BSR politics, this chapter employs a Critical Geopolitics perspective which views foreign policy as a historico- spatial, practical and formal practice of constructing and defending different identities.⁷⁶

In this perspective, the chapter has been divided into four sections as follows: i) importance of Black Sea, Crimea and Sevastopol port for Russia’s projection of power, ii) evolution of Russian foreign policy in different phases, iii) Russia’s diplomatic role and iv) narratives which Russian officials and political thinkers regularly use to build a particular stance about Russia.

2.1 Importance of Black Sea and Crimea for Russia

Crimea is having an interesting history. Different empires have ruled Crimea like Mongols, Tatars, Ottomans, Tsars and then Russians. After Cold War, Crimea came under the control of Ukraine. Then in 2014, Russia started to control Crimea by the will of the Crimean people as they perceive themselves Russian. Actually, Crimean people voted for incorporation into Russia on the verge of dissolution of the Soviet Union and pro-Russian feelings remained strong in the peninsula throughout the 1990s and 2000s.

There were several reasons why Russia wanted to have access to the BSR throughout history. For example, during the late 17th century it was perceived important for

⁷⁴Amal Anzari, "The State of Cooperation in the Black Sea Region," September 10, 2021, <https://idrn.eu/the-state-of-cooperation-in-the-black-sea-region/>.

⁷⁵ Janusz Bugajski and Peter B. Doran, "Russian Derzhavnost, Grand Strategy, and the Black Sea," International Affairs Forum, June 8, 2024, Center for European Policy Analysis, 43, https://www.ia-forum.org/Content/ViewInternal_Document.cfm?contenttype_id=5&ContentID=8902.

⁷⁶ Mariya Y. Omelicheva, "Critical Geopolitics on Russian Foreign Policy: Uncovering the Imagery of Moscow’s International Relations," (Lawrence: Department of Political Science, University of Kansas), (2).

commercial reasons. In the 19th century Russia supported separation of Slavic people from the Ottoman empire and pan-Slavic feelings were important at that point. Crimea has always been key to the Russian Black Sea ambitions, due to its central geographical position. It also acquired additional symbolic importance in the 19th century, due to the Crimean war that Russia fought against Britain, France and Türkiye.⁷⁷

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Crimea became part of an independent Ukraine, which led to a complex and often tense relationship between Russia and Ukraine regarding control and influence over the peninsula.⁷⁸ So the majority of Russians believed that transferring of Crimea to Ukraine was a major historical injustice. Moreover, Russian BSF was located there since the Soviet times. In 1990's and 2000's, Russia didn't have enough resources to relocate the BSF as it was very expensive to build new infrastructure. So, Russia negotiated with Ukraine to keep this base. Crimea has symbolic will for Russia. Majority in Crimea are Russian people who perceive them Russians. During the dissolution of Soviet Union, Crimean wanted to switch from Ukraine. Crimea organized a referendum to move under Russian sovereignty. At the time of dissolution, every state was claiming something on the basis of history. There were feelings of abandonment among the people of Crimea.⁷⁹

Nevertheless, Ukraine and Russia had cooperative relations till Orange Revolution. Most contentious issues were resolved under a treaty that was signed between Russia and Ukraine in 1997. Since Soviet times their remained close human-to-human ties, with freedom of movement, no passport and identification required. But after Orange Revolution in 2004, things started to change. There were more restrictions on Ukraine side. In 2014, coup d'état in Kyiv happened, a strong pro-Russian movement started in Crimea. There was a perception that Ukraine Nationalist were creating problems in East Ukraine and Crimea. After the coup there was no sovereign government to represent and protect the

⁷⁷ Dr. Igor Istomin is working as an Associate Professor at Department of Applied International Political Analysis, MGIMO University of Russia. The researcher conducted online interview through Google Meet on May 2, 2024. The Transcription of interview is attached as Annexure 2.

⁷⁸ Dr. Gloria Shkurti Özdemir is working as a Researcher in the Foreign Policy Directorate and Assistant Editor of Insight Turkey, The SETA Foundation, Istanbul Turkey. The questionnaire is shared through WhatsApp on July 12, 2024. The transcription of interview is attached as Annexure 9.

⁷⁹ Interview with Dr. Igor.

people of Ukraine and Crimea. So Crimean people had right to conduct their own referendum, chose to be part of Russia. Russia decided to not to go against the will of the people so it controlled Crimea.⁸⁰

Another perspective is, Russia considers Crimea to be Russian in many ways. Crimea is populated by ethnic Russians more than by other peoples and in last seventy years, also Russia deported many Tatars from Crimea. Russia's war in Ukraine needs to be viewed via the prism of a colonial Russia was an empire different to British Empire which had its territories overseas. Russia's empire is contiguous to the Russian mainland. So it is very difficult for the Russia mindset to accept that there have to be a limit to its own borders and its neighbours are not part of Russia. So Crimea was part of the Russian empire. Letting go of Crimea is also letting go of empire. Letting go of Crimea is also what Russia needs to do to have proper decolonization.⁸¹ Dr. Gloria also viewed the Crimea as a significant proportion of Crimea's population identifies as ethnically Russian, fostering cultural and nationalistic ties to Russia. This demographic factor has been used to justify Russian claims and actions in the region.⁸²

2.1.1 Significance of Sevastopol for Russia

When look throughout the actions of Russia, Crimea is strategically important providing access to Black Sea as it has an important port, Sevastopol which is home to BSF. So Russian invasion of Ukraine is started in a way. If Russia manages to deny the access of Black Sea to Ukraine, then Ukraine would be much less viable as a state similarly if Russia loose access to Black Sea then it would be detrimental for Russia because it doesn't have port like this.⁸³

Dr. Gloria also has the same views in this context. For instance, the most important factor is the strategic ones, the presence of the Sevastopol port in Crimea, the primary base of the Russian BSF. This base provides Russia with a crucial naval presence in Black Sea,

⁸⁰ Interview with Dr. Igor.

⁸¹ Ms. Samantha De Bendern is working as an Associate Fellow in Russia and Eurasia Programme, Chatham House, London. The researcher conducted online interview through WhatsApp on May 26, 2024. The Transcription of interview is attached as Annexure 5.

⁸² Interview with Dr. Gloria.

⁸³ Interview with Dr. Marion.

allowing for power projection into Mediterranean Sea, the Middle East, and beyond. So it can be argued that control over Crimea and a strong presence in Black Sea reinforce Russia's position as a dominant regional power. Furthermore, Black Sea is a region of strategic competition with NATO. By controlling Crimea, Russia can counter NATO's influence and presence in the region, maintaining a balance of power. It is also important to state that Sevastopol and other Crimean ports are warm-water ports that do not freeze in winter, unlike many of Russia's northern ports. This allows for year-round naval operations and trade activities, which are crucial for military and economic reasons.⁸⁴

According to Nicholas Spykman, 'geography does not argue, it simply is.'⁸⁵

Russia has its own port, Novorossiysk and did invest a lot into this port but Sevastopol port's infrastructure is advanced and offers different capabilities especially maintenance, construction, command and control capabilities. For example, the headquarters of Black Sea is located in Sevastopol. Furthermore, apart from the opportunities that Sevastopol offers, the geostrategic position is very important that is offered by the Crimean Peninsula to Russia. It is situated in the center of Black Sea while Novorossiysk is in the northeast corner of Black Sea if Russia only deploys its force from there, it is pretty much cornered. In the current war, Russians has the advantage that they can withdraw forces from Crimea to Novorossiysk and further to Abkhazia because they have geostrategic space. This gives the Russian Navy space to deploy forces, to withdraw and to react to different developments. If Russia had not annexed Crimea, then it would have been stuck in Novorossiysk surrounded by NATO member states or at least NATO partner countries. Most of the littoral states are NATO states, particularly Türkiye is a powerful NATO member state and two states like Ukraine and Georgia have very strong aspirations to join NATO. By annexing Crimea, Russia put a powerful roadblock in the way of Ukraine's accession to NATO.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Interview with Dr. Gloria.

⁸⁵ Laws of Plato, "State, Territory, and Boundaries: A General Discussion," in *The Laws of Plato*, 8, https://sunypress.edu/content/download/449659/5463518/version/1/file/9780791421932_imported2_excerpt.pdf.

⁸⁶ Dr. Tobias Kollakowski is working as a Research Fellow at German Institute for Defence and Strategic Studies, Kings London College. The researcher conducted online interview through google meet on June 11, 2024. The transcription of interview is attached as Annexure 6.

Significance of Sevastopol port is analyzed by different attributes: Sea control means that the controlling power can use the sea to serve its interests, but now, sea control also means securing it for everyone except the enemies of the system.⁸⁷ Sevastopol is important because it contributes in the Russian ability to control its open and littoral waters. First, Russia values Sevastopol because it can pursue its political objectives through this port. Before Russia's seizure of Crimea, Russia and Ukraine shared the Sevastopol's port facilities, this joint basing limited the practical maritime power of Ukraine while the presence of Russian BSF in Sevastopol hindered Ukraine's ability to control effectively its main port and its infrastructure.⁸⁸ So it was in Russian political interests to have a pro-Russian government in Ukraine which would continue the longstanding lease on Sevastopol because the port limited Ukraine's freedoms as much as it did Russia's, especially given Ukraine's intentions to integrate with the Western organization. But, after the invasion, although maritime governance was, and remains, troubled with divergent views regarding Crimea, the absolute control over a strategic port like Sevastopol provides Russia with the lead in any new geopolitical maneuvers it chooses to make whether they be power projections, expeditionary operations and participation in sea commerce or new multilateral arrangements.

Second, maritime power projection is the ability of a state to influence or coerce others at, or from the sea. This definition is very wide, allowing maritime power to translate into social, political, and/or military projections. As Till suggests, power projection not only means 'what they can do at sea, but what they can do from it.'⁸⁹ This means that ports may allow states to project power for historic or cultural reasons, meet geopolitical objectives, and even militaristic expeditionary operations away from their coastlines. Sevastopol's importance to Russian security in terms of the port being Russia's access to regional and international power projection. The Sevastopol port is the symbolic representation of Russia's soft-power victory against the West.⁹⁰ Russia views its soft power in geopolitical

⁸⁷ Tanvi Chauhan, "Why Are Warm-Water Ports Important to Russian Security?" (2020), Political Science, Geography, Semantic Scholar, <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Why-Are-Warm-Water-Ports-Important-to-Russian-Chauhan/ef0ec0d27cc50d00982fc41b3aa78c35cc629718>.

⁸⁸ Chauhan, "Why are Warm," 60.

⁸⁹ Chauhan, "Why are Warm," 58.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 61.

terms as a ‘counterforce to the West’ in an effort to defend Russian interests. Sevastopol is obviously important to Russian security because Russia uses it to reach certain geopolitical and military effects, both domestic and international. Once Sevastopol was under Russia’s possession, there was no fear of an anti-Russian government in Ukraine reverting the lease, so Russia annexed the peninsula and also the port, as a medium of political warfare instead of using the port for military purpose against Ukraine.⁹¹

Third, good order at sea means port is being used to protect against any threat to the sea order. Different states have different meanings of order: good order involves dealing with traditional threats like alliances, balancing, unipolarity etc., as well as new age globalization threats like WMD, illegal immigration, non-state actors’ aggression, radicalism, environmental degradation, and so on.⁹²

Sevastopol is essential to Russian security because Russia protects its region from any threat throughout the year, which disturbs the order. Russia’s good regional maritime order is perpetually threatened due to the presence of NATO. According to Putin,

we are against having a military alliance making itself home right in our back-yard or in our historic territory [and] I simply cannot imagine that we would travel to Sevastopol to visit NATO sailors.⁹³

Sevastopol acts as barricade against any hostile action taken by the West. Russia uses Sevastopol as a buffer against any imminent threat from the West along with other threats. In this respect, Sevastopol is important to Russian security because it allows Russia to preserve its own good order.⁹⁴

Lastly, maritime harmony requires cooperation and integration of many states’ maritime agencies as deal with common threats. A naval port is required in order to command and share the global commons peacefully and effectively.⁹⁵ Sevastopol is essential to Russian security because it allows the Russian state to effectively maintain cooperation with its region on trade, military support, nontraditional threats, and so on. Sevastopol allows

⁹¹ Ibid., 62

⁹² Ibid., 59.

⁹³ Putin, “Address by President of the Russian Federation.”

⁹⁴ Chauhan, “Why are Warm,” 65.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 59.

Russia to uphold its maritime consensus with Moldova in transporting Russian forces, conducting joint military operations, exchanging military hardware, and codirecting border security operations in Transnistria. Russia also values Sevastopol because it can use it to advance joint maritime security operations with other countries into a fully standing multinational maritime task force. This includes BLACKSEAFOR, and OBSH, they are established with the aim to prevent risks and deter threats at sea. However, Russia's voluntary participation in multinational maritime security operations even with rivals indicates both the importance of the port for that end and Russia's disposition to enhance maritime unanimity.⁹⁶

2.2 Evolution of Russia's Black Sea Centric Approach

Russian foreign policy is very much defined by history.⁹⁷ Russia's pursuit of Black Sea is centuries old. Its Black Sea centric approach has evolved gradually. Russia's power status changes but its interest in Black Sea does not deviate. The impact of history on Russia's foreign policy regarding Crimea and Black Sea is profound and multifaceted, deeply rooted in historical, strategic, and cultural factors.⁹⁸ As the Critical Geopolitics perspective focuses on the social construction of spaces and identities.⁹⁹ So Russia's construction of different identities (Imperial Russia, Soviet Union) had evolved gradually as the part of foreign policy to pursue its national interests.

2.2.1 Imperial Russia

With the historical perspective, the annexation of Crimea by Catherine the Great (1783) marking the beginning of Russian control over the region. This historical event established Crimea as a significant part of Russian territory. Another important event can be considered also the Crimean War (1853-1856) which highlighted the strategic importance of Crimea and Black Sea for Russia, emphasizing the region's role in Russian defense and power

⁹⁶ Ibid., 65.

⁹⁷ Interview with Dr. Igor.

⁹⁸ Interview with Dr. Gloria.

⁹⁹ Mariya Y. Omelicheva, "Critical Geopolitics on Russian Foreign Policy: Uncovering the Imagery of Moscow's International Relations," (Lawrence: Department of Political Science, University of Kansas), (2).

projection.¹⁰⁰

There was no doubt that the quest for achieving absolute sovereignty over Black Sea was one of the motives while Catherine the Great of Russia also had the sentiments of hostility against the Turks. It was all started with the invasion of Ukraine by the Empress whose aim was to conquer Crimean Peninsula to seize warm water port. She wanted to create a powerful navy to project power outside of Russia's mainland. Eventually, the aim behind this invasion to capture Constantinople and the Straits from the Ottoman Empire. By following the Greek Project, she aimed to divide the Ottoman Empire to reestablish the Eastern Roman Empire under Russia. So she could have project power in the Eastern Mediterranean and Africa. This would be possible if Russia completely dominated Black Sea.¹⁰¹

During 19th century, the Ottoman Empire started to decline so Russia and France viewed this as an opportunity and affirmed that they would protect the Palestine and the Levant. Black sea was the only source for Russia to project power in the Eastern Mediterranean. In this context, Russia indulged in Crimean war with France, Britain and the Ottomans but Russia lost the war. Russia's expectations of increasing influence in the Ottoman Empire ruined for the rest of the 19th century. Though, in the start of the 20th century, the last Russian Tsar, Nicholas II, was still following the same approach. During the WWI, Russia's aspirations to occupy Istanbul in the final partition of the Ottoman Empire, to restore the ancient Orthodox Christianity. Russia's aims regarding the Ottoman Empire were so advanced which formalized in a secret agreement known as the Constantinople Agreement signed during the war. The Allies agreed to give Constantinople and other Turkish lands to Russian Empire in result of victory. But this plan did not become successful due to Russian Revolution and Soviet Union created.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Dr. Gloria.

¹⁰¹ Adam Christopher Nettles, "The Black Sea Thread in Russian Foreign Policy and How the United States Can Respond," *Journal of Advanced Military Studies* 13, no. 2 (2022): 123, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/866878>.

¹⁰² Ibid., 123.

2.2.2 Soviet Union Strategy (1922-1991)

After Montreux Convention of 1936, seemingly Russia lost the game. But, Soviet Union started to pressurize Türkiye to renegotiate the convention to share the control over the Straits. Crisis initiated between Soviet Union and Türkiye in 1946, when Russia increased its military presence in Black Sea. Russia also demanded military bases on Turkish land. Türkiye called US for help and in response US sent warships to the disputed area. The Soviet Union eventually stepped down from its demands, however this incident worked as a catalyst in the process of Truman Doctrine. This doctrine was installed to contain Soviet threat in the Mediterranean. Finally Türkiye and Greece joined NATO in 1952.¹⁰³ NATO assured territorial integrity to Türkiye. So Türkiye sustained its control over the southern coast of Black Sea and the Turkish Straits as it had for six centuries. While the rest of the coast controlled by Russia and its satellite states. The region became bi-polar in the presence of NATO and the Soviet Union and a balanced environment maintained throughout the Cold War.¹⁰⁴

2.2.3 Post-Soviet Policy (1991-2014)

As far as the perception of Cold War is concerned, there is one point of view which in US, a lot of people support that the Soviet Union lost the Cold War as they could not sustain the arms race with US and NATO Allies. They had invested so much in military development which resulted in the burden on their economies too large and the Soviet system fell apart and NATO achieved success in the Cold War. A second interpretation which, to a certain degree, contradicts the above-mentioned view relates to the engagement policy by some European countries towards the USSR. According to this second point of view, building trust, deepening trade relations and creating opportunities for people to travel fostered social and political change. The conclusion drawn from this interpretation of history has been, for the most part, to strengthen relations with Moscow as this would ultimately lead to change and more open and democratic societies.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Boris Toucas, "The Geostrategic Importance of the Black Sea Region: A Brief History," *Center for Strategic & International Studies*, February 2, 2017, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/geostrategic-importance-black-sea-region-brief-history>.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 124.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Dr. Tobias

The Soviet Union's dissolution shattered balance in the BSR. Prior to this incident, both US and the Soviet Union regulated the affairs of the region but the emergence of new states broke the hegemony of the Soviet Union. Russia emerged as the successor state of the Soviet Union but no more dominance. There was unstable balance of power evolved in the region following by multiple armed disputes. Seemingly, Putin pursued the ambitions of Peter the Great as he justified his invasion of Ukraine by saying

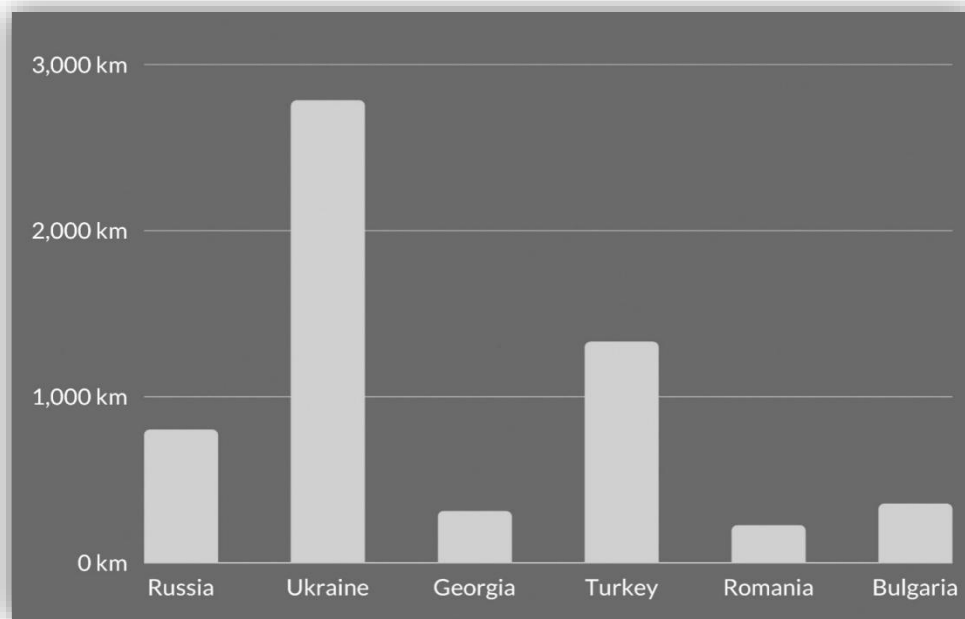
Peter the Great waged the Great Northern War for 21 years. It would seem that when he was at war with Sweden, he took something from them. He did not take anything from them, he simply returned what was Russia's.¹⁰⁶

Russia's unilateral actions based on historical revanchism by which Russia enhanced its physical position and control of Black Sea. This combination of power imbalances paired with historically rooted approach of revanchism has resulted in a series of conflicts since his accession. Russia enhanced its physical position and control of Black Sea in result of each conflict with neighbouring states which shows by the following figures.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ Adam Christopher Nettles, "The Black Sea Thread in Russian Foreign Policy and How the United States Can Respond," *Journal of Advanced Military Studies* 13, no. 2 (2022): 125, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/866878>.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 125.

Figure 3. Black Sea Coastline in 2000

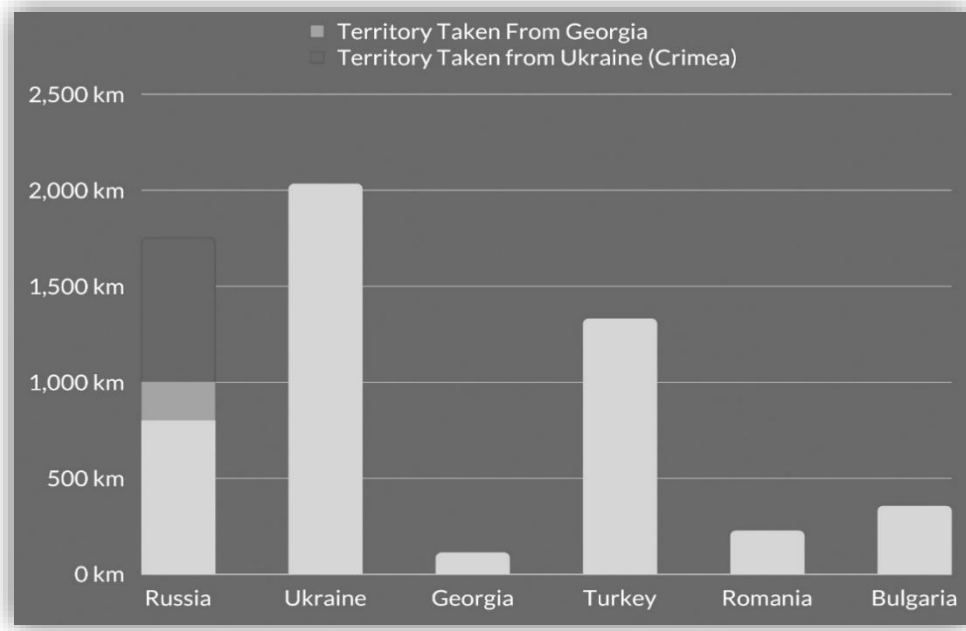


Source: This graph has been taken from “The Black Sea Thread in Russian Foreign Policy and How the United States Can Respond”,¹⁰⁸

This graph shows the original coastline of each state occupies before the Georgia War 2008.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 126.

Figure 4. Black Sea Coastline when Russia invaded Georgia (2008) and Crimea (2014).

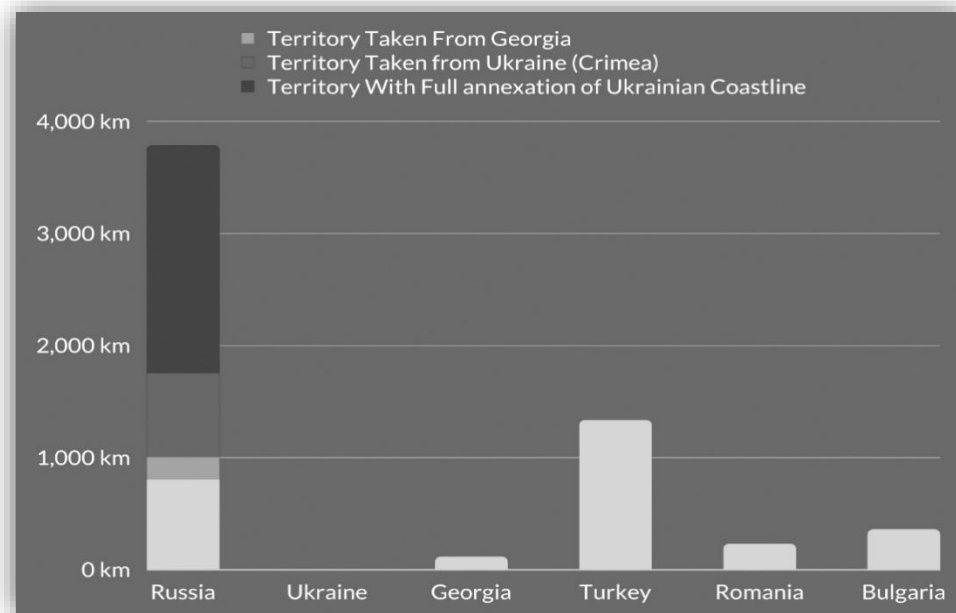


Source: This graph has been taken from “The Black Sea Thread in Russian Foreign Policy and How the United States Can Respond”¹⁰⁹

This graph shows the decrease in the coastline of Georgia and Ukraine after Georgia War and Crimean Annexation. Russia has occupied these coastlines and increases its influence over Black sea.

¹⁰⁹ Adam Christopher Nettles, “The Black Sea Thread in Russian Foreign Policy and How the United States Can Respond,” *Journal of Advanced Military Studies* 13, no. 2 (2022): 125, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/866878>.

Figure 5. Russian Coastline after Invasion of Ukraine.



Source: This graph has been taken from “The Black Sea Thread in Russian Foreign Policy and How the United States Can Respond”¹¹⁰

This graph shows the complete picture of captured coastlines by Russia from Georgia, Crimea and then full scale war of Ukraine. In fact, Türkiye possesses the longest coastline but after seizing other states territories, Russia controls the longest coastline.

¹¹⁰ Adam Christopher Nettles, “The Black Sea Thread in Russian Foreign Policy and How the United States Can Respond,” *Journal of Advanced Military Studies* 13, no. 2 (2022): 128, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/866878>.

2.3 Russia's Diplomatic Role in the Black Sea Region

The Warsaw Pact encaged the Soviet Union states while its suspension brought relief in a sense that states could join the security alliance of their choice. The same was for Russia, as Dr. Igor explained this situation in a way that in 1991, many expressed a feeling of relief in Russia when dissolution of the Soviet Union was happened. As economic situation was very bad, only two parts of the USSR were self- sufficient and profitable i.e., Russia and Belarus while other thirteen republics were dependent and received subsidies from these two. Nevertheless, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union Moscow continued to support other post-Soviet states. During difficult times in the 1990s and 2000s it helped to consolidate their statehood largely through provision of cheap energy.¹¹¹

Russia was providing oil and natural gas to Georgia, Crimea, Moldova, Belarus and Ukraine at a price lower than the Western Europe. Russia was basically subsidizing the states around it. Instability in Russia's neighbourhood could produce instability in Russia. Russia wants to have stability in its borders. It does not want genocide, which became possible in its neighbourhood. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, there were complex processes of nation formation. Dr. Igor elucidated it with examples like in Georgia there were people who did not perceive themselves as Georgians. The region of Abkhazia had an autonomy within Georgia under the Soviet Union. The Georgians Nationalists who came to power in 1991, they wanted single nation state. Therefore, Russia was trying to mediate and negotiate a ceasefire between Abkhazia and Georgia. Another example of Moldova where Russian army prevented attack by Moldovan forces on Transnistria in 1992.¹¹²

At the same time Russia continued to recognize Transnistria as the part of Moldova but Russia wanted that there should be diplomatic solution to this problem. Russian military bases were in Georgia in 1990's but Russia had pledge to withdraw its forces from Georgian bases in 2006-7.¹¹³ Once Russia withdrew its forces in 2008 Saakashvili launched an armed attack on a breakaway region of South Ossetia. From Russian perspective, there

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

were a lot of attempts by local actors to resolve complicated disputes by military means so this could lead to ethnic cleansing. Russia strived to prevent this from happening. In 2002 Russia came close to negotiating a deal in which Transnistria would reintegrate into Moldova under conditions of federalization. Both sides support this deal (Kozak Memorandum), but at the last moment Western representative pressed the president of Moldova into non-signing of this document. Russian foreign policy was very aware of the example of Croatia as a negative instance. After dissolution of Yugoslavia, in parts of Croatia, Serbian population created a de-facto state as they didn't feel themselves Croatians. There was a state of war between the two entities.

When ceasefire happened then UN peacekeeper came there. In 1995, when Croatia became more stable and its army got stronger, it launched two military operations on Serbs to cleanse where they had fled to other states. It was hard to find a resolution to this conflict. So, Russia did not want to happen this on its borders. In Central Asia, Russia also helped to Resolve the Civil War in Tajikistan back in 1990's. In Kazakhstan, at the time of dissolution, there was a large Russian ethnic population. But Russia did not try to destabilize Kazakhstan, it had no territorial claims vis-à-vis Kazakhstan. So, to sum up, Russia remained always interested in stability in its neighborhood, which suffers due to the multiple internal disputes within post-Soviet states. Russia tried prevent military conflicts in its neighborhood, tried to resolve these disputes diplomatically even if it took time and it supported the stability of its neighbors economically.¹¹⁴

Russia's modern foreign policy is based on the concept of a unique civilization rooted in Russian ethnic identity, history and culture. Russia's efforts to command and control Russian ethnic populated territories through annexations, military aid and peace programs are cited as the examples of Imperial Russia.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Interview Dr. Igor.

¹¹⁵ Mark Galeotti and Andrew S. Bowen, "How Russia's President Morphed from Realist to Ideologue – and What He'll Do Next," *Foreign Policy*, April 21, 2014, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2022/09/22/putin_s_empire_of_the_mind_russia_geopolitics.

2.4 Practical and Formal Geopolitical Concepts in Russian Foreign Policy

The fall of the Soviet Union damaged the Russian position in the region. This was primarily due to the division of the Soviet BSF including the infrastructure and related industries. In fact, this was the period of instability which led to a drop in the combat readiness of Russia's BSF. In effect of this, Russia lost its military parity in the BSR for the first time. Russia's strategic power weakened led to the strengthening of other regional states.¹¹⁶ In this context, Russia started to focus on its foreign policy, designed by geopolitical dynamics in pursuit of imperial power. Russian officials, political thinkers and ideologists have built different identities to represent Russia as great power. This feature is analyzed with different aspects of Critical Geopolitics which expose how political actors formulate foreign policy in the BSR.

In the Critical Geopolitics framework, geopolitical knowledge is reproduced on three levels: practical geopolitics, which involves the everyday practice of statecraft through foreign policy discussions; popular geopolitics, which shapes national identity and perceptions of other nations and cultures through popular media and culture; and formal geopolitics, which refers to the development and transmission of geopolitical ideas by intellectuals and academic institutions.¹¹⁷ So, here are different political thoughts, ideas, and narratives which constitute the foreign policy of Russia to demonstrate Russia as imperial power in world politics.

2.4.1 *Russkyi Mir*

Russian ideologist and philosophers created a formal geopolitical concept *Russkyi Mir* to represent Russia as a distinctive state of values and tradition. This term is constructed in historical perspective of Imperial Russia. Putin had practically used this term for the first time during his first reign as a notion of foreign policy. It is used as an instrument to project

¹¹⁶ Konstantin Kurylev, "The Black Sea Region as a Zone of Geopolitical Confrontation," *Valdai Discussion Club*, Jan. 15, 2020, <https://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/the-black-sea-region-as-a-zone-of-geopolitical/>

¹¹⁷ Gearóid Ó Tuathail, "Understanding Critical Geopolitics: Geopolitics and Risk Society," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 22, no. 2–3 (1999): 107–124.

Russia's geopolitical goals and hegemonic claims on the post-Soviet space.¹¹⁸ The Critical Geopolitics approach understands it as a social, cultural, ideological and political practice that shapes and constructs fundamental beliefs about reality.¹¹⁹

Collapse of Soviet Union not only shaken the Russia but also the newly emerged states as their state affairs were dependent upon Russia. Most of the states had Pro-Russian leaderships but Colour Revolutions in Georgia and then Ukraine changed the regime in both of the states which was an alarming situation for Russia as it was perceived as a security threat. This was the time when *Russkyi Mir* emerged to influence Black Sea states. A foundation was established on the name of *Russkyi Mir* in 2007 with the approval of President Putin.¹²⁰ Its purpose was to promote Russian language. The *Russkyi Mir* or Russian world refers to the spaces which are populated by ethnic Russians, speak Russian language or associate with Russian culture. It extends to Belarus, Kazakhstan, East Ukraine, Transnistria in Moldova, South Ossetia and Abkhazia in Georgia etc. including Russia itself.¹²¹

In 2013, Russia officially converted this formal geopolitical concept into practical and made it the part of foreign policy.¹²² Russia has promoted *Russkyi Mir* worldwide to become a brand. Its spatial focus is wide and ambiguous. It was first introduced for the post-Soviet space but later, it was expanded to focus on Central and Eastern Europe and then globally. It is not limited to post-Soviet space but also have targeted to EU member states. Russia has invested in Bulgaria to spread anti-EU stances to exploit its affinity with Orthodoxy and Slavic ethno cultural aspects. The *Russkyi Mir*, Foundation has so far established six Russian Centers in Bulgaria to target younger generations.¹²³ So, it is not only religious and cultural concept, but political as well which is formulated to establish

¹¹⁸ Andrei Lovu, "Russkyi Mir in the Black Sea Region," *Middle East Institute*, 2021, 1, <https://www.mei.edu/sites/default/files/2021-07/0712%20Russkyi%20Mir%20in%20the%20Black%20Sea%20Region%20-%20Andrei%20Iovu.pdf>.

¹¹⁹ Merje Kuus, "Critical Geopolitics," in *The International Studies Encyclopedia*, vol. II, ed. R. Denemark (Oxford: Blackwell, 2010), 683–670.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 2.

¹²¹ Filip Noubel, "What does "Russian World" stand for in Putin's statements about Ukraine," *Global Voices*, (blog) Feb. 26, 2022, accessed June 1, 2024, <https://globalvoices.org/2022/02/26/what-does-russian-world-stand-for-in-putins-statements-about-ukraine/>.

¹²² Ibid., 2.

¹²³ Ibid., 3.

connections with the Russian diaspora. It is a significant instrument used to shape the Russian public opinion and Russian expats throughout the ‘near abroad’ and beyond to serve the Russian interests and reinforce Russia’s claim to a sphere of influence. It has proven to be a useful mechanism in pursuit of the Russian foreign policy objectives.¹²⁴

President Putin also justified the occupation of Crimea by inducing the notion of *Russkyi Mir*. He emphasized his aspirations of the Russian world to re-establish unity as Russians living as a divided nation. According to him, broad Russian civilization has to be protected from external forces especially from the West.¹²⁵ Although much of the focus has been on promoting Russian soft power, but it has also been used in the war time in Ukraine’s Donbas region to claim that portions of Eastern Ukraine were historically part of Russia; they referred to the region as *Novorossiia*, a term used to designate part of southern Russia during Tsarist days. In 2014, this idea was supported directly by Putin who said in referring to Donbas:

I’ll remind you, this is *Novorossiia*: Kharkov, Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson, Nikolayev and Odessa were not part of Ukraine during Tsarist times. These were all territories given to Ukraine in the 1920s by the Soviet government.

Although Putin did not say that Russia should reclaim these regions, he encouraged the separatist cause and those who sought to recreate *Novorossiia*.¹²⁶ Putin stated in a speech that Ukraine belongs to the Russian world before his invasion of Ukraine.¹²⁷

Dr. Paul defined Putin thinking regarding Imperial Russia as Putin has made extensive references to history in making claims on Crimea and on the territory he calls *Novorossiia*, which includes much Ukraine’s Black Sea coast, including Odesa. It is hard to know

¹²⁴ Robert E. Berls, “Strengthening Russian’s Influence in International Affairs, Part II: Russia and its Neighbours: A sphere of Influence or a Declining Relationship,” NTI, Jul. 13, 2021, <https://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/strengthening-russias-influence-in-international-affairs-part-ii-russia-and-its-neighbors-a-sphere-of-influence-or-a-declining-relationship/>.

¹²⁵ Wilfried Jilge, “Russkyi Mir: Russian World, On the genesis of a geopolitical concept and its effects on Ukraine,” German council on foreign Relations, May 3, 2016, Accessed June 1, 2024, <https://dgap.org/en/events/russkiy-mir-russian-world>.

¹²⁶ Robert E. Berls, “Strengthening Russian’s Influence in International Affairs, Part II: Russia and its Neighbours: A sphere of Influence or a Declining Relationship,” NTI, Jul. 13, 2021, <https://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/strengthening-russias-influence-in-international-affairs-part-ii-russia-and-its-neighbors-a-sphere-of-influence-or-a-declining-relationship/>.

¹²⁷ Filip Noubel, “What does “Russian World” stand for in Putin’s statements about Ukraine,” *Global Voices*, (blog) Feb. 26, 2022, accessed June 1, 2024, <https://globalvoices.org/2022/02/26/what-does-russian-world-stand-for-in-putins-statements-about-ukraine/>.

whether he really believes these historical arguments or just uses them to justify goals driven by Russia's traditional imperial goals.¹²⁸

Dr. Anna viewed Russian aims since history as the quest to rule vast territory to ensure inside security. Historically, Russia has treated its neighbourhood as a zone of security. Factually, territorial expansion has been a way to produce the security inside the Russia. It has been a source of perceived security for Russian state. Even in the pre- Soviet period, Russia as most empire was struggling between territorial expansion and need of internal modernization. That's one way to situate Crimea in terms of how history shaping Russia's foreign policy behavior. In context of Crimea, Russia does have a special historical narrative. When it comes to Ukraine and the Slavic nation in particular, Russia has had *Novorossiia* initiative which exceptionally goes back to Yeltsin. The argument that Russia reserves the right to protect the Russian minorities in other states in its vicinity.¹²⁹

So by using this concept Russia protecting *Novorossiia*, Russia essentially justifies and legitimizes it in international system and in this respect it emerges as revisionist power. So in terms of Ukraine, historically Russia does cease a part of the Russian empire which is again against the International Law because Russia recognized the territorial integrity of Ukraine in exchange for Ukraine to give up the nuclear weapons so this again regardless of what history said, is against the international law. Very specific the Russia's attachment to claim to Ukraine and Slavic nation in particular seems to Kremlin using historical narratives to justify.¹³⁰

2.4.2 Primakov Doctrine

It was 1996, when Yevgeny *Primakov* took the charge of Russian foreign ministry. At time, Russia pursued good relations with the West. Then *Primakov* passed a statement that US led world order was not acceptable to Russia. He proposed multipolar world which would govern by major powers where Russia would play a central role. He opposed NATO's

¹²⁸ Dr. Paul D' anieri is a Professor of Political Science at University of California. The questionnaire is shared through Gmail on May 7, 2024. The transcription of interview is attached as Annexure 3.

¹²⁹ Interview with Dr. Anna

¹³⁰ Interview with Dr. Anna

enlargement and wanted to secure Russia's dominance in its near abroad.¹³¹ *Primakov's* ideology was initiated to neutralize the immediate threat as international pressure to Russia after the breakdown of the Soviet Union.¹³²

It has worked well with the Russian foreign policy more than last two decades as Russian has enhanced its military power in the region then the fall of the Soviet Union. Russian military actions in Georgia and Ukraine has prevented NATO's enlargement. Russia wants conflict with NATO neither in past nor in present but NATO's presence in its close proximity creates chaos which allows hybrid aggression to be launched as military operations in its neighbourhood.¹³³ Since the Crimean Annexation, the doctrine has become the foundation of all political and strategic initiatives, improving Russia's position as an autonomous power of international influence.¹³⁴

This political thought is explained under the light of practical geopolitics which refers to the everyday practices of statecraft, where foreign policy is formulated and enacted by diplomats, political leaders and policymakers. It emphasizes on how states construct and communicate their geopolitical strategies and national interests through specific foreign policy actions, speeches, and diplomatic engagements. As stated by Simon Dalby, Practical Geopolitics involves the 'geopolitical reasoning of political elites' as they justify foreign policy decisions to both domestic and international audiences.¹³⁵

¹³¹Nicole Ng and Eugene Rumer, "The West Fears Russia's Hybrid Warfare. They're Missing the Bigger Picture," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, July 3, 2019, accessed June 3, 2024, <https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2019/07/the-west-fears-russias-hybrid-warfare-theyre-missing-the-bigger-picture?lang=en>

¹³² Dr. Sanu Kainikara, "Russia's Return to the World Stage: The Primakov Doctrine- Analysis," Eurasia Review, Nov. 5, 2019, accessed in June 3, 2019, <https://www.eurasiareview.com/05112019-russias-return-to-the-world-stage-the-primakov-doctrine-analysis/>.

¹³³ Ilie-Răsvan Dumitru, "RUSSIA'S GEOPOLITICAL DETERMINATIONS IN THE BLACK SEA", *Bulletin of "Carol I" National Defence University*, (2021).

¹³⁴ Dr. Sanu Kainikara, "Russia's Return to the World Stage: The Primakov Doctrine- Analysis," Eurasia Review, Nov. 5, 2019, accessed in June 3, 2019, <https://www.eurasiareview.com/05112019-russias-return-to-the-world-stage-the-primakov-doctrine-analysis/>.

¹³⁵ Simon Dalby, "Geopolitics, the Bush Doctrine, and War on Terrorism," *The Arab World Geographer* 9, no. 2 (2008): 88–108.

2.4.3 Eurasianism

Security, sovereignty and territorial integrity are the primary objectives which Russia pursues through its foreign policy. Russia also wants to strengthen its position as a powerful and sovereign actor in the contemporary realm.¹³⁶ Russian foreign policy is an amalgam of various identities among which Eurasianism is very popular. This notion has been continuously evolved since its origin. Basically it is a political thought that Russia occupies an exclusive geographical place between Asia and Europe.¹³⁷ This ideology has been introduced to preserve Russian heritage and culture spread over a gigantic territory. It is used as a source of authenticity for Russia's multiethnic character.¹³⁸ It was first appeared in early 20th century as a dominant ideological movement. Its purpose was to represent Russia as Eurasia which was a unique geopolitical and cultural space.¹³⁹

Prior to fall of the Soviet Union, in 1980's, two prominent Eurasianists, Lev Gumilev and Aleksandr Dugin, began to more assertively promote Eurasianist ideology. However, Gumilev played a key role in sustaining Eurasianist ideology during Soviet era. While Dugin emerged as a central figure in its revival after Yeltsin took the charge of presidency. Notably, Dugin was instrumental in transforming Eurasianism into a new geopolitical vision for Russian foreign policy.¹⁴⁰ So Russia is a separate space from the rest of Europe and epicenter of a unique Eurasian civilization.¹⁴¹ Under Putin's supremacy, Russia has established the Eurasian identity different from the West. As it is based on the political ideology which forms Russia's current foreign policy aspiration and resurgence desires as

¹³⁶ Agnieszka Legucka, "Russia Turns Towards Eurasia in New Foreign Policy Concept," The Polish Institute of International Affairs, Oct. 5, 2023, accessed Jun. 3, 2024. <https://pism.pl/publications/russia-turns-towards-eurasia-in-new-foreign-policy-concept>

¹³⁷ Steven K. Voytek, Eurasianists Trends in Russian Foreign Policy: Critical Analysis, West Virginia University, The Research Repository, (2012): p. 4, accessed Jun. 3, 2024, <https://researchrepository.wvu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1259&context=etd>

¹³⁸ Steven K. Voytek, Eurasianists Trends in Russian Foreign Policy: Critical Analysis, West Virginia University, The Research Repository, (2012): p. 4, accessed Jun. 3, 2024, <https://researchrepository.wvu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1259&context=etd>, p. 5.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 6.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 16.

¹⁴¹ Dmitry Gorenburg, "Russian Foreign Policy Narratives," Marshall Center, Nov. 2019, accessed Jun. 4, 2024, <https://www.marshallcenter.org/en/publications/security-insights/russian-foreign-policy-narratives-0#toc-introduction>

a power in Eurasia. This is to align the former Soviet periphery with post-Soviet Russia to keep them away from external actors.¹⁴²

2.4.4 Bastion Defense

The formal geopolitical concept was emerged as Bastion Defense when the Soviets introduced the idea of protecting their strategic submarines. It was originated most likely from a series of articles published in 'Navies in War and Peace' in the 1972-73 issues of *Morskoi Shornik*, the professional journal of the Soviet Navy.¹⁴³ For example, Ó Tuathail argues that Formal Geopolitics involves 'the systematic production of geopolitical knowledge' by intellectuals and institutions, which in turn informs and guides the foreign policy choices of political leaders.¹⁴⁴

In order to maintain control over Crimea after its occupation since 2014, Russia has advanced its military capabilities under the Bastion Defense not only on land but also in Black Sea to efficiently counter threats. Russia has launched its maritime doctrine in July 2022¹⁴⁵ after waging full scale war on Ukraine which shows the importance of Sea of Azov and Black Sea as the sphere of national interest. Where BSF is the instrument of Russian foreign and security policy and an enforcer of maritime doctrine. The BSF is one of four Russian naval fleets which is aimed at to project power in the region and it also serves as an essential launching point for Russia's military activities in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Beyond the Bosphorus, Baltic Fleet units, the Northern Fleet and the Pacific Fleet regularly support the BSF. This scenario indicates that Russia views geographic region from Arctic and the North Atlantic to Baltic and Black Sea as a single geostrategic entity.¹⁴⁶

Russia has enhanced its maritime power status. The BSF is positioned to deny military access to the Caucasus and Ukraine. Russia has captured an additional coastline by

¹⁴² Saira Nawaz Abbasi and Gul e Hina, "Russian Foreign Policy in Eurasia and Re-Sovietization of Ukraine under Putin," *Progressive Research Journal of Arts and Humanities* 3, no. 1, (2021): 3.

¹⁴³ Geir Hestvik, "Conflict 2020 and Beyond: A Look at the Russian Bastion Defense Strategy," *Combined Joint Operations from the Sea Centre of Excellence*, (2020): 22.

¹⁴⁴ Gearóid Ó Tuathail, *Critical Geopolitics: The Politics of Writing Global Space* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

¹⁴⁵ Yuval weber, "Russia's New Maritime Doctrine," *MES Insights* 13, vol. 4 (2022).

¹⁴⁶ Daria Isanchenko, Göran Swistek "The Black Sea as Mare Clausum," *German Institute for International and Security Affairs* 33, (2023): 2.

annexing Crimea and Sevastopol port. Russia also possesses the control of Abkhazian coastline of 220 kilometers of Black Sea. Russia's aspirations to dominate the region and upgrading of the BSF is a danger for the stability of the region.¹⁴⁷ Russian naval strategy in Black Sea aims to use BSF to establish sea control by using modern technology and equipment.¹⁴⁸

Conclusion

The historical, geopolitical and national factors have a major role in shaping Russia's foreign policy towards Black Sea. Russia's foreign policy has gradually evolved since Imperial Russia in the context of Black Sea. Russia has progressively seized the control of Black Sea coast line since 2008. Russia's ambitions in Black Sea are prominently visible with the annexation of Crimea. Russia has adopted a more assertive regional strategy as a result of the belief that Black Sea is its natural sphere of influence, especially in reaction to perceived dangers posed by NATO expansionism. Russia has a symbolic desire for Crimea since Catherine the Great. In an attempt to protect Russian interests, Russia has built different narratives which shows that post-Soviet territories still belong to Russia. Russian officials, policy makers and media has been working in this domain to express the Russian aspirations.

¹⁴⁷ Janusz Bugajski and Peter B. Doran, "Russian Derzhavnost, Grand Strategy, and the Black Sea," International Affair Forum, June 8, 2024, Center for European Policy Analysis, 43, https://www.ia-forum.org/Content/ViewInternal_Document.cfm?contenttype_id=5&ContentID=8902.

¹⁴⁸ Johannes Riber, "Russia's Twenty-First-Century Naval Strategy—Combining Admiral Gorshkov with the Jeune École," Naval War College Review 75, no. 3 (2022): 12

Chapter Three

Türkiye's Role in the Black Sea Region

The BSR appeared to be a disputed region throughout history which is near to more significant geographical entities. Accordingly, Black Sea basin has been defined as the region where Russia exerts its influence, Türkiye enjoys a long reign as Ottoman Empire, bordered with Europe and an extension of the Mediterranean world.¹⁴⁹ Strategic interests of Türkiye's are probably the same in the BSR. According to Çelikpala and Erşen, there are four main goals of Türkiye in the region: 1) maintaining the status-quo established by the Montreux Convention; 2) protecting its interests in relation to Russia's stronger military presence in Black Sea; 3) dealing with the significant security implications of the Russian A2/AD spheres built around Turkish territories; and 4) accommodating the diverse Black Sea policies of its NATO allies without isolating Russia.¹⁵⁰

This chapter has been divided into following sections i) Structural Geopolitical Change in the status of the Türkiye ii) Invoking of Montreux Convention during Ukraine Conflict, iii) Development in Turkish Foreign Policy since 2014, iv) Türkiye as a regional Security Actor, and v) Türkiye as a Member of NATO.

3.1 Structural Geopolitical Change in the Status of Türkiye

Critical Geopolitics exposes that geographical assumptions are shaped by power dynamics, historical narratives, and cultural contexts, influencing how nations and leaders act on the global stage.¹⁵¹ So these geographical assumptions are politically and socially constructed not natural objectives. It also argues that geography and politics are inescapably co-constituted, and that space is power.¹⁵² Critical Geopolitics defines space as not just a physical entity but it is an active element in the construction of identity, political power and worldwide influence. Geopolitical actors exercise power through the control of space.

¹⁴⁹ Özgür Özdamar, "The Black Sea Region in the New Turkish Foreign Policy," Center for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies, 2011, (Black Sea Discussion Paper Series)

¹⁵⁰ Dr. Yevgeniya Gaber, "Turkey's Policies in the Black Sea: Horizon 2030," *Defence and Security Foresight Group*, (2021): 3.

¹⁵¹ Gearóid Ó Tuathail, *Critical Geopolitics: The Politics of Writing Global Space* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 19.

¹⁵² Ibid, 15.

The establishment of Türkiye is explained through the term of spatial legacies¹⁵³ (historical events) which means the borders are marked in the result of major conflicts and empires leave behind spatial legacies which play an important role in shaping geopolitical dynamics. Critical Geopolitics argues that spatial legacies are socially and politically constructed and are significant in understanding of historical territorial arrangements which impacts foreign policy.

In 2024, Türkiye has celebrated the 101st anniversary of independence on October 29th, and this is one of the oldest countries in the world. The country remembers its strong Ottoman-Imperial Tradition. Türkiye is proud of its past achievements, such as being one of the leaders of the Muslim world, conquering Constantinople in 1453, and colonizing most of the Balkan peninsula for almost 500 years. The founding father, Kamal Atatürk, who liberalized and westernized its political system, Türkiye has a clear separation of politics and religion and an independent judiciary.¹⁵⁴

Kamalism is a political doctrine and a geostrategic standing that emphasizes the country's role as a bridge between Asia and Europe, the Muslim world, and Christianity. Secular tenants of Kamalism survived the political and economic upheaval period and several military takeovers, hunts, and military dictatorships that lasted until the mid-1980s. Its unique attribute of foreign policy 'Zero-Problems with Neighbors' rests on rebuilding and maintaining close relations with former territories of the Ottoman Empire. Another feature is 'Neo-Ottomanism,' which assumes that Türkiye is destined to become more than just a regional power within Europe and the Middle East and is destined to exercise a far more influential role in world politics.¹⁵⁵

Türkiye emerged from the collapsing Ottoman Empire, which endured for six hundred years, spanned three continents, and ruled the Islamic world as well as swaths of Europe. Since its inception in 1923, the Republic of Türkiye forged close economic and military

¹⁵³ Gearóid Ó Tuathail, *Critical Geopolitics: The Politics of Writing Global Space* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 22.

¹⁵⁴ Dr. Piotr Pietrzak is an independent Political Analyst in Sofia University, Bulgaria. The questionnaire is shared through Gmail on Nov. 25, 2024. The transcription of interview is attached as Annexure 11.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

ties with the West as part of its vision of becoming a modern, secular nation.¹⁵⁶ This empire went through multiple conflicts and comingling between powerful forces: East and West, Christianity and Islam, modernity and tradition. Present Türkiye reflects these impacts but also pursues to represent itself as an independent power with a unique national identity. However, there is split between West and Türkiye over its democratic backsliding, relations with Russia, and other issues.¹⁵⁷

Modern Türkiye's borders were marked after the fall of the Ottoman Empire in WWI. The victorious entities, Britain and France, captured the region from Ottomans and had the intentions to divide much of the empire among Armenians, Greeks, and Kurds. Turkish nationalists, led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, rejected this proposal and waged a war of independence which ended in the establishment of Türkiye as an independent republic in 1923. The President Atatürk instituted sweeping reforms to secularize the public sphere and advance his vision of modernization based on the Western model. His 'peace at home, peace in the world' foreign policy focused on defending Türkiye's sovereignty while building ties with its former occupiers.¹⁵⁸

For most of WWII, it remained neutral but friendly to the Allies, and after the war, it further enhanced its relations with the West. It became the member of NATO in 1952 and started to receive US aid in line with Truman Doctrine.¹⁵⁹ After World War II, Türkiye faced significant issues from the Soviet Union including the territorial claims by Moscow in eastern Türkiye. The foreign policy of Türkiye during the Cold War period was designed to avoid isolation and insecurity. Türkiye felt the need for security guarantees against Soviet aggression that paved the way for its alignment with the West. It received military and economic aid through the Truman Doctrine (1947) and the Marshall Plan, which were part of the U.S. strategy to contain communism.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁶ Dr. Imrana Begum is an Assistant Professor at Department of Essential Studies, NED University of Engineering and Technology, Karachi. The questionnaire is shared through WhatsApp on Nov. 25, 2024. The transcription of interview is attached as Annexure 10.

¹⁵⁷ Kali Robinson, "Turkey's Growing Foreign Policy Ambitions," *COUNCIL on FOREIGN RELATIONS*, (2023), <https://www.cfr.org/background/turkeys-growing-foreign-policy-ambitions>

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

The country has built a close partnership with the West through its membership of NATO and deepening trade relations with the EU. The parameters of its foreign policy were determined by the strategic exigencies of its leading NATO allies. Türkiye's geopolitical position made it a vital partner for the West in containing Soviet influence. Despite its strategic importance, Türkiye faced hurdles in its pursuit of European integration. From 1949 to 1991, only a few times Türkiye came to the forefront of international politics mainly due to the crises in its relations with Greece or Cyprus.¹⁶¹

With the disintegration of the USSR, Türkiye came out of the strategic isolation of Russia which had become the central reason to join NATO. The hostile encirclement was also vanished with the dissolution of Warsaw Pact. Türkiye started to develop its relations with the other regional states which recently liberated from the Warsaw Pact on the basis of bilateral agreements. Their purpose was to obtain mutual benefits. The newly formed states of Ukraine and Georgia despite of having a long history of political disagreements with Russia, started to promote ties with Türkiye. Moreover, it seemed that Russia would not sustain these circumstances and disintegrate in a similar way to that of the former Soviet Union which would upset the territories of the regional states as well. This perspective was prominent in Turkish perception of the regions of the North Caucasus, and in particular of the separatism in Chechnya. Without transforming it into the subject of official government policy, Türkiye, at the very least, did not impede a number of its own social and political organizations from cooperating with separatists or providing assistance to the pan-Turkish movements in the Turkish speaking regions of the North Caucasus.¹⁶²

According to Structural Geopolitics, geopolitical relations and foreign policy are shaped by underlying structures (historical legacies, institutional frameworks and global power dynamics). Ó Tuathail argues that how historical legacies shape geopolitical thinking and geopolitics is not a timeless and neutral science, but a historically and socially contingent set of ideas and practices that are linked to the structures of power and history.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ Interview with Dr. Imrana Begum.

¹⁶² Alexander Yasiliev, "THE BLACK SEA REGION IN TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY STRATEGY: RUSSIA & TURKEY ON BLACK SEA," (CARNEGIE MOSCOW CENTER, 2010)

¹⁶³ Ibid.

In effect to shifting regional dynamics in the BSR during the 1990s and 2000s, it was no longer important for Türkiye to maintain a close alignment of its interests with the military and political strategy of the West. Türkiye increasingly viewed Black as a shipping corridor that would open up alternative transportation and trade routes to Eastern and Northern Europe, as well as to the Caucasus and Central Asia. As a result, in Turkish foreign policy, BSR was perceived as a hub where the most essential distribution lines united. Türkiye's active participation in BSEC, showed its intentions that how much Türkiye is committed to its regional role. This organization was established at the goal of development of economic cooperation and trade between the riparian states. In addition, BSEC also serves to oppose such threats to regional security as the pollution of water body, drug trafficking, organized crime, and terrorism. Türkiye has always followed a pragmatic approach in relation to Russia. Türkiye not only cooperates with Russia for security purposes, but it can exert severe pressure on its partners evenly.¹⁶⁴

As Türkiye is the successor state of the Ottoman Empire so its approach towards Black Sea is formulated by history, geography, the shifting international dynamics and its own domestic politics. Among all regional states, Türkiye possesses the longest coastline about 1329 km in total. Furthermore, Türkiye controls the traffic in Black Sea through the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, the narrow channels which connect to the outside world through Mediterranean Sea. The Turkish government adopts the Montreux Convention which is responsible for regulating the maritime affairs of Black Sea and the Straits. Türkiye perceives this international legal instrument as a supreme mechanism which is vital for its national security as it restricts the external powers' access to Black Sea. Türkiye has strictly followed the provisions of Montreux Convention during war times like WWII and the current hostilities in Ukraine as it provides a framework to establish stability and peace in the region.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ Alexander Yasiliev, "THE BLACK SEA REGION IN TURKISH FOREIGN POLICY STRATEGY: RUSSIA & TURKEY ON BLACK SEA," (CARNEGIE MOSCOW CENTER, 2010)

¹⁶⁵ Dimitar Bechev, "SAILING THROUGH THE STORM- Türkiye's Black Sea strategy amidst the Russian-Ukrainian war," *European Union Institute for Security Studies*, Feb. 2023,

3.2 Invoking of Montreux Convention during Ukraine Conflict

According to Critical Geopolitics, Montreux Convention is viewed as a ‘historical legacy’ which reflects the geopolitical concerns of major powers in temporal context and continues to shape the regional power structures. It was an outcome of historical power dynamics which still regulates the geopolitical order of the BSR. Among littoral states of the BSR, Türkiye plays a significant role in accordance with the Montreux Convention which allows it to regulate the passage of military and non- military vessels during the war times through the Straits. Black Sea has been the stage of contest between Russia and Ukrainian forces where several Russian naval assets are already in Black Sea.

There are two provisions of Montreux Convention which are critically important for the explanation of Russia-Ukraine conflict. First, Article 19 states that during times of war when Türkiye itself is not involved in a conflict, warships enjoy freedom of navigation and transit through the Straits. But the entrance of warships belonging to aggressor states restricted from the Straits unless they are returning to base or rendering assistance. This is the current state of Ukraine Conflict as two sovereign states are engaged in an international armed conflict. Türkiye is not involved in the conflict and remains a non- aggressor state. Türkiye stance is clear as it has declared it as a war.¹⁶⁶

Second, Article 21 states that if Türkiye considers itself to be threatened with imminent danger of war, the Turkish Government may limit the passage of warships through the Turkish Straits. It is totally up to the Turkish Government which decision they take for the entrance of warships. Significantly, Article 21 empowers Türkiye with enormous discretion to allow warships to pass through the Straits. So Türkiye could feasibly allow NATO non-Black Sea vessels to transit and exclude Russian vessels from entering Black Sea. Article 19 seems much more likely to be the wartime provision at play.

Invoking either Article would be historically significant. Türkiye has not labelled earlier Russian aggression in Georgia, Crimea, or eastern Ukraine a ‘time of war’ and restricted

¹⁶⁶ Mark Nevitt, “The Russia-Ukraine Conflict, The Black Sea and The Montreux Convention”, *Just Security*, Feb. 28, 2022, <https://www.justsecurity.org/80384/the-russia-ukraine-conflict-the-black-sea-and-the-montreux-convention/>

Black Sea access. In fact, Türkiye only invoked Montreux's wartime provisions in WWII, to prevent German and Italian combatants from entering Black Sea.¹⁶⁷

3.3 Developments in Turkish Foreign Policy since 2014

As a whole, following its inception in 1923, Türkiye's foreign policy was characterized by a commitment to secularism, nationalism, and Western-oriented diplomacy. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the country's founder, pursued a policy of neutrality during WWII, maintaining diplomatic relations with both the Axis and Allied powers. After the war, Türkiye aligned itself with the Western Bloc, joining NATO in 1952 and the Council of Europe in 1949. During the Cold War era, Türkiye's foreign policy was marked by a strong anti-communist stance and a reliance on the US for military and economic aid. The country participated in the Korean War as part of the UN coalition and hosted US military bases on its territory. Türkiye also pursued close relations with other Western countries, including the UK and France. In the regional context, Türkiye's foreign policy focused on maintaining good relations.¹⁶⁸

But since the Crimean annexation, Türkiye has transformed its approach to limit the conflict in order to make the region stable. It has adopted the policy of deter and dialogues with Russia while recognizes the Ukrainian sovereignty and negates the Russia's unilateral actions. According to Critical Geopolitics, Turkish foreign policy in the BSR since 2014, can be seen as a multifaceted interplay of historical legacies and strategic performance. Türkiye's nuanced approach reflects its need to balance regional ambitions with global power dynamics, while maintaining its sovereignty and geopolitical influence in an increasingly contested space.

According to Dr. Gloria, during the last years, Türkiye has made significant changes in its foreign policy, following a more pragmatic and autonomous foreign policy. This has

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Dr. Uzma Siraj is an Assistant Professor at Department of International Relations, Federal Urdu University, Karachi. The questionnaire is shared through Whatsapp on Dec. 4, 2024. The transcription of interview is attached as Annexure 13.

allowed Türkiye to pursue a policy that is primarily focused on its national interests. Seen from this perspective it can be said that a destabilized region is not in the interest of Türkiye. Furthermore, the fact that Türkiye has good diplomatic relations with both Ukraine and Russia, especially in the leadership level, make it necessary but at the same time possible for Türkiye to act as a balancer in the region. Only by maintaining such a position is possible for Türkiye maintain stability and balance in the region.¹⁶⁹

3.3.1 Türkiye as a Balancer in the Black Sea Region

During the fall of the Ottoman Empire, it had started to balance major powers in order to preserve the status quo and slow down the process of disintegration. It was further used as a tool during Independence War (1919-1923), WWII (1939-1945), Detente period (late 1960s to mid-1970s), and since 2010, it has adopted this balancing strategy between its Western allies and regional partners, primarily Russia. Russia's opposing approach against the US has become increasingly significant in post-Cold War period as Russia has moved towards a more aggressive foreign policy. Its actions are prominent in the context of Black Sea. So balancing strategy is the longest serving Turkish policy it practices to balance the major powers.¹⁷⁰ Türkiye's role as a regional balancer is not a recent phenomenon but rather a continuation of its long-established foreign policy.¹⁷¹

Historically, Türkiye has hostile and challenging relations with Russia. Both regional powers have a history of competition over territorial acquisition in which the factor of enmity prevails. Their history still influences their policy making process regardless of increased cooperation. Top leadership is involved in governing of relations which is described as an elite-driven process.¹⁷² In this scenario, Structural geopolitics examines the broader structural forces such as global power dynamics, and historical contexts that shape foreign policy decisions. It emphasizes that foreign policy is influenced not just by the actions of individual states or leaders, but by the larger geopolitical environment and systemic factors in the international relations. This perspective highlights how global

¹⁶⁹ Interview with Dr. Gloria

¹⁷⁰ Siri Neset et al., "Turkey as a regional security actor in the Black Sea, the Mediterranean, and the Levant Region," (CMI: 2021): 20.

¹⁷¹ Interview with Dr. Imrana Begum

¹⁷² Siri Neset et al., "Turkey as a regional security actor in the Black Sea", 23.

inequalities, power structures, and historical legacies affect the state behavior and policy choices. According to Agnew, Structural Geopolitics focuses on the ‘geographical structures of power’ that shape how states interact and formulate their foreign policies within a global context.¹⁷³

Institutions are not involved in major areas of economy, security and defense. By visualizing historical legacies, Türkiye is reluctant in trusting Russia’s commitment which has been seen in current situation. Turkish leadership aims to be a regional power in its own right. Subsequently, Türkiye identifies that it has to balance both the opponents like Russian desire of resurgence and US assertive actions in its surroundings. Nonetheless, it is challenging for Türkiye to compete with resurgent Russia in Black Sea and on the other side to pursue the interests of NATO.¹⁷⁴ Türkiye's balancing act in the region is indeed a complex and delicate endeavor.¹⁷⁵

Geopolitically, the BSR has a lot of significance where regional and extra regional powers are equally involved in order to control the warm water. Russia wants to pursue its historical goals of imperial expansionism while West has the desire to contain. In this perspective, Türkiye is repeating its historical legacies of balancing the conflicting parties. So, once again, Türkiye is playing a balancing role between Russia and the West to establish security and stability in the region. The best example of this balancing act is Maritime security which is mainly designed by the Montreux Convention authorize Türkiye to governs the Straits regime independently. It restricts the transit of military ships of non- riparian states for 21 days while allows commercial ships to move freely. Türkiye is not in the favour of strong NATO’s presence in Black Sea so strictly opposes it. Türkiye has concerns about Russia’s offensive posture that NATO’s strong presence will become the reason of Russia’s aggression and Türkiye do not want to provoke Russia. Hence, Türkiye argues that, being a NATO member, it is able to maintain maritime security in Black Sea with the cooperation of other allies and partner states, as well as Russia.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ John Agnew, *Geopolitics: Re-Visioning World Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 45.

¹⁷⁴ Siri Neset et al., “Turkey as a regional security actor in the Black Sea”, 23.

¹⁷⁵ Interview with Dr. Uzma Siraj.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 31.

Later to Crimean Annexation, Russia subsequently started to enhance its military capabilities and Türkiye unintentionally contributed to it. Though, Türkiye has acted as a NATO gatekeeper for Black Sea but after Crimean incident, it lost its naval superiority in Black Sea to Russia. While Russia also recommenced its extensive naval activity in the Mediterranean, which is equally alarming for Türkiye and NATO. Yet, Türkiye did not join the EU sanctions and lost the opportunity to regain its dominating naval presence in Black Sea. Türkiye had fear of severe Russian reaction on the one hand. Briefly, though Türkiye does not always follow the EU and NATO strategies in Black Sea, it has appeared as the balancer of Russia. A Turkish foreign policy decision maker said by giving his opinion about Russia that if Türkiye comes out of Black Sea balance then there will be no power which can counter balance Russia. Russia has invaded Ukraine, and some portions of Georgia and they are also present in the politics of Syria. They are present everywhere.¹⁷⁷

But according to Dr. Taras, Türkiye is not a balancer. Türkiye is acting in Russia's interests by allowing Russia to evade Western sanctions through Türkiye, giving sanctuary to Russian oligarchs, selling Russians Turkish passports, and not allowing NATO naval ships to enter Black Sea.¹⁷⁸ Dr. Anna also has the same opinion that Türkiye has not acted as a balancer, it could have acted as a balancer. Domestic politics is very important in context of Türkiye, it has weak democratic institutions, authoritarianism is creeping up since 2016, has personalized the power system which seems to be driving Türkiye's foreign policy. So as a middle power, Türkiye is similar to India, China and Iran, has played a role in taking advantage of the Russian invasion in Ukraine. Türkiye has been not necessarily a balancer but Türkiye has been taking the advantage of the weakening Russia whether in terms of very cheap energy supplies, energy purchase, building up nuclear stations, nuclear energy, nuclear power stations. Türkiye is trying to become an energy hub which is essentially would mean that Russia would bring its oil and gas to Türkiye which Türkiye hopes to sell to Europe which essentially Europe does not want to do. So it is more accurate to say that Türkiye has positioned itself as a beneficiary of the rift between Russia and Ukraine.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 32.

¹⁷⁸ Dr. Taras Kuzio is working as a Professor at Department of Political Science, National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Accademy. The questionnaire is shared through Google Meet on May 20, 2024. The transcription of interview is attached as Annexure 4.

¹⁷⁹ Interview with Dr. Anna

While Dr. Igor defined their relationship as both, Russia and Türkiye are complicated partners. Their relations are not limited to Black Sea but there are much wider relations like in Syria, Libya, Nagorno-Karabakh and beyond. Their interests are not identical. But one thing is very good for Russia that Türkiye has pragmatic not ideological approach. Türkiye is the state which pursues its own foreign policy and not the policy of NATO.¹⁸⁰

Structural geopolitics explains that Türkiye's foreign policy is influenced not only by its national interest but by its place within the Western security architecture and its need to manage relations with both the West and Russia. This balancing reflects the complex, multilayered geopolitical system that influences state behavior beyond direct national interests.

3.3.2 Türkiye's Arrangements to limit the Ukraine Conflict

Critical Geopolitics argues that states' foreign policies are shaped by how they imagine their role in the world. Türkiye's geopolitical imagination of Black Sea is rooted in its self-perception not only as a regional power but as a channel between the East and West. The Crimean annexation has led Türkiye to strengthen its presence in the BSR without provoking Russia.

Geographical location, NATO membership, and President Erdogan's activism are the unique features which Türkiye holds and uses them as an advantage to play a key role in the Ukraine War. Other Western allies cannot accomplish NATO's northern enlargement without Türkiye. Nevertheless, Türkiye has become an indispensable actor for all parties. Türkiye successfully played the role of a mediator between Russia and Ukraine in the earlier of the war. It has also played the role in the exchange of prisoners of war between the parties. It is also working on peace talks between Russia and Ukraine.¹⁸¹ According to Ms. Samantha, Türkiye could be a very good mediator in Peace Talks because Russia trusts Türkiye more than other members of NATO.¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Interview with Dr. Igor

¹⁸¹ Daria Isachenko, "Turkey in the Black Sea region: Ankara's reactions to the war in Ukraine against the background of regional dynamics and global confrontation," (Berlin, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, 2023) 2nd time report

¹⁸² Interview with Ms. Samantha.

To promote security and diplomatic partnership, defense cooperation has been seen between Türkiye and Ukraine. Türkiye has not recognized Russian aggressive actions in the form of Crimean Annexation and supports Ukraine politically by upholding Ukraine's statehood like territorial integrity and sovereignty. From defense perspective, Turkish production of corvettes for Ukraine's navy, the sale of Bayraktar TB2 combat drones and plans for their joint production, helped in de-escalation of conflict. Whereas Türkiye also exercised its power by closing of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits to Russian warships and prevented escalation in Black Sea, which helped Ukraine to assert its statehood. Simultaneously, Türkiye is getting stronger in the region by supporting Ukraine as Ukraine is helping to contain Russian expansion, a menace to Türkiye itself. This cooperation can help in the formation of post-war Black Sea security framework. As the war is proceeding, the western aspect is getting prominent in Turkish, Ukrainization foreign policy. However, Russia and Türkiye are not partners just ally. Türkiye can engage with Russia according to the circumstances and both parties are reluctant in trusting West. So Türkiye is neither so much anti- Western nor pro- Russian.¹⁸³

While Dr. Anna had different opinion. According to her, Türkiye is acting as a transactional player, mediator, third party services but not a credible player in Ukraine Conflict. Because it is taking advantage of weakened Russia, as all kinds of relations with Russia are sabotaging its relations with the West. By simply offering good offices to the Russia and Ukraine which a lot of other countries are doing, it could have been more effective in doing that. But it is a lot more taking advantage just as transactional player. The fact that it has presence in Black Sea which Türkiye uses as an advantage. If Russia will try to reduce Ukraine's access to Black Sea, in that respect Russia and Türkiye, back door deals would happen.¹⁸⁴

From the point of view of Dr. Bushra, Türkiye as an important regional power, has condemned the war from the beginning and continued its high-level mediation efforts to end the war. Türkiye as a neighbouring country has made the most intense efforts to end the Russia-Ukraine war through talks. In spite of increasingly economic relations and

¹⁸³ Yevgeniya Gaber, David Lewis, and Graeme P. Herd, "Ukraine and Emerging Trends in Russian and Turkish Foreign Policy," *George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies*, (2023): 1.

¹⁸⁴ Interview with Dr. Anna.

acting as a balancer between Ukraine and Russia in wake of the Ukraine war, Türkiye's inclination towards Ukrainian territorial integrity and defence is quite visible which attests its loyalty as a NATO member state in accordance to the NATO's collective defence mechanism, although Ukraine has not yet been admitted as a full-fledge member but is only a NATO partner country. Türkiye was among the ones voted for a UN General Assembly resolution condemning Russia also reflects to the former's commitment to Ukraine's integrity. Another reason for Türkiye's commitment to Ukrainian security is that Ukraine is an important ally for the balance of power around Black Sea. After the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the Ukrainian government appealed to Türkiye to exercise its authority under the Montreux Convention to limit the transit of Russian warships from Mediterranean to Black Sea, and with reluctance, Türkiye had declared the invasion of Russia into Ukraine as a 'War.'¹⁸⁵

Turkish support for Ukraine's defense capabilities has been critical, despite the fact that it has been surpassed in volume by Western transfers of arms and money. As part of the Military Framework Agreement between Türkiye and Ukraine in October 2020, both countries agreed to the exchange of military intelligence, cooperation between the armed forces and defence industry, mutual education and training activities. A recent example being the new joint artillery ammunition production lines the Turkish defense industry is helping US partners set up. Therefore, in spite of Türkiye's efforts to act as balancer in this war, Türkiye's inclination towards Ukrainian defence is quite visible, further consolidating its position as a NATO member in this particular issue. However, it keeps its efforts intact to make a balance between Russia and Ukraine to the maximum extent possible and the fact that it has not sanctioned Russia or closed its airspace to Russian aircraft is an evidence.¹⁸⁶

3.4 Türkiye as a Regional Security Actor

The Cold War did not end well as it became the reason of several security and political issues in the BSR. The disintegration of the Soviet Union had created a power vacuum

¹⁸⁵ Dr. Bushra Batool is a Research Officer at Rabita Forum International and visiting faculty at Bahria University, Karachi. The questionnaire is shared through WhatsApp on Dec. 4, 2024. The transcription of interview is attached as Annexure 12.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

because there was no superior power which would regulate the affairs of the newly emerged states. According to Critical Geopolitics, disintegration of the Soviet Union is a historical, spatial and temporal legacy which has changed the regional power dynamics of the BSR. This event has long lasting effect on the region in the form of the formation of new borders, new conflicts like Crimea and new alliances.

Russia became fragile as it was struggling with economic and security issues. Other regional states were trying to seeking help from Western security structures. The only state, Türkiye, which was stable at that time as it was not in the USSR bloc so not dependent economically on Russia. Türkiye took the advantage of this situation and followed an active policy to lead the region and appeared a rising regional power. Türkiye established BSEC for economic and security purposes then BLACKSEAFOR and OBSH to enhance regional cooperation. Türkiye has special interests in Black Sea as it has sovereign control over the Straits and governing its exit from and entry points to Black Sea. Türkiye expected to bear the international responsibility for unresolved disputes, energy security and other security-related issues in the BSR with the Montreux Convention. Moreover, Türkiye's geopolitics is dependent upon the Montreux convention. The main aspect of Turkish Black Sea policy is to maintain control over the Turkish Straits.¹⁸⁷

Türkiye's foreign policy in Black Sea is mainly based on the strengthening of regional security. To attain this goal, Türkiye has been working on regional cooperation as an initiator since the inception of new entities in the BSR. It involves the formation of different regional organizations to enhance maritime security and peace as it has the control of important Straits and the longest coastline as well. In its strategic thinking towards the BSR, Türkiye give preference to the maritime domain over all other security issues. It pays special attention to the affairs of Straits under the Montreux Convention for the purpose of security and stability in its surroundings. Montreux Convention acts as a bridge between the regional security and Türkiye's sovereignty as it is one of the founding documents of the Turkish Republic.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ Tufekci, Bayram, "Turkey's," 7.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

Türkiye's objectives in the BSR, were based on the maintenance of the status quo, initiation of maritime cooperation program with all riparian states and establishment of Black Sea Naval Force. In this context, Black Sea Harmony, another maritime operation was initiated in 2004. Türkiye's actions in the region demonstrated that it did not need NATO's further engagement. As NATO was already there in the form of its three allies like Türkiye, Bulgaria and Romania. But NATO has different perspective that Türkiye is functioning as a collective defense actor but it is mixed with the Russian concept of collective security. The aspirations of Türkiye, not to instigate Russia in the BSR is a regular activity in Türkiye's Black Sea policy. This policy is not only based on historical legacies but the complicated relationship with the West.¹⁸⁹ In the BSR, Türkiye's strategic position is crucial, and its collaboration with NATO allies Romania and Bulgaria to establish a Mine Countermeasures Task Force demonstrates its commitment to ensuring safe navigation and regional security.¹⁹⁰

3.5 Türkiye as a Member of NATO

Earlier in the Cold War, Türkiye had the aspirations to join NATO for security purposes as it did not possess ample capacity to deal with the intimidations emanating from the Soviet Union on its own. After Turkish Strait Crises and territorial demands of the provinces of Kars and Ardahan in Eastern Anatolia by Russia, Türkiye called West for help and joined the multilateral security alliance of NATO. Türkiye wanted to enhance its deterrence capabilities against the threats emanating from external sources and did not want to be the part of Soviet bloc. Since the start, NATO has acted as a collective defense organization for Türkiye.¹⁹¹ Türkiye had left the policy of neutrality by joining NATO. Türkiye, gradually started to align its foreign policy and interests with NATO. There was another reason of seeking membership of NATO as Türkiye wanted to adopt westernize processes.¹⁹²

The Soviet Union collapsed and the Cold War ended, it also resulted in the disappearance of most of the threats which created a positive impact on Russo-Turkish relations.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 18.

¹⁹⁰ Interview with Dr. Uzma Siraj.

¹⁹¹ Tarik Oguzlu, "Turkey and NATO," Antalya International University, 2013, 2.

¹⁹² Ibid., 3.

Moreover, collapse of the Soviet Union created a space which Türkiye filled by improving its hard and soft power capabilities and also transformed its approach towards NATO. Simultaneously, Türkiye started to follow more active foreign policy. It started to approach other regional powers and actors to grow independently. As the international system is getting multipolar and unipolarity is disappearing.¹⁹³

Türkiye is taking part in NATO's peace keeping operations as it provided military support in keeping peace in Bosnia and Kosovo. Türkiye has favoured NATO's expansion towards Poland, Czech Republic and Hungary. It has also encouraged NATO's Partnership for Peace Program for the states not being member of alliance. But in Russia's case, Türkiye has different approach. From Türkiye's perspective, NATO should pay attention to Russian concerns. NATO's eastward expansion and efforts to increase its military presence around the BSR might supposed to be the encirclement of Russia. In these circumstances, Russia can assume more expansionist and nationalist policies. As a result, it would spoil the relations of Russia and Türkiye and turn them to rivalry and hostility again, as it was during the history.¹⁹⁴

It appears to be a declining phase in Türkiye and NATO's relations after the incident of coup attempt, 2016. Being NATO's ally, Türkiye regards its presence in Black Sea but Türkiye also perceives it as a challenge to its national interests and security. Since 2016, there has been seen a deep rift in relations with EU and US which pushed Türkiye towards Russia. So Türkiye's dependency on Russia with regard to weapons procurement, economic and energy cooperation, is a challenge for other allies.¹⁹⁵

According to Dr. Anna, Türkiye has not advanced the interests of NATO, in fact it sabotaging. It has been very transactional and not an institutional player. Actually Erdogan gave Sweden hard time in joining the NATO. So in many ways. Türkiye is not a trustworthy partner for which Türkiye justifies its strategic autonomy. Because it is more transactional, individualize, so it is not always in interest of Türkiye. As its economy is sinking. Right now, Azerbaijan, a tiny state is holding Türkiye a hostage, will not enhance Türkiye

¹⁹³ Ibid., 4.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 7.

¹⁹⁵ Dr. Gaber, "Horizon 2030,"

Armenia relations. There is push on Armenian side for rapprochement but there is a deadlock because Türkiye won't do anything come by sit has the permission from Azerbaijan. So this is fascinating that a tiny state that put money into Erdogan's presidential campaign. So having a tiny state holding this middle power hostage. This is historic opportunity for Türkiye to build relations with South Caucasus and by establishing relations with Armenia. It would have stronger institutional presence in the Caucasus. So it is one of the example of Türkiye's foreign policy not advancing its interests.¹⁹⁶

But Dr. Marion said that Türkiye's balancing role in the BSR, affects its performance as NATO member. Türkiye has been a tricky NATO member for a long time. So, on the one hand it is really important part of the alliance. It got important geostrategic position and geographically where it is. But at the same time, the Turkish government, for number of years has trying to find out a position in between the NATO allies and it's also been close to Russia. Few years ago, before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, there was a debate about Türkiye acquiring S-400 air defence system from Russia and this caused a huge internal discussion within NATO while Türkiye argued that it was its right as a sovereign nation to buy air defence system from any supplier including Russia.¹⁹⁷

Dr. Marion also said that other NATO member states were extremely reluctant to connect a Russian system within the NATO system for fear of providing Russia access to secret information. Interoperability of military systems within the alliance is a huge point of contention for NATO. So it is a good example which shows to an extent that Türkiye has sort of try to find the balance between NATO membership and off course the relationship with the Russian government for the number of years now. So far in this conflict, it has acted very carefully as it has try to use international law to impede Black Sea access and so on. So it has been very important in the sense that it hasn't allowed Russia to get sea superiority. It means it is much more difficult for Russia to replace any naval access for damage and sunk in Black Sea.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶ Interview with Dr. Anna.

¹⁹⁷ Interview with Dr. Marion.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

But at the same time, the Turkish government is still very close with the Russian government and that relationship could also go in different direction. So it is a tricky position for all involved especially for Türkiye which really values NATO as an alliance but at the same time also for other NATO member states that are already dealing with members such as Hungary very close with Russian government and the situation is going to be with Türkiye that how the actions might impact on the alliance on the longer turn.¹⁹⁹

Türkiye as a NATO ally, tries to balance its relations with Russia within the structural constraints of its Western alliances and military commitments, while Russia, as a post-Soviet superpower, seeks to challenge Western influence. John Agnew emphasizes that international relations are deeply structured by the distribution of power among states and the role of international institutions.²⁰⁰

According to Dr. Imrana, Türkiye has been a critical member of the NATO Alliance, while simultaneously positioning itself as a prominent actor within the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) since its establishment in 1969. In recent years, Türkiye has sought to diversify its strategic and economic partnerships beyond the traditional Western bloc and NATO. Its interest in joining BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) highlights Ankara's intention to expand its geopolitical and economic influence. This balancing act, however, has raised questions about Türkiye's evolving role within NATO, particularly as it delayed Sweden's accession to the alliance, sparking concerns about Türkiye's alignment with NATO objectives.

Despite these developments, Türkiye asserts that its outreach to non-Western platforms will not compromise its commitments to NATO. Nevertheless, its growing engagement with Russia and China, two nations often viewed as adversaries by NATO, is likely to cause unease among the alliance's Western members, particularly the US. This dual approach underscores Türkiye's strategy to navigate a multipolar world while balancing its traditional alliances with its pursuit of broader partnerships.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ Interview with Dr. Marion.

²⁰⁰ John A. Agnew, *Globalization and Sovereignty* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 35.

²⁰¹ Interview with Dr. Imrana Begum

Conclusion

Though Türkiye is not as strong as Russia but it is a major regional actor which plays a paramount role in the context of security and political dynamics of the oceanic region. Türkiye's approach is defined by its historical legacy of Montreux Convention which provides it a universal authority of sovereign control over the Straits. This Convention regulates the marine traffic either strategic or non-strategic across the Straits and preserve regional stability. Türkiye has used its power during the Ukraine conflict to limit the war intensity and magnitude. Türkiye navigates the delicate interplay between cooperation and competition with a pragmatic approach that strikes a balance between its NATO commitments and a careful engagement with Russia. Despite being the NATO member, Türkiye has avoided actions that would instigate Russia while simultaneously bolstering regional security through regional entities. There are different views about Türkiye's role in the Ukraine Conflict, it may be a balancer, mediator or transactional. But one thing is sure that Türkiye has implemented a pragmatic approach to advance its interests. Its national policy prioritizes its national interests over rigid conformity with any of the bloc, reflecting its broader strategic autonomy. Its actions in Black Sea are motivated by its geopolitical interests to preserve sovereignty, and regional stability.

Chapter Four

Implications for NATO's Enlargement in the Black Sea Region

In the context of Formal Geopolitics, NATO is viewed as a key strategic alliance formed to ensure collective defense and security among its member states, particularly in response to threats from adversaries. Initially, it was created as a counterbalance to the Soviet Union and the spread of communism. It is seen as a stabilizing force that plays a crucial role in maintaining the geopolitical order of the Western world. In Formal Geopolitics, NATO is an instrument of maintaining Western hegemony and preventing adversarial powers from gaining influence in key strategic regions.²⁰² According to Dr. Pietrzak, NATO is a very conservative organization that was established to protect its member states from Soviet aggression in 1949; after the collapse of the USSR in 1991, NATO has expanded several times. Today, it consists of 32 member states, which are all different. The strongest one is the US, which is in charge of the organization; even though officially every single country has an equal say, the US is the primary decision maker, for it has the strongest army in the world and the most robust economy.²⁰³

NATO always has great interest in the BSR as this region provides a connection between the Caspian, Aegean and Mediterranean Seas, simultaneously, an important corridor which gives access to the Middle East, enhances the interests of different powers in the region, among them NATO.²⁰⁴ NATO's interests are based on two things. First: three of the riparian states like Türkiye, Bulgaria, and Romania are NATO allies and other two states, Georgia and Ukraine are the part of NATO's PfP Programme and have aspirations to join the alliance. Second: the major geopolitical competitor and rivals, Russia, is very vital in weakening the objectives of NATO in the region.²⁰⁵

²⁰² Colin S. Gray, *Geopolitics of Super Power* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1988), 145.

²⁰³ Interview with Dr. Piotr Pietrzak

²⁰⁴ Beqa Bochorishvili, "NATO in the Black Sea," *Geocase*, April, 25, 2023, <https://www.geocase.ge/en/publications/974/nato-shavi-zghvis-regionshi#>

²⁰⁵ Luke Coffey, "NATO cannot afford to ignore the geopolitics of the Black Sea," TRT World, 2022, <https://www.trtworld.com/opinion/nato-cannot-afford-to-ignore-the-geopolitics-of-the-black-sea-13117083>

After the fall of the USSR, different states from the Baltic and the BSR started to join NATO which exasperated Russia. Despite Russia's warning to NATO, it continued its enlargement process. In 2008, NATO showed the possibility of Ukraine and Georgia could be the member of NATO at the Bucharest summit which aggravated Russia. The Soviet Republic's leader Gorbachev, was promised that NATO would not expand in the East. Russia took NATO's expansion as a grave threat as its presence on its borders in the form of Georgia and Ukraine would not be acceptable for Russia. Its presence in its sphere of influence would create impact on the Russian security.²⁰⁶

John Mearsheimer raised the same point, he accused NATO's expansion in the Eastern Europe for the Russian aggression. He claimed that NATO did not pay attention to Russia's interests and its attempts to encircle Russia with military bases and missile defense system in member states, aggravated Russia to annex Crimea and then wage full scale war in Ukraine. NATO and US are responsible for Ukrainian devastation.²⁰⁷ Andrew Bowen in a congressional hearing held in 2016, titled Defending Ukraine Deterring Putin, determined the US-NATO Black Sea presence as the rationale for Russia's hostility. He also described that Russian political and military leaders perceived NATO's expansion on its borders and Black Sea as an existential threat to Russia.²⁰⁸

With the end of the Cold War, world became unipolar which also affected the BSR in a positive manner as it became relatively stable in the absence of aggressive Russia. Since NATO has expanded in the surrounding of Russia and its policy of expansion is security and safety for all. But this alliance is unable to expand further due to Russia's hostile actions. In this respect, this chapter comprises of four sections: i) Russia's perspective about NATO, ii) Türkiye stance on NATO's engagement iii) NATO's interests in Black Sea with the lens of the different summits, iv) security and political implications for NATO's expansion.

²⁰⁶ Beqa Bochorishvili, "NATO in the Black Sea," *Geocase*, April, 25, 2023, <https://www.geocase.ge/en/publications/974/nato-shavi-zghvis-regionshi#>

²⁰⁷ Julie, "Mearsheimer's Article On NATO's Expansion Causing Russian Aggression," *MALAYSIAN DIGEST*, Dec. 8, 2022, <https://malaysiandigest.com/mearsheimers-article-on-natos-expansion-causing-russian-aggression/>

²⁰⁸ Abraham Mahshie, "Black Sea NATO Allies Call for Added Security Amid Russian Buildup," *Air & Space Forces Magazine*, Dec. 17, 2021, <https://www.airandspaceforces.com/black-sea-nato-allies-call-for-added-security-amid-russian-buildup/>

4.1 Russia's perspective about NATO

Critical Geopolitics views the relationship between foreign policy and history as a dynamic interplay where historical narratives are constructed and used by states to shape and justify their foreign policies. Critical Geopolitics argues that foreign policy decisions are often rooted in historical interpretations that serve to legitimize current geopolitical strategies. As history is socially constructed, so implemented selectively to support specific political objectives and territorial claims.²⁰⁹

Dr. Igor defined Russian foreign policy in the context of history. It is very much derived by history and historical impact is still prominent in the policy making process. Russia still belongs to historical roots of Imperialism and perceives any external influence as threat in its near sphere. According to him, one of the major historical events was WWII/ the Great Patriotic War for Russian foreign policy and Russian identity. It was tragic event where almost 30 million soviets died. Nazi Germany had surprised attack on Russia in 1941. The Soviet Union was not fully prepared for the attack and it suffered significant loss. This is an important lesson for Russian foreign policy decision making that they can't allow their selves unprepared for the potential military attack. This is the potential threat to Russia. Perhaps one of the reasons why Russia has such a strong feeling about NATO right now. As NATO, since its inception, created to deter and contain Soviet Union. As first Secretary General Lord Ismay said: NATO was created to keep the Soviet Union out, the Americans in and the Germans down.²¹⁰

He said that after the dissolution of Soviet Union, Russia proposed numerous times an inclusive non-bloc European security architecture to dissolve military alliances and to create collective security organization which would represent all. After 1991, Warsaw Pact was dismantled and the original reason for NATO did not exist anymore. As NATO was created to deter the Soviet Union which pursued the world revolution. The Soviet Union was based on the idea that the whole world should be communist. Russia is different from

²⁰⁹ Gearóid Ó Tuathail, *Critical Geopolitics: The Politics of Writing Global Space* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 78-83.

²¹⁰ Interview with Dr. Igor.

the Soviet Union in this regard. It does not want to promote any particular way of life or any particular ideology. So, during meetings with the US presidents, Russian leaders repeatedly asked: as we are not in any competition with each other then why to have a military alliance, military bloc to keep it. That is very hard to understand from the Russian perspective.²¹¹

He argued that when NATO started to expand during 1990's, there were rosy relations under the presidency of Boris Yeltsin. During the meeting with the US vice-president Al Gore, Yeltsin once said that Moscow has no problem when East European states had good relations with NATO, but on one condition: Russia should have a little bit warmer relations with NATO than the rest. During the 1990's and even in 2000's, there were several suggestions from Russian side that Moscow could join NATO, but NATO denied. NATO is a military alliance which expands towards Russian borders and doesn't want Russia as member. This combination obviously increases the perception of threat on the Russian side. And this perception becomes especially acute due to the clear analogies between NATO advancing to Russian borders today and Germany advancing to the Soviet borders in the 1930s. Moscow does not want to become an object of surprise attack from the West.²¹²

Türkiye remained the member of NATO since the Cold War but Bulgaria and Romania became member in 2000's. From Russian perspective, it was not clear what was the reason to incorporate these states in NATO. Under Obama administration, US introduced Missile Defence Program in Romania which became operational in 2015. This is problematic for Russia for two reasons. First of strategic balance because it is clear that Russia has enough strategic nuclear arms to provide balance between Russia and US. But if US expands missile defence around Russia then it can launch surprise attack on Russia. There is a concern that Russia won't have capability of retaliation in this case. Second concern is that US can use place missiles for attacking Russian territory in the launchers that it placed in Romania aimed for missile defense. Technically speaking, the MK-41 launchers are capable of firing both anti-missiles and missiles. They were located close to Russian

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid.

border, as the flight time from Romania to the Russian territory is so much smaller than from the US.²¹³

Furthermore, he described the political developments between NATO and Ukraine. In 2000's, Ukrainian President Yuschenko started to develop relations with NATO. Majority of Ukrainian were against NATO enlargement according to polls. However, in 2008 in Bucharest Summit, NATO took a decision that Ukraine and Georgia would eventually be part of NATO. It had not provided specific timeframe for Ukraine and Georgia to be member of NATO. But it was an open ended pledge. In 1997, there was an agreement between Russia and Ukraine. Russia leased military facilities for its BSF in Crimea. But in 2006, Ukraine and NATO jointly organized military exercise in Crimea right next to Russian BSF. People of Ukraine started to protest against the arrival of NATO troops. Which led to cancellation of exercise at that time. However, the whole instance was a signal for Russia that situation became dire.²¹⁴

He told that Russian concerns neither listened nor addressed. And by that time West became especially deaf to Russian grievances. When the first wave of NATO enlargement came in 1990's, there were negotiations between Russia and NATO and the Russia-NATO Founding Act created. It included the pledge by NATO not to place nuclear weapons in the new members like Poland, Hungary, and Czech Republic, with additional pledge of no deployment of major military forces in the newly joining members. So, Russia was engaged in the first wave of NATO and diplomatic guarantees were there. In 2002, when second wave of NATO enlargement was happening, Russia-NATO Council was established with some diplomatic dialogues. But when Bucharest Summit happened in 2008 to bring Ukraine and Georgia into alliance. NATO made no additional assurance to Russia. NATO ignored Russian apprehensions. So NATO is expanding posing threat to Russian security. Its expansion is counter-productive as it brings more conflict in the BSR. Ukraine will never be part of NATO as long as Russia exists. Ukraine's aspirations to joins NATO, leads to a war with NATO. Most likely such confrontation will escalate to nuclear level.²¹⁵

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Interview with Dr. Igor.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

NATO-Russia relationship is characterized as the amalgam of complications, uncertainty and misperceptions. The NATO's official policy clearly describes that the Alliance is defensive its objective is to provide security and safety to everyone. It is not against any entity. But Russian politicians and legislators view NATO as a tool of the Western policy in both Eurasia and Europe. In 2008, the President Putin declared that: 'we view the appearance of a powerful military bloc on our borders ... as a direct threat to the security of our country.'

While NATO describes Russian actions in this way that Russia has violated the international rules in the East. Russia has the aspirations of resurgence to attain the Imperial goals. By invading Ukraine, it not only threatens Ukraine but also put European and global security in danger. Ukraine War is not an isolated incident but also affects the European security and economy. Russia wants to pursue its historical goals in Black Sea as it knows the significance of this water entity. Russia is getting aggressive and has followed assertive unilateralism for the projection of its interests to become the hegemon in the region. Though, NATO has three allies in the BSR but Russia's aggressive approach regarding Black Sea and considerable defense capacity in the region are disturbing for NATO. West perceives it as a challenge to Euro-Atlantic security as a whole.²¹⁶

4.2 Türkiye's Stance on NATO's Engagement

Türkiye is amongst the loyal members of NATO for decades.²¹⁷ Türkiye started its journey of NATO membership at the start of the Cold War. In 1947, Türkiye followed the Truman Doctrine, a significant initiative of the US foreign policy which expected to contain Soviet expansion. Türkiye aligned with the West by adopting this doctrine. NATO served as a collective defence organization throughout the Cold War against the Soviet aggression and its Warsaw Pact allies. Türkiye's is situated at the center of Europe and Asia which is an advantage for NATO. West viewed Türkiye as a source to contain Soviet influence in the Middle East and the Mediterranean. Its location between Asia and Europe and proximity to the unstable Middle East region, exposed it to regional conflicts. NATO not only assured

²¹⁶ Natia Gvenetadze, "Of Strategic Importance Cooperation and Confrontation on the Black Sea," *Per Concordiam*, 2019.

²¹⁷ Neset, "Turkey as a regional security actor in the Black Sea," 47.

security to Türkiye but also served the platform to cooperate with Western powers which reduced the menaces emerged from the regional instability.²¹⁸

Türkiye, located at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, its role is strategically essential for NATO to protect its southern flank. Türkiye is NATO's bridge to the Middle East, North Africa, Caucasus, and Asia.²¹⁹ It is being situated on the eastern flank of NATO with other two East European states like Bulgaria and Romania, makes it strong and critical ally of NATO which can deter threats emanating from Russia and other adversaries. Its vast geography and access to significant Straits and to aquatic body, makes it essential regional actor which can check and respond to the regional development in the BSR and Eastern Europe. Important maritime choke points, Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits, are under the control of Türkiye which connect Black Sea to the Mediterranean. Türkiye provides the safe passage to NATO naval forces and goods through these narrow channels, and maintain Western access to Black Sea.²²⁰

While Dr. Pietrzak has a different opinion that Türkiye is one of the most critical NATO members. Its army is one of the strongest in the alliance. Just like France, Germany, Poland, or the UK, it should have its opinion heard. Türkiye can afford a different opinion, which will always be different from the opinion of Poland, Lithuania, and Estonia regarding Russia. In the meantime, however, Greece, Cyprus, Italy, Hungary, and Austria would see Türkiye's close relations with Russia as something normal, for they don't see Ukraine's NATO membership as something ever possible. NATO has a minimal appetite to enter the war with Russia, which is why NATO does not support Ukraine directly. The only support that Ukraine gets is from the NATO member states or the EU – of course, most of the EU members happen to be in NATO, but it is not NATO that adopted a more confrontational attitude to Russia; it is its member states.²²¹

²¹⁸ Oleksandra Mamchii, “Why is Turkey a member of NATO?”, Best Diplomat, 2023, <https://bestdiplomats.org/why-turkey-is-in-nato/>

²¹⁹ Interview with Dr. Piotr Pietrzak

²²⁰ Oleksandra Mamchii, “Why is Turkey a member of NATO?”, Best Diplomat, 2023, <https://bestdiplomats.org/why-turkey-is-in-nato/>

²²¹ Ibid.

Türkiye has two major apprehensions in the regional context: First, Türkiye avoid any action which can instigate Russia. Second, Türkiye is concerned about its leading role in the region in relation to NATO. In 2005, Türkiye showed strong resistance when the US wanted to extend NATO's maritime operation from the Mediterranean to Black Sea. Türkiye argued that Bulgaria, Romania and Türkiye itself, the allies of NATO so this alliance already had a sufficient presence in the region.

Türkiye leads NATO in Black Sea and it also wants to keep the US influence as little as possible. Türkiye blocked the US Navy hospital ships USNS Mercy and USNS Comfort from entering the Black Sea in 2008 during the Georgian Conflict. Whether in the BSR, the Eastern Mediterranean, or the Middle East, both parties see each other as a threat to their respective regional interests. The BSR makes clear that Türkiye is adopting an autonomous strategy among the NATO members, in part due to it.²²²

Türkiye started to give military support to Ukraine in 2014, although it refrained from joining the Western sanctions on Russia following the Russian invasion of Crimea. Its objective was to boost Ukraine's military prowess in addition to filling in the gaps in its own production capacity. Ukraine is crucial to limiting Russian hegemonic claims in Türkiye's idealized regional order. In light of this, mutually beneficial trade and armaments cooperation has emerged. It sent its first consignments of armament to Ukraine in 2015. A strategic cooperation agreement on defence industrial cooperation was signed by both regional actors in 2016. Additionally, a deal was reached in 2019 for the transfer of Turkish drones to Ukraine by both parties.

Prior to the outbreak of the Ukraine War, Türkiye 's deterrence and dialogue policies towards Russia were mostly consistent with NATO's. Türkiye continues to use this strategy, in contrast to the Alliance. By adhering to this stance, Türkiye has established its position as a go-between for Russia and Ukraine. Instead of advancing towards the West as anticipated, since 2022 it has strengthened ties with Russia. Its importance has undoubtedly increased for Russia as well as for Ukraine due to the war. The Turkish public's opinion is in line with this viewpoint. According to a survey conducted by the

²²² Ibid.

European Council on Foreign Relations, 55% of Turkish respondents saw Russia as an essential partner, 14% as an ally with similar goals and values, and 18 per cent a rival and 8 per cent an adversary.²²³

NATO members frequently share interests, but it also happens that they have differing ideas about how to establish strategies to address current problems. Türkiye's policies are one of the reasons NATO is not adequately represented in Black Sea. For instance, Türkiye was the driving force for the creation of BLACKSEAFOR. Türkiye attempted to strengthen its position by undermining NATO's presence in the BSR by developing this approach, and to some extent, it was successful.²²⁴

Nonetheless, Türkiye's position inside NATO has been cemented by its military prowess and geopolitical advantages. The country has contributed significantly to the alliance's joint defence and security initiatives. NATO's largest and most proficient armed forces are found in Türkiye. With an army, air force, and navy that are well-equipped, its military might make it a vital component of the alliance's defence capabilities. NATO operations in the Middle East have benefited greatly from the presence of its Incirlik Air Base.²²⁵

Even though Türkiye made significant contributions to NATO's regional posture, it also desired that the Allies' presence serve as a symbol of their unity and solidarity. It did and still does think that, even in the face of support from both regional and non-regional Allies, NATO's presence in the area should abstain from provocations that could unnecessarily raise tensions and cause a conflict to spill over into the Black Sea. As a fundamental component of international law, the Montreux Convention is one of the laws that Türkiye espouses as having to be followed. It purposefully stays out of the Black Sea military confrontation with Russia.²²⁶

According to Dr. Gloria, Türkiye's performance in NATO can be describes as: Türkiye is the second military power within the alliance. This brings Türkiye in a very important

²²³ Oleksandra Mamchii, "Why is Turkey a member of NATO?", Best Diplomat, 2023, <https://bestdiplomats.org/why-turkey-is-in-nato/>

²²⁴ Ibid.,

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Tacan Ildem, "Is There a Need to Develop a NATO Strategy for the Black Sea Security," *Edam*, Jul. 6, 2023, <https://edam.org.tr/en/foreign-policy-and-security/is-there-a-need-to-develop-a-nato-strategy-for-the-black-sea-security>

position within the alliance. It is also important to state that while in some cases Türkiye has been criticized for its closeness with Russia, the war in Ukraine showed perfectly how Türkiye followed a successful policy and made possible to reach important milestones including here the food corridor agreement. At the same time, a few months before Türkiye supported the inclusion of Sweden and Finland into NATO which prove also the stance of Türkiye within the alliance.²²⁷

From the Practical Geopolitical perspective, Türkiye's stance on NATO reflects a pragmatic approach, to balance its broader geopolitical interests and regional relationships with its commitments with NATO as an ally. Türkiye uses its strategic position to leverage both NATO and Russia to maximize its influence.²²⁸

4.3 NATO's Interests in the Black Sea Region

NATO's long-term goals for the BSR have not changed since the Cold War. The goal is to maintain freedom of navigation on the seas and, for that reason, to prevent Russian expansion. That goes back even further in history, to the time of the Crimean War.²²⁹ Due to its unique geographic location, the region has come to play a significant role in the West's efforts to combat global terrorism and solve new security concerns. As a result, NATO members came to understand that in order to guarantee security in the Balkans and the Middle East, they needed unfettered access to the BSR. Nadia Alexandrova-Arbatova writes in her contribution to *The Wider Black Sea Region in the 21st Century: Strategic, Economic, and Energy Perspectives* that 'NATO's strategy in the region is guided not only by the rivalry with Russia but also by terrorism, proliferation, and energy concerns' with regard to security.²³⁰

According to Structural geopolitics, NATO's expansion in Black Sea as a geopolitical challenge to Russia. NATO's engagement with non-member states like Ukraine and Georgia, alongside increasing military cooperation with Romania and Bulgaria, signals a

²²⁷ Interview with Dr. Gloria.

²²⁸ Gearóid Ó Tuathail, *Critical Geopolitics: The Politics of Writing Global Space* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 122.

²²⁹ Interview with Dr. Paul.

²³⁰ Gvenetadze, "Of Strategic Importance,".

shift in the regional power balance. Russia perceives this as an encroachment on its sphere of influence, intensifying the regional security competition. From a Structural Geopolitical perspective, NATO's actions could be seen as an attempt to restructure the regional security architecture by integrating more countries into the Western sphere of influence.²³¹

NATO's interests in the BSR are driven by several factors. First of all, its strategic location grabs the attention of the West as it connects Asia, Europe and Middle East making it critical hub for trade, energy and transportation. Then NATO is concerned about Russia's growing military presence and assertive behavior in the region including the Crimean Annexation and full scale war in Ukraine. NATO aims to counter balance Russia's influence and prevent further destabilization. NATO has three members in the BSR and other states also want to join NATO which strengthens its position in the region. NATO engagement with partner members like Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova, is to promote security and stability in the region.

The region is a focal point for NATO's attempts to uphold security and stability in the larger Euro-Atlantic area because to its key marine routes, energy resources, and close proximity to war zones. Protecting maritime communication routes, fending off hybrid threats, strengthening deterrent powers, and encouraging cooperation between partners and member nations are among the Alliance's strategic goals. Furthermore, given Russia's proactive efforts in the area, NATO's presence in Black Sea guarantees the security of its eastern flank and strengthens its larger commitment to collective defense.²³²

NATO's interests are centered on the advancement of Euro-Atlantic integration among Black Sea littoral states, the promotion of democratic government and the rule of law. To advance stability, security, and democratic models in this area, the Alliance aims to deepen its associations with regional players, such as Georgia, Ukraine, and other NATO contenders. Furthermore, NATO's involvement in Black Sea strengthens regional

²³¹ Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

²³² Stephen J. Flanagan et al., "Russia, NATO, and Black Sea Security" (RAND Corporation, October 5, 2020), https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA357-1.html.

cooperation frameworks, deters destabilizing actions by outside players, and increases the ability of member states to withstand outside pressure.²³³

As said by Dr. Gloria, NATO's interests in the BSR are shaped around the general objectives of the NATO Alliance. Considering the BSR's proximity to Europe and its strategic implications, NATO wants to see a politically stable region. The possible effects of Black Sea on other regions, especially Europe, Asia and the Middle East, affect NATO's security concerns in many ways. NATO plays an active role in Black Sea despite Russia's expansionary policies. Preventing Russia's expansion and military influence is another interest in the region. One of NATO's goals is to eliminate Russian influence and ensure security among the alliance member states.²³⁴

In addition, Black Sea is considered an important corridor in terms of maritime. Protecting maritime borders in Black Sea, which has great strategic importance in terms of trade and energy, is of great importance for NATO. In line with these interests, among the consequences of NATO's implementation of its expansion policy in Black Sea is the strained relations with Russia. These results are followed by an increase in military armament, anti-NATO rhetoric and movements, and on the contrary, support for NATO.²³⁵

While, Dr. Marion says that NATO as an organization has no interests in Black Sea instead the NATO member states that are bordering Black Sea have interests so it would be the Romanian interest, Bulgarian interest and Türkiye's interest. With respect to Ukraine War, NATO has interests in Black Sea from security perspective that how does the war affect the BSR, how does it affect the civilians and how does it affect the grain shipment. NATO does not have mind of its own and it has 32 Allies and its interest will be the interest of Allies.²³⁶

Dr. Taras has another view that NATO has not articulated clear interests in Black Sea. There is no NATO expansion in Black Sea as the last three US Presidents (Obama, Trump,

²³³ Zviad Adzinbaia, "NATO in the Black Sea: What to Expect Next?" (NATO Defense College, 2017), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep17617>.

²³⁴ Interview with Dr. Gloria.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Interview with Dr. Marion

Biden) do not support Ukraine and Georgia joining NATO.²³⁷ In the BSR, NATO's political involvement strengthens its military presence and demonstrates its commitment to preserving the values of democracy, international law, and collective security. NATO pursues its interests by conducting summits occasionally. Since the annexation of Crimea, NATO has conducted following summits:

²³⁷ Interview with Dr. Taras

Figure 6: NATO Summits and Outcomes

Date	Summit Title	Outcome
Sep. 4, 2014	Wales Summit	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Adopted Readiness Action Plan• Spending 2% of GDP on defence expenditure by 2024• Support for Ukraine and Non-Member Partners• Monitoring of force posture in Black Sea• boosting NATO support for partner countries outside the alliance.
Jul. 8, 2016	Warsaw Summit	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tailored Forward Presence initiated.• Romania's rigidity about Russia, But Türkiye and Bulgaria appeared as vigilant actors.• Initiation of Sea Breeze Exercise.
Jun. 29, 2022	Madrid Summit	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• New Strategic Concept.• Deployment of Drones• Patrolling of air space• Battle groups established in Bulgaria and Romania.

Source: Researcher has developed the table.

4.3.1 Wales Summit

After Crimean annexation, NATO conducted Wales Summit in Sep. 2014, to defend the eastern flank of the BSR. It was especially about the Baltic Sea Region but the regional developments in Black Sea were also discussed. Though, it did not produce an immediate security response but at least security situation of Eastern Europe got attention of NATO allies. NATO spent two more years to conduct Warsaw Summit in July 2016 for Black Sea to come into sharper focus for the alliance and for the adoption of more robust measures. In the absence of a NATO's unified policy, military vessels of US and other non-regional members started to patrol Black Sea on a rotational basis. Through routine political-military assessments, the NATO secretariat and military staff at its headquarters started to increase situational awareness of developments in Black Sea between the summits of 2014 and 2016. The political decision-making body of NATO, the North Atlantic Council, started holding meetings and monitoring troop postures in the area. Following the Wales Summit, NATO demonstrated its presence in the BSR to Russia by implementing a variety of diplomatic and military actions.²³⁸

4.3.2 Warsaw Summit

During the 2016 Warsaw summit, NATO allies reaffirmed their dedication to protecting their fellow members and friends in the Black Sea region and refuted Russia's unlawful annexation of Crimea. NATO reaffirmed its support for regional initiatives led by Black Sea littoral states in the summit communiqué. Its goals included advancing the TFP in the southeast portion of Alliance territory and providing security and stability, as well as stationing a multinational brigade there for training. There are three components to the TFP: aviation, land, and marine. Unlike NATO's EFP in the Baltic States, which uses an 'all alliance approach' with different NATO states taking the lead, including the US, UK, Canada, and Germany, it is essentially a regional presence. NATO's operations in Black Sea are therefore centered on training and assurance, whereas the alliance keeps battalion-

²³⁸ "Wales Summit Declaration," North Atlantic Treaty Organization, accessed June 22, 2024, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm.

sized, combat-ready battle groups around the Baltic Sea that work in tandem with national defence forces.

Romania is the focal point of the TFP's land-based component, with the establishment of a multinational framework brigade there in October 2017. Combat aircraft are deployed as part of the TFP's Enhance Air Policing operation to establish a combat air patrol akin to the NATO operation undertaken for the Baltic States. The US, UK, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, and Canada have all promised to support air patrols in the area. The TFP's maritime component includes trips to ports in Georgia and Ukraine as well as the usage of Bulgarian and Romanian ports by NATO naval ships, particularly those from Standing NATO Maritime Group 2 and Standing NATO Mine Countermeasures Group 2. Following the takeover of Crimea, the number of NATO naval warships entering Black Sea surged dramatically.²³⁹

At the Warsaw summit, a compromise emerged between Romania's proposal to establish a permanent NATO military presence and joint NATO military patrols in Black Sea. Whereas Bulgaria appeared as vigilant actor which was anxious about the risks of escalation triggered by a more substantial NATO commitment to the region. Subsequently, Bulgaria and Türkiye have adopted a more cautious threat assessment on Russia in Black Sea than Romania.

In support of the TFP, NATO has established command-and-control arrangements to conduct operations in Black Sea. This has included the deployment of NATO personnel to the region to create local capacities to accept reinforcements and coordinate the increased tempo and scale of exercises. In February 2017 a meeting of NATO defense ministers that addressed the security situation in Black Sea agreed two additional maritime measures: an increased NATO naval presence for training, exercises and situational awareness and a maritime coordination function for NATO when operating with other NATO forces in the BSR.²⁴⁰

²³⁹ Neil Melvin, "Rebuilding Collective Security in the Black Sea Region", (Sweden: SIPRI, 2018).

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

Romania took the initiative to establish the NATO BSF during the Warsaw summit, and it was well accepted in Berlin, NATO headquarters, and Washington. However, following the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, the strategy was altered. Beginning in 2021, Bulgaria has been in charge of NATO naval training exercises in Black Sea; these exercises, known as 'Breeze,' were last conducted in July 2022 and involved up to 1400 soldiers, 24 combat and support boats, 5 military aircraft, and 4 helicopters. One of the objectives and justifications for the exercises was to strengthen the alliance's interests in the BSR, as was previously said. Another was to lessen Russia's hegemony and maritime monopoly.²⁴¹ The final communique of the NATO Warsaw summit highlighted the importance of the BSR in such a way that NATO Allies are facing challenges which are evolving due to the unpredictable circumstances in Baltic and Black Sea. Russia is continuously enhancing its military capacity in the BSR which becomes a potential threat for regional security. This situation has increased uncertainty in the region which could be decreased through mutual transparency and risk reduction measures. In 2014, NATO warned about the Russia's militarization of the Crimean Peninsula that it would have an impact on most of Black Sea.²⁴²

4.3.3 Madrid Summit

Russia is clearly the biggest menace to Euro-Atlantic security, according to NATO, which made this declaration clear when it adopted its new Strategic Concept at the June 2022 Madrid Summit. NATO is particularly concerned about Russia's pursuit of militarization of marine spaces. The security of the Alliance and its allies depends strategically on the BSR. NATO and other Western partners unilaterally expanded their presence in the area in reaction to the takeover of Crimea. As part of NATO's 'Air Policing' mission, allied aircraft have since been policing the airspace over Black Sea, Romania, and Bulgaria. The TFP was founded on land in Romania and Bulgaria following the 2016 NATO summit in Warsaw. These components, together with the decisions made at the 2022 Madrid Summit, serve as the cornerstone for the newly formed Battle Groups in Romania, Bulgaria, and

²⁴¹ Beqa Bochorishvili, "NATO in the Black Sea Region," *Geocase*, Apr. 25, 2023, <https://www.geocase.ge/en/publications/974/nato-shavi-zghvis-regionshi#>

²⁴² Natia Gvenetadze, "Of Strategic Importance Cooperation and Confrontation on the Black Sea," *Per Concordiam*, 2019.

Hungary by the Alliance. These multinational troop contingents operating under the NATO banner aim to reinforce the Alliance's primary defence and deterrent objectives. As a result, the number of US forces in Romania and other locations has increased thrice, from roughly 1,000 in January 2022 to approximately 3,000 now. The Americans have not only sent combat-ready and well-trained units to an especially vulnerable Romania through the troop contingents of the mobile 101st Airborne Division, but they are also taking advantage of their close proximity to the fighting in Ukraine to conduct ongoing reconnaissance and obtain intelligence. Drones are so frequently used over the Black Sea in international airspace. Currently, Romania is the cornerstone of the US and Allied presence in the BSR, as well as the initiatives taken there to strengthen NATO's defence preparedness and deterrence.²⁴³

Since the twitch of the Ukraine Conflict and the implementation of Türkiye's limitations on Bosphorus navigation, the Alliance's operations in the maritime domain have essentially come to a halt. As has been the case virtually consistently since 2014, there are no longer any foreign Allied naval forces in Black Sea, except from the Bulgarian, Romanian, and Turkish units stationed there. Additionally, alliance exercises and maneuvers are no longer conducted at sea. NATO's primary goal after the Wales Summit resolutions in 2014 was to create military security mechanisms in the BSR and give it more consideration in its own planning.

To coordinate activities and drills, a Black Sea Coordination Function was to be established at the Alliance's maritime headquarters in Northwood, UK. The intention was to give the tools necessary for a continuous picture of ship movements and a more comprehensive grasp of regional trends. Bulgaria suggested in 2016 moving this maritime coordination duty from Northwood to a Varna-based 'Regional Naval Coordination Presence.' The decision is currently pending because only Türkiye opposed the motion, despite the plan receiving broad support from the other states. In order to improve its standing in BSR, Türkiye has sought to reduce the influence of other forces in the area, particularly that of the Alliance as a whole and its non-regional Allies.²⁴⁴

²⁴³ Isachenko and Swistek, "Mare Clausum," 3.

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 4.

The war in Ukraine has significantly impacted NATO's posture in the BSR. The outcome of this conflict will be crucial in shaping NATO's future strategy, especially regarding freedom of navigation and regional stability. NATO has provided substantial support to Ukraine, but a definitive strategy that addresses both the immediate and long-term threats posed by Russia is still in development.²⁴⁵

4.4 Security and Political Implications for NATO's Expansion

Russia is perceived as a security threat by the post-Soviet states as Russia still considers them in its sphere of influence. According to Ms. Samantha, if Ukraine joins NATO, it is not an existential threat for Russia, but Russia is an existential threat for Ukraine. There is a reason why countries which border Russia, want to join NATO because they feel threatened by Russia. If they did not feel threatened they would not want to join NATO. Finland joined NATO and has a much longer border with Russia than Ukraine, and that is not an existential threat for Russia either. Again this is a colonial war. Putin believes that Ukraine should be part of a reconstructed Russian Empire. Black Sea is more important for Russia than for NATO as Black Sea has warm water ports, and most of Russia's maritime ports are frozen for part of the year and Black Sea ports particularly Sevastopol port on Crimea is only the warm water port that Russian navy has. It is geopolitically important for Russia to be able to use Black Sea as an access to Mediterranean.

While talking about NATO's expansion, Ms. Samantha said that it is important to note that NATO has many times reached out to Russia for partnership, for dialogue on European security, but Russia has constantly invaded its neighbours. NATO has expanded through a democratic process. States that want to join NATO have to qualify and once they qualify, NATO then decides whether they can join. When Russia wants a country to be part of Russia it invades, and that is the big distinction. Regarding Ukraine, it has been asking to join NATO since the late 1990's but NATO has constantly said no. Ukraine is not part of NATO. Ukraine is not about to be part of NATO. Even the NATO Secretary General said, 'Ukraine will not be invited to join NATO at the NATO summit in July (2024)' and Russia

²⁴⁵ Interview with Dr. Gloria.

knows that. It is a false argument. It may be join one day, but it is not the case today. That is Russia's false narrative.²⁴⁶

But NATO has been experiencing security and political implications since Georgia and Ukraine showed the aspirations to be the allies of NATO as it is an extra regional actor which influences the region through its members. However, the main regional players: Türkiye as a NATO ally and Russia as rival state, both are challenging for NATO to compete. So these are the following implications:

4.4.1 Security Implications

The BSR is a strategic fault line between NATO and Russia, with significant geopolitical tensions. Russia has been actively working to establish a sphere of influence in the region, using a combination of military and informational tactics to assert control. This includes military buildups in Crimea and hybrid warfare strategies.²⁴⁷ However, since the Crimean annexation, the security dynamics has been changing continuously of the BSR which enforces the littoral states to emphasize on their security more rigorously. Since 2014, Russian aggression has caused different security implications to NATO's expansion which are as follows:

4.4.1.1 Russia Ukraine War

Russia made it very clear for two decades that NATO is an existential threat to its sovereignty. Certain countries in EU like France and Germany particular, will lukewarm about the idea of including Ukraine in NATO. NATO member states generally refrain from accepting countries into the alliance which have unresolved territorial issues. Ukraine, of course, has suffered from an ongoing conflict in the East and the Crimean issue for past ten years. According to Dr. Tobias, the chances of Ukraine entering NATO are extremely low. Still, Ukraine has politically moved very close to NATO, it has restructured (parts of) its armed forces in accordance with NATO doctrine and changed its rank system to fit in NATO's rank system. The adoption of NATO procedures and the trainings according to NATO standards, many Ukrainian soldiers have received during the past decade is one

²⁴⁶ Interview with Ms. Samantha.

²⁴⁷ Interview with Dr. Gloria.

factor that can explain why Ukrainian has managed to put up a lot of resistance against Russia when the Kremlin launched its invasion.²⁴⁸

Russia is regarded by NATO members as the ‘most significant and direct threat to its members' peace and security,’ placing it at the top of the list of threats. It also contends that Russia aims to dominate other countries and establish areas of influence through ‘coercion, subversion, and assault.’ The 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine provided a fresh boost to the established perception of Russia among the Western governments. Since then, though, fresh assessments of Russia's military power and the threats it poses to NATO security have led the alliance's members to increasingly caution the country and to appear to be pressuring it to boost defence spending. Furthermore, during the past ten years, the defence budgets of European NATO members have increased by almost one third, with several nations raising their allocations significantly in reaction to Russia's military incursion. Similarly, ‘NATO members are living in extremely perilous times and at a stage when large-scale violence is more probable than it has been in recent history,’ according to a British military official.²⁴⁹

Russia violates UN Charter by attacking Ukraine which Germany does not tolerate. Same is true for UK and France. Other countries have more realist outlook in international relations, like Hungary is pursuing realist foreign policy. It is a minor country and looking for power distributions for positioning itself in the system of international relations. They see the realist view of Ukraine conflict that in longer run, Ukraine cannot stand the chance against Russia so why they sacrifice their relation and economic growth. Even in the ethical point of view, why prolonging the suffering of the people there if the entries are clear from the beginning.²⁵⁰

4.4.1.2 Russia's Narratives Regarding NATO's Expansion

From a Popular Geopolitical perspective, NATO's expansion in the BSR after the occupation of Crimea is shaped by media narratives, public discourse, and cultural perceptions. These narratives influence how both Western and Eastern European publics

²⁴⁸ Interview with Dr. Tobias

²⁴⁹ Interview with Dr. Tobias.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

understand the conflict, shaping political support for NATO's actions and fueling concerns about potential escalation. In Russia, popular narratives cast NATO as an aggressor, reinforcing nationalist and anti-Western sentiment. Overall, Popular Geopolitics emphasizes the importance of media, public perception, and cultural representation in shaping the geopolitical dynamics of NATO's Black Sea expansion.

Russia's narratives regarding NATO's expansion has been having different kind of reactions and perspectives from the other countries and experts. The Western experts has used the term Russian propaganda which has always used NATO. Russian propaganda has always cultivated this image of West as enemy. So this is not new. It was used as a tool to justify its domestic authoritarianism. Many analysts like Mearschiemer has been arguing that it is because of NATO's expansion, have this war. But the driver of this war is largely domestic, largely deepening authoritarianism. So NATO's expansion is a boogie man to scare the public, to create the narratives that Russia is a besieged and Russia is attacked by the West.²⁵¹

When assessing Russia's possible danger to NATO, modernization initiatives and military capability are crucial factors to take into account. Russia has strong military capabilities as a great power, having one of the largest and most technologically equipped armed forces in the world in addition to its nuclear arsenal. Russia's strategic nuclear weapons, which include long-range bombers, intercontinental ballistic missiles, and ballistic missiles fired from submarines, pose a serious danger to NATO members and serve as a powerful deterrent.²⁵² Although there is still little chance of a direct nuclear clash between Russia and NATO, these capabilities do exist, and there is always a chance that tensions might escalate during a crisis.²⁵³

²⁵¹ Interview with Dr. Anna

²⁵² Rodrigue DEMEUSE, "THE RUSSIAN WAR ON TRUTH, DEFENDING ALLIED AND PARTNER DEMOCRACIES AGAINST THE KREMLIN DISINFORMATION CAMPAIGN," (Belgium: COMMITTEE ON DEMOCRACY AND SECURITY, 2023)

²⁵³ "Disinformation and Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, Threats and Governance Responses," OECD, Nov, 3, 2022, accessed May 16, 2024. <https://www.oecd.org/ukraine-hub/policy-responses/disinformation-and-russia-s-war-of-aggression-against-ukraine-37186bde/>

Following its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Russia was hit with international sanctions, its reputation was damaged, and state-sponsored channels: Russia Today and Sputnik were banned in many Western states. As a result, Russia turned to more focused and targeted operations using social media platforms like X, TikTok, and Telegram to influence and grow its audience abroad, particularly in the Global South, where Russian state media is still very much in play. Additionally, Russia strengthened its information and media sharing partnerships with like-minded nations. Russia used ‘Narrative Warfare,’ a type of misinformation, to conceal its plans, defend military actions, and deny any involvement in the conflict.²⁵⁴ Examples of few narratives are:

- Ukraine is the aggressor,
- Ukraine is provoking Russia,
- The Russian invasion is a special military operation.²⁵⁵
- NATO’s expansion is a primary cause of Russian aggression.²⁵⁶

Propaganda is used by Russia as a deadliest weapon to spread the chaos in the region.²⁵⁷ Propaganda and disinformation are key component of Russia’s overall information warfare strategy, in competition and in conflict due to its effectiveness in achieving tactical and strategic results. Russian disinformation exacerbates division within adversaries such as NATO and US.²⁵⁸ Nevertheless, propaganda by Russian state-affiliated media that targets Turkish public opinion is not addressed by Türkiye. Türkiye allows the unfettered operation of the state-sponsored Sputnik News Agency and RS FM (Voice of Russia, Sputnik FM) in Russia. Pro-Russian narratives that blame the US, NATO, and the West for starting the war in Ukraine and generating instability in the region can potentially strengthen President Erdogan's alliance with the Eurasianists and erode Türkiye's

²⁵⁴ The Digital Forensic Research Lab, “Undermining Ukraine: How Russia widened its global information war in 2023,” Atlantic Council, Feb. 29, 2024, accessed May 16, 2024, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/report/undermining-ukraine-how-russia-widened-its-global-information-war-in-2023/>

²⁵⁵ “Russian Disinformation and Propaganda: Ukrainian Stakeholder,” p.2

²⁵⁶ Cody Schuette, “Russian Disinformation on NATO Expansion and the War in Ukraine,” *Journal of Strategic Security* 16, no. 4 (2023): 36.

²⁵⁷ “Escalation of disinformation and propaganda around the war in Ukraine,” OSCE PA, Dec. 12, 2022, accessed May 16, 2024, <https://www.oscepa.org/ru/dokumenty/special-representatives/disinformation-and-propaganda/4599-note-by-oscar-mina-escalation-of-disinformation-and-propaganda-around-the-war-in-ukraine-12-december-2022/file>

²⁵⁸ Schuette, “Russian Disinformation,” 35.

cooperative connections with the West. Additionally, these narratives push Türkiye towards Russia, and it is challenging to resist Russian influence in Türkiye.²⁵⁹

In contrast, European states are rich, they are not engaging in war fares, they have not tried to contain Russia, NATO's expansion has stalled, they are not going to take Ukraine or Georgia and Russia having normalize its influence inside EU and NATO states. So NATO's expansion is not the factor for this war but Russia will continue the propaganda to build this image that Russia is under attack and this is not a new narrative. It has always been there, historically predetermined.²⁶⁰ It affects the decision making and public opinion resulted in protests against NATO's expansion.

In this perspective, Popular Geopolitics refers to how geopolitical events and issues are framed, represented, and understood in the popular imagination, often through media, public discourse, and cultural narratives. In the context of NATO's expansion in the BSR after the Crimea annexation, popular geopolitics focuses on how this expansion is perceived and discussed by the public, politicians, media, and cultural outlets, and how these perceptions influence geopolitical strategies and decisions.

4.4.1.3 Frozen Conflicts

There are four frozen conflicts existing in the BSR i.e., between Armenia and Azerbaijan²⁶¹, Georgia and South Ossetia²⁶², Georgia and Abkhazia²⁶³, and Transnistria²⁶⁴

²⁵⁹ Gaber, Lewis, and Herd, "Ukraine and Emerging Trends," *George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies*, (2023): 2.

²⁶⁰ Interview with Dr. Anna

²⁶¹ There is an ethnic and territorial dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan which is known Nagorno Karabagh Conflict. Nagorno Karabagh is situated in Azerbaijan but its population is comprised of 95% of Armenians so they want to join Armenia. The first war started in 1988 and lasted till 1994. Then in 2016, 2020 conflict again ignited which resulted in hundreds of casualties but still unresolved.

²⁶² Georgia and South Ossetia Conflict is an ethno-political conflict. South Ossetia had declared its separatist intentions in 1990's and wanted independence from Georgia. As a result, war initiated and still it is continued evenly. Russia is playing a leading role in this conflict where Russia-Georgia War happened in 2008 also. Russia recognized South Ossetia as an independent state.

²⁶³ It is a territorial dispute between Georgia and Abkhazia which initiated in 1989 and lasted till 1994 when agreement of ceasefire was signed. Abkhazia separated from Georgia and declared independence in 1999. War erupted in Georgia and Russia in 2008 over South Ossetia and resulted in the recognition of both South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states.

²⁶⁴ It is a territorial dispute between Moldova and Transnistria. Transnistria declared independence in 1990 and war exploded. Russia is on the side of Transnistria and has tried to resolve the conflict but it is also unsettled.

and Moldova.²⁶⁵ After the fall of the Soviet Union, they received renewed attention as unresolved spaces.²⁶⁶ Their roots appeared before the collapse of the Soviet Union where internal borders had purely theoretical importance but became real problems once the Soviet project collapsed and fifteen independent states emerged.²⁶⁷ These conflicts provided an opportunity to Russia to exert influence on these states defined as a sphere of special strategic interests. Russia's approach to these conflicts have security implications in the region.²⁶⁸

Russia wants to control frozen conflicts because this control gives Russia an impression of controlling the states and location of these conflicts come under the Russian sphere of influence and interests. This will serve Russia's two other strategic objectives: securing of its borders and preventing others from filling the strategic space. This strategic logic has been clear in Russia's dealing with frozen conflicts in the whole post-Soviet period.²⁶⁹ So NATO cannot proceed to these areas as except Nagorno Karabagh, remaining three areas situated at the borders of Russia. NATO's projection of power will ultimately result in armed conflict.

4.4.1.4 Maritime Security

As a result of Russia's capture of Crimea, a militarized and more contentious maritime security environment has emerged, evoking memories of the Cold War. The notable augmentation of Russian military presence in Crimea has intensified regional instability and intensified feelings of insecurity and unpredictability. Russia now has control over the Black Sea thanks to the militarization of Crimea, which NATO's supreme allied commander for Europe, General Philip Breedlove, has described as a serious source of concern.²⁷⁰ A maritime security conundrum in Black Sea has also been brought about by

²⁶⁵ Dan DUNGACIU, Jakub GODZIMIRSKI, "Russia and the Frozen Conflicts in the Black Sea Region," Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, (2020): 3.

²⁶⁶ DUNGACIU, GODZIMIRSKI, "Russia and the Frozen Conflicts," 4.

²⁶⁷ Idib, 7.

²⁶⁸ Idib, 8.

²⁶⁹ Idib, 10.

²⁷⁰ Deborah Sanders, "Maritime Security in the Black Sea: Out with the New, In with the Old," *Mediterranean Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (2017): 1.

Russian initiatives to further its strategic interests in the area, leading to a rise in NATO participation and US marine presence.²⁷¹

Russia's regional strategy has included dominating Black Sea to threaten both NATO and non-NATO countries from the sea, but it has also given Russia the ability to isolate and split the region. At the center of this policy have been the BSF and Sevastopol access. Control of Black Sea maritime zone was a crucial part of Russia's military strategy when the conflict started in 2022.²⁷² However NATO has three member states in the region but their diverging interests in Black Sea has security implications for NATO.²⁷³

4.4.2. Political Implications

In 2004, Romania and Bulgaria joined NATO and in 2008, during Bucharest Summit, Ukraine and Georgia had showed their intentions of joining the alliance which resulted in the Russia- Georgia War. Since then NATO has not expanded forward due to Russian hostile unilateral actions in the region. The Political implications for NATO's expansion are as follows:

4.4.2.1 Russian Aggression

Dominance over the BSR has always been seen by Russia as essential to the country's survival. Being the only warm-water ports in Russia, Black Sea ports have long benefited the country's economy.²⁷⁴ Russia wants to control as much of the region around Black Sea as it can. Viewing Black Sea as its own lake, filled by weaker actors who are unable to challenge its regional hegemony, Russia is the only state on Black Sea with a fully comprehensive policy. Russia approaches Black Sea security by negotiation first, and if that fails, it takes aggressive action to further its goals. Russia seeks to obstruct Black Sea states in the area by conquering them militarily or by pitting them against one another. Russia implemented the 'non-claimed' attack model. It affirmed its hegemony by

²⁷¹ Sanders, "Maritime Security", 2.

²⁷² Neil Melvin, Natia Seskuria, "A New Security Order in the Black Sea, The Role of Georgia," Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies, (2022): 8.

²⁷³ Iulian Romanynshyn, "Ukraine, NATO and the Black Sea," NATO Defence College, (NDC Policy Brief Jan. 2023)

²⁷⁴ Luke Coffey, "NATO cannot afford to ignore the geopolitics of the Black Sea," TRT World, 2022, <https://www.trtworld.com/opinion/nato-cannot-afford-to-ignore-the-geopolitics-of-the-black-sea-13117083>

observing a practice and using the inherent fear of unprovoked assaults against NATO members as leverage. On the one hand, Russia strongly militarized the peninsula in order to use its A2/AD capabilities to establish its hegemony. Conversely, Russia has established a cooperative partnership with Türkiye acknowledging its significance in the Mediterranean region, even though it means excluding Türkiye from NATO.²⁷⁵

The Secretary General of NATO stated in 2014 that NATO could no longer conduct business as usual with Russia, calling Russian military aggression the worst crisis to hit Europe since the collapse of the Berlin Wall. Russia has been conducting a series of hybrid operations in the Baltics, Eastern Europe, and, most recently, the BSR and Eurasia in an attempt to reestablish its pre-Cold War, Soviet-style regional primacy. Russia is mostly employing soft power to threaten the West without going outside predetermined boundaries. A consensus among academics is that Russia's approach is motivated by its goal of regaining its standing as a 'great power.' An indication of Russia's changing military policy in the BSR is the annexation of Crimea, which came after the invasion of Georgia. During the Cold War, Black Sea was referred to as a 'Soviet lake' in recent history. Although Black Sea continued to play a crucial role in forming Russia's perception of its near abroad, Dr. Toucas claims that with the fall of the Soviet Union, the BSR lost its geostrategic significance for the West.²⁷⁶

4.4.2.2 Diverging Threat Perception among Members

However, Black Sea states have failed to formulate a rational approach toward Russia. In practice, though, Russia's 'divide and conquer' policy has been so successful hence Black Sea is a major source of insecurity. Black Sea states agree on one point that they want the regional development and prosperity, but their policies show a different picture.²⁷⁷

Within NATO, different states have different experiences with Russia. East European states: Romania and Bulgaria have lived under Russian or Soviet occupation and dominance. They understand Russia's behavior much better than West European states.

²⁷⁵ Iulia Joja, "Black Sea Strategic Volatility: Players & Patterns," Black Sea Strategy Papers, Foreign Policy Research Institute, Oct. 2019, p. 4,

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Iulia Joja, "Black Sea Strategic Volatility: Players & Patterns," Black Sea Strategy Papers, Foreign Policy Research Institute, Oct. 2019, p. 3,

They understand the threat. As an example, the Estonian prime minister said: we understand what Russian peace means. Russian peace means deportation, destruction of our nationhood, our language, our culture. It means torture, imprisonment of anybody who has different opinions to the official Russian government view point. All these countries including Bulgaria and Romania know what it means to be controlled by Russia. They have known that in their living memory that it means dictatorship and lack of freedom.²⁷⁸

For example, As a US strategic partner in the region and a NATO promoter, Romania has secured the image of a Westernizer and stabilizer in the region.²⁷⁹ Romania has been a staunch advocate of enhanced NATO's military presence, which paradoxically resonated much better with Russia-alert Ukraine or Georgia, rather than with Bulgaria or Türkiye.²⁸⁰ Because Romania also has the minority issues and it borders Moldova which has one of the secessionist regions that Russia has been manipulating by the time. If anything militarily is going to happen in Moldova, it will heavily impact on Romania and refugees' flows in the area. That really influences Romania security position.²⁸¹

Bulgaria is similar in this regard that also having negative history of previous association with the Soviet Union. But at the same time, some government factions have favoured Russia more than others. So Bulgaria favours a more balanced approach overall.²⁸² It has always pursued a dual approach in its foreign policy, oscillating between the commitments within the Alliance and the desire to maintain close relations with Russia. It was seen when Bulgarian Prime Minister Boyko Borissov rejected the Romanian idea of creating a joint BSF of Romania, Bulgaria, and Türkiye. Bulgaria's dependence on Russia in terms of energy, business and tourism, perceives as the derivatives of delaying tactics.²⁸³

While Türkiye has not lived under Russian occupation, so it has a completely different historical perspective on the region. It is also a former empire and was very strong in the

²⁷⁸ Interview with Ms. Samantha.

²⁷⁹ Maryna Vorotnyuk, "Black Sea Security Deadlocks: NATO-Russia Confrontation," *Ukraine Analytica* 19, no. 1 (April 2, 2020): p. 22,

²⁸⁰ Maryna Vorotnyuk, "Black Sea Security Deadlocks: NATO-Russia Confrontation," *Ukraine Analytica* 19, no. 1 (April 2, 2020): p. 21,

²⁸¹ Interview with Dr. Marion

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ Maryna Vorotnyuk, "Black Sea Security Deadlocks: NATO-Russia Confrontation," *Ukraine Analytica* 19, no. 1 (April 2, 2020): p. 22,

BSR. Probably Erdogan's desire is to be the dominant power in the region again. He believes that he can do that in cooperation with Russia. Because both Erdogan and Putin have similar dictatorial impulses.²⁸⁴ However, Türkiye is much more used to encountering Russia and it has been also trying for more balanced approach on the one hand. Yet they are NATO members and they want to be in NATO and value of military alliance. But at the same time, they don't necessarily want to write off relationship with Russia completely and there are some aspects on which the government aligned. So this might be the reason of not making an effective NATO policy in the Black Sea.²⁸⁵

According to Dr. Gloria, the NATO Alliance and its values require joint action, at some point it can be observed that the attitude towards Russia among member states changes as each state acts according to its own national interests. In some cases, this varies depending on the historical experiences of the states with Russia, and sometimes it varies in line with their economic, political and security interests.²⁸⁶

While Dr. Taras has different opinion about Russian threat perception that it is growing and a fear that if Ukraine is defeated, Russia will continue its expansion and attack NATO members. Most NATO members are now believing there will be a war with Russia in the next five years. Only Hungary is pro-Russian. The bigger problem is that all NATO members did not spend the required 2% as a minimum of GDP on defence. In 2014, only five NATO members spent 2%. Today 18 out of 32 members spend 2%. The urgency to spend more on defence is brought about by the growing perception of Russia as a threat and of the fear of Donald Trump wins the US election, he will withdraw the US from NATO.²⁸⁷ So these three allies have different level of relationship with Russia and NATO as well. Because states have their own interests to pursue first.

4.4.2.3 Türkiye's Regional Approach

NATO possesses several major assets in Türkiye: The Incirlik Air Base which plays a symbolic role in NATO's nuclear deterrence and enables its power projection in the Middle

²⁸⁴ Interview with Ms. Samantha.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Interview with Dr. Gloria.

²⁸⁷ Interview with Dr. Taras

East, an allied command in Izmir, and also the Army Transportable Radar Surveillance radar in Kurecik, a pillar of NATO'S missile defence architecture. NATO has second largest military of Türkiye.²⁸⁸ Despite of all this, Türkiye has non-bloc and regional approach. Türkiye pursues interest based foreign policy.²⁸⁹ After 2014, Türkiye's did not join the Western sanctions against Russia, but started to build good relations.²⁹⁰

The tenet of Türkiye's regional policy has consistently been to maintain Black Sea 'internal,' meaning that less access is allowed to NATO and non-littoral states. The 'keep internal' approach towards Black Sea has been adhered to by successive governments without question, resulting in a policy that has come to be known as 'zero problems with neighbours.' The Montreux Convention, which governs maritime security in Black Sea, was last amended during the Cold War.²⁹¹ This convention restricts the naval presence of non-Black Sea nations, including the US, in Black Sea. This convention limits the tonnage and duration of naval forces from outside the region, which complicates NATO's ability to maintain a consistent and robust naval presence.²⁹²

Türkiye has leveraged its geostrategic position to emerge as a broker in the Ukraine Conflict, balancing between NATO and Russia. Despite opposing the invasion and giving Ukraine the Bayraktar TB2 drone, Türkiye has not joined the sanctions on Russia and has, in fact, increased its imports from Russia in 2022.²⁹³ Türkiye is not a balancer. It is acting in Russia's interests by allowing Russia to evade Western sanctions through it, giving sanctuary to Russian oligarchs, selling Russians Turkish passports, and not allowing NATO naval ships to enter Black Sea. It pursues its interests separate to NATO.²⁹⁴ Its engagement sometimes clashed with NATO allies. These diverging interests have led to

²⁸⁸ Boris Toucas, "Turkey Has no Allies in the Black Sea, only Interests," Center for Strategic & International Studies, Feb. 13, 2018, accessed May 15, 2024, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/turkey-has-no-allies-black-sea-only-interests>

²⁸⁹ Interview with Dr. Igor

²⁹⁰ Ibid, 5.

²⁹¹ Ibid, p. 6,

²⁹² Interview with Dr. Gloria.

²⁹³ Richard D. Hooker, "A Security Strategy for the Black Sea," Atlantic Council, Dec. 2023,

²⁹⁴ Interview with Dr. Taras

disagreements with in the NATO alliance.²⁹⁵ Maintaining Türkiye is important for NATO. Because it maintains NATO's influence in the BSR.²⁹⁶

4.4.2.4 Public Opinion

People in Europe, since Ukraine War, have been continuously protesting against NATO as there is public perception that NATO is responsible for Russian aggression against Ukraine. In different states of Europe like France, Germany, Spain etc. protests have conducted to stop the war provoked by US and NATO. In UK, 4000 people protested to demand 'No to NATO Expansion'. In recent years, mistrust against NATO have intensified, sparking criticism from European politicians and academics, and triggering more anti-NATO protests. According to French President Macron: We must get out of NATO, a useless organization. Political statements instigate people to protest against NATO.²⁹⁷ People think increase in defence spending in Europe urged by NATO is a threat to peace. There is a perception that more arms mean more wars and people always pay for it, no NATO no army bases.²⁹⁸ People think that they bear the economic burden of the war.²⁹⁹ They are not willing to die for Ukraine and want peaceful solution. French public even demanded of withdrawal of France from the alliance.³⁰⁰ So overall opinion is against NATO which hinders NATO'S expansion policy.

From Popular Geopolitical view, Russian state media has framed NATO's activities as an aggressive encroachment on Russia's sphere of influence, fueling nationalist and anti-Western sentiments among the Russian public. This narrative, deeply embedded in Russian political discourse, portrays NATO as a hostile force seeking to undermine Russian security, sovereignty, and prestige. Such rhetoric has reinforced the notion of an existential

²⁹⁵ Mamchii, "Why is Turkey?"

²⁹⁶ Interview with Dr. Anna.

²⁹⁷ Huaxia, World Insights: "Protests intensify in Europe amid mounting political, public mistrust against NATO," Xinhua, (blog), March 30, 2023, accessed May 14, 2024, <https://english.news.cn/20230330/d148eec93deb48d68a34ccb16875f5d7/c.html>.

²⁹⁸ Elena Rodriguez, Micheal Gore, "Thousands protest in Madrid against NATO Summit", Reuters, (blog), June 26, 2022, accessed May 14, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/thousands-protest-madrid-against-nato-summit-2022-06-26/>

²⁹⁹ Can Cakir, "The background of the demonstration against NATO in Germany," United World Int. (blog), March 10, 2023, accessed May 14, 2024, <https://unitedworldint.com/29070-the-background-of-the-demonstration-against-nato-in-germany/>

³⁰⁰ "Protest against sending Western troops to Ukraine held in Paris," TASS, March 3,

conflict between Russia and NATO, heightening tensions and public support for Russia's foreign policy moves. In Popular discourse, especially Romania and Bulgaria closer to Russia, there is significant concern that Black Sea could become a flashpoint for a larger military conflict between Russia and NATO. These insecurities are augmented by media coverage of military exercises, troop deployments, and naval operations in the region. This imminent threat is increasing the broader geopolitical tensions between NATO and Russia, influencing public opinion and political decision-making.

Conclusion

The BSR has been the epicenter since the Crimean annexation for Western Alliance, though NATO's interests belong to the geographical position and history of the region. NATO has advantage to have three allies in the region but also countering the opposition of Russia. As Russia does not want the expansion of NATO in its near abroad. Except Russia, Türkiye is another regional power which is not influenced by Russia and NATO. In fact, Türkiye is pursuing independent foreign policy approach so being the member of NATO, it hinders NATO's engagement in the region. Russian unilateralism and Türkiye's regional approach along with frozen conflicts, disinformation and public opinion etc. are creating security and political implications for NATO.

Chapter Five

Aftermath of Events in the Black Sea Region: Current Geo-Political Scenario

The BSR is simply a creation that concerns the security of Europe and Asia.³⁰¹ The region is having historical rivalries among neighbouring states which intensify time to time and further effects the geo-political dynamics of BSR. Despite of energy transit, its significance for the shipping routes which supplies goods between Asia, Europe, and Middle East. There are historical geo-political tensions among Russia, Türkiye, and Ukraine and these strains are still ongoing in the region. NATO and the EU increasing influence in the region is enhancing threat for Russia in the BSR and making the geo-political dynamics more complex and complicated. There are numerous unresolved tensions among regional and extra-regional actors in the region. The EU, USA has been trying to maintaining balance and sovereignty against Russia. The bilateral connections between Russia and Türkiye are crucial for maintaining stability in the region, as Russia is the dominant state and Türkiye has autonomous authority over major straits.³⁰²

Russia and Türkiye have unequal power in the region. Russia's primary goal is to access Black Sea since Ukraine serves as a buffer between the Russia and the West. Moreover, the BSR is significant for the players because it's a gateway to the warm oceans. Türkiye attempts to avoid rivalry with Russia because of the latter's military might. Both the Russian-Georgian conflict in 2008 and the invasion of Crimea in 2014 were handled neutrally and did not result in sanctions against Russia.³⁰³

There are various key players in the region having diverse objectives. Russia is struggling for the regional hegemony to control and influence. Türkiye is trying to enhance its

³⁰¹ John Smith, "The Black Sea Regional Security and Geostrategy Balance: A New Cold War Scenario," *ResearchGate*, Jan, 2024, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/377620887_The_Black_Sea_Regional_Security_and_Geostrategy_Balance_A_New_Cold_War_Scenario.

³⁰² John Smith, "Turkey and Russia: The Logic of Conflictual Cooperation," *ResearchGate*, October 29, 2021, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/355819538_Turkey_and_Russia_The_Logic_of_Conflictual_Cooperation.

³⁰³ Ariel Cohen, "The 2008 Russo-Georgian War: Putin's Green Light," *Atlantic Council*, August 8, 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/the-2008-russo-georgian-war-putins-green-light/>.

presence in the region and leveraging the strategic location by focusing on regional approach and Russia is responding to the approach strategically and politically. On the other hand, Ukraine is eagerly looking forward to strengthening its ties with EU and NATO. The aim behind the ties is to balance Russia in the BSR. Even though the USSR's collapse greatly reduced Russia's role in Black Sea, the Kremlin has been attempting since 2014 to change this reality by using force in Ukraine. Despite this, Russia is still a major participant in the region.³⁰⁴

Russia views NATO's expansion into the BSR as a threat to its immediate sphere of influence, despite NATO's stated goal of ensuring everyone's security and safety. However, because of Russia's aggressive tactics, this partnership is unable to grow any further. The BSR is the interplay of various powers and is a hub of critical geo-politics. There are multiple factors behind the interplay including Turkish Black Sea Policy, and Türkiye balancing act against Russia, and Russian aggression against Ukraine and its partisans.

This chapter explains the complex interplay and geo-political landscape of the BSR and divided into four sections which are; i) The State of Relations between Russia and Türkiye during Ukraine Conflict ii) Current Geo-Political Situation in the Black Sea Region, iii) Current Russia's Standing in the Black Sea Region, iv) Regional Interplay in the Black Sea Region, v) and Chances of Nuclear War

5.1 The State of Relations between Russia and Türkiye during Ukraine Conflict

The relationship between Russia and Türkiye has been complex and multifaceted since the Crimean annexation in 2014. Despite being on opposite sides of the conflict, they have maintained a delicate balance of cooperation and competition.³⁰⁵ Their relations deteriorated when the residents of Crimea voted in favour of Russia's annexation. The people of Crimea refused to recognize the legitimacy of authorities brought to power allegedly by the US. Türkiye followed the Western stance and did not recognize the annexation of

³⁰⁴ International institute for Peace, "The New Black Sea - How the War in Ukraine is Reshaping the Region," *International Institute for Peace Vienna*, accessed May 23, 2024, <https://www.iipvienna.com/newblacksea>.

³⁰⁵ Interview with Dr. Uzma Siraj.

Crimea with Russia in 2014. Türkiye believes that the return of Crimea to Ukraine is a requirement of international law.³⁰⁶

Based on Dr. Pietrzak analysis, paradoxically Russo-Türkiye relations improved after Russia first annexed Crimea in 2014 and the recent escalation of the war in Ukraine, and it looks like there is even a chance of an improvement of the bilateral relations. Türkiye is one of the few NATO countries that maintains very amicable ties with Putin's Russia and try to act like a balancer and an impartial negotiator in the region. Ever since Feb. 2022, Türkiye hosted several peace negotiations between Russia and Ukraine that resulted in several de-escalations, prisoner exchanges, and temporary ceasefires of the hostilities in the Ukraine Conflict. It could be explained by the fact that both leaders, Putin of Russia and Erdogan of Türkiye, are not perfect democrats; they drive their countries into authoritarianism, but geostrategically, they have shared interests in expanding their trade relationship; Türkiye buys and sells Russia weapons, while Russia bypasses Western sanctions through Türkiye. So, upgrading their strategic relationship is in both parties' interest. Türkiye sees global politics as a transactional bazaar.³⁰⁷

Dr. Bushra views Türkiye's position as a neutral state between Russia and Ukraine. In recent years, Türkiye has pursued what can best be described as foreign policy independence. As an important power in the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and the Caucasus, Türkiye has sought a multifaceted foreign policy that has, at times, conflicted with its NATO allies. Türkiye has largely been seen as a country that can talk to either of the warring parties regarding war settlement. Although, neither of the two sides; Russia and Ukraine, are completely happy with Türkiye's position in the war, but each has their own reason to be satisfied with Türkiye.³⁰⁸

Russia would like to see less Turkish military assistance given to Ukraine, but is happy with the economic lifeline Erdogan has provided to Putin. Türkiye is also a destination for Russian tourists and an importer of oil and gas. To the extent that this war affects these ties and drives up energy prices, the Turkish economy, which is already experiencing upwards of 50 percent inflation, will feel the repercussions. Ukraine would like Türkiye to cut off

³⁰⁶ Interview with Dr. Imrana Begum.

³⁰⁷ Interview with Dr. Piotr Pietrzak.

³⁰⁸ Interview with Dr. Bushra Batool

economic ties with Russia, but is happy with the stream of Bayraktar and other weapons flowing from Türkiye to help with its defense. Türkiye supports Ukraine's territorial integrity and has provided the country with armed drones and other military support, but it is also strengthening its energy ties with Russia and opposes Western sanctions on Russia. In 2017 also, Türkiye purchased S-400s from Russia which also included dialogue based to upgrade economic ties and discussions about deepening diplomatic and even military relations. At the same time however, Türkiye and Russia have found themselves on opposite ends of major regional conflicts, including in Syria, Libya, and Nagorno-Karabakh.³⁰⁹

5.2 Current Geo-Political Situation in the Black Sea Region

Geopolitical competition in Black Sea is redefining regional order, changing its geopolitical identity, and shaping relations between states in the wider region. It has also excavated out the once popular idea of regional order premised on regional ownership and laid bare how the security of different regions is interlinked. Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean have increasingly merged into one geopolitical space, where regional and great power rivalries play out. Türkiye includes the two regions and is emerging as a key actor and a potential beneficiary of the shifting geopolitics.³¹⁰

5.2.1 Impact on Regional Order

Russia perceives itself as a great power depends on Black Sea. Its regional policy aims to increase its military presence, weaponized energy and economic dependencies, disrupt connectivity, and challenge the territorial integrity of littoral states in order to create and exploit vulnerabilities. Because to the 2008 conflict and annexation of Abkhazia, Russia now holds two thirds of Georgia's coastline.³¹¹ It is attempting to take control of the whole Ukrainian coastline, having already annexed four districts of Ukraine including Crimea. In

³⁰⁹ Interview with Dr. Bushra Batool.

³¹⁰ Dalay and Sabanadze, "How Geopolitical Competition in the Black Sea is Redefining Regional Order," *Chatham House*, March 7, 2024, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2024/03/how-geopolitical-competition-black-sea-redefining-regional-order>.

³¹¹ Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights, "Military Occupation of Georgia by Russia," RULAC, accessed May 23, 2024, <https://www.rulac.org/browse/conflicts/military-occupation-of-georgia-by-russia>.

an effort to exert pressure on Moldova's government, Russia has also supported a pro-Russian rule in Transnistria, a breakaway province of Moldova.³¹²

However, the region's progressive absorption into the political and security landscape of the West has been aided by Russia's unintentional attempts to dominate the BSR environment. The regional order is becoming more and more divided as a result of the two concurrent processes. The nations in the area have looked to join NATO and the EU in reaction to Russia's efforts. Two of the five littoral states include Ukraine and Georgia which are prospective members of NATO, while three (Türkiye, Bulgaria, and Romania), Türkiye, which has been a member since 1952, and Bulgaria and Rumania members since 2004.³¹³ Similarly, three are candidate states and two (Bulgaria and Romania) are members of the EU.

According to Critical Geopolitics, history shapes foreign policy. Romania's historical hostile relations with Russia, has led to a stronger influence from NATO on its security and foreign policy decisions. In contrast, Bulgaria and Türkiye believes in less presence of NATO as they do not want to provoke Russia. As result of NATO's intensions and actions, Russia retaliates to secure its objectives in the region. Meanwhile, Türkiye is strengthening its ties with its Black Sea allies while refusing to permit NATO and Russian warships to sail in the region.³¹⁴ NATO allies Bulgaria and Romania, recently forming a trilateral Mine Countermeasures Task Group. By doing this, the Russian blockade will be lifted, allowing Ukraine to export grain directly to the global market and improving maritime safety in the area. Russia is also sent a strong message by the Black Sea NATO partners' organized collaboration.

In order to counterbalance Russia, Türkiye views Ukraine as essential to the regional order. Türkiye maintains strategic ties with Ukraine despite its close relations with Russia. Particularly in the defence sector, their collaboration has grown. Since both Türkiye and

³¹² Dalay and Sabanadze, "How Geopolitical Competition in the Black Sea is Redefining Regional Order," *Chatham House*, March 7, 2024, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2024/03/how-geopolitical-competition-black-sea-redefining-regional-order>.

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ Alper Coşkun, "The Shifting Balance of Power in the Black Sea," GIS Reports Online, February 14, 2024, <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/turkey-black-sea/>.

Ukraine oppose Russian hegemony over Black Sea, they are essentially natural allies.³¹⁵ Furthermore, Türkiye's role in the conflict, as a country able to talk with both Russia and NATO, is potentially important. But Erdogan's increasing authoritarianism and his unwillingness to condemn Russia also make him suspect NATO's perspective.³¹⁶

5.2.2 Double Balance in the Black Sea Region

Ukraine prevents additional Russian pressure and influence in the area. When Russian forces were stationed on the Ukrainian border in January 2022, tensions between Russia and the West grew. According to the Türkiye analysts, 'If Ukraine falls, it will have direct implications on Türkiye'.³¹⁷ Therefore, Türkiye has to adopt a less ambiguous stance following the outbreak of hostilities in Ukraine on February 24, 2022.³¹⁸ It was thought that Türkiye and its Western allies could be able to get closer throughout the war.³¹⁹

However, Türkiye indicated that it was still maintaining its delicate balance when it put the Montreux Convention's terms into effect on February 28, 2022.³²⁰ Türkiye has barred warships from both littoral and non-littoral states from passing through the straits by using Article 19 on the vessels of belligerent parties.³²¹ Although Türkiye made this decision in reaction to Ukraine's demand that Russian warships be barred from the straits, it also significantly affects the ability of its Western allies' warships to access the area.

Türkiye's actions demonstrate that preserving the status quo in Black Sea remains its primary goal. Its top priority is to protect its security from the negative consequences of

³¹⁵ Daria Isachenko, "Turkey in the Black Sea Region: Ankara's Reactions to the War in Ukraine against the Background of Regional Dynamics and Global Confrontation," SWP Research Paper 2023/RP 12 (17.10.2023), doi:10.18449/2023RP12.

³¹⁶ Interview with Dr. Paul

³¹⁷ Daria Isachenko, "Turkey in the Black Sea Region: Ankara's Reactions to the War in Ukraine against the Background of Regional Dynamics and Global Confrontation," SWP Research Paper 2023/RP 12 (17.10.2023), doi:10.18449/2023RP12.

³¹⁸ Daria Isachenko, "Turkey in the Black Sea Region: Ankara's Reactions to the War in Ukraine against the Background of Regional Dynamics and Global Confrontation," SWP Research Paper 2023/RP 12 (17.10.2023), doi:10.18449/2023RP12.

³¹⁹ Nadezhda Arbatova, George Perkovich, and Paul van Hooft, "The Future of Nuclear Arms Control and the Impact of the Russia-Ukraine War," in *European Security after the Ukraine Conflict: Respite Finem*, Promoting Dialogue on Arms Control and Disarmament, <https://www.amacad.org/publication/future-nuclear-arms-control-and-impact-russia-ukraine-war/section/2>.

³²⁰ Daria Isachenko and Göran Swistek, "The Black Sea as Mare Clausum: Turkey's Special Role in the Regional Security Architecture," *SWP Comment* 2023/C 33 (21.06.2023), 7 Seiten, doi:10.18449/2023C33.

³²¹ Ibid.

the conflict between Russia and the NATO. The historical legacy of the Montreux Convention, which Türkiye interprets in terms of collective security. Two things need to be differentiated in this context, firstly, it helps Türkiye and the other riparian and non-riparian states by maintaining stability. Secondly, it also has to do with the relative strength of Türkiye and Russia. This is where Türkiye 's strategic alliance with Ukraine, which it established after Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, comes into play.³²²

5.2.3 A New Cold War Scenario

The complex dynamics and asymmetry make the unique New Cold War scenario in the BSR. In the context of Critical Geopolitics, the Ukraine conflict is often framed as the ideological conflict between opposite poles. In this frame, Russia is viewed as a revisionist power which is challenging the Western liberal order, while NATO is acting as a Western political tool defending democratic values and sovereignty in Eastern Europe. It seems the revival of the Cold War-era geopolitical narratives, contributing to the polarization of global politics.

Critical geopolitics argues that Ukraine is viewed as a critical geopolitical space by Russia and the West. For Russia, Ukraine is part of its historical sphere of influence, and Western aspirations to merge Ukraine into NATO are perceived as existential threats. Conversely, for NATO and Western powers, supporting Ukraine represents a commitment to territorial sovereignty and the containment of Russian expansionism. This spatial competition reflects the dynamics of Cold War geopolitics, where borders and spheres of influence were hotly contested. Critical Geopolitics also emphasizes on the role of media and public discourse which shape the conflict. This war is often narrated by scholars, intellectuals, political elites and media sources through binary oppositions: good v/s evil, East v/s West and democracy v/s authoritarianism.

The BSR's security is sometimes referred to as a 'geostrategic gateway' because of the modern 'New Cold War' provisions, which involve NATO and Russia engaging in

³²² Pinar Elman, "Split Three Ways on Ukraine: Turkey in a Changing Regional Order," in *PISM Strategic File*, no. 10 (46), [https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/180808/PISM%20Strategic%20File%20no%2010%20\(46\).pdf](https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/180808/PISM%20Strategic%20File%20no%2010%20(46).pdf).

coercive rivalry to gain supremacy over the BSR.³²³ NATO's long-term goals for the BSR have not changed since the Cold War. The goal is to maintain freedom of navigation on the seas and, for that reason, to prevent Russian expansion. That goes back even further in history, to the time of the Crimean War.³²⁴ The region is in a risky situation under different geopolitical scenarios which show the evidence of the New Cold War in the BSR.

5.3 Current Russia's Standing in the Black Sea Region

According to critical Geopolitics, Russia's strategy in Black Sea is based on its long-standing geopolitical competition with Türkiye as well as NATO. One of its objectives is to repel any danger that NATO may pose to Russia's strategic stronghold in Crimea or its interior. Additionally, it seeks to prevent Ukraine and Georgia from joining NATO and to inflame divisions among alliance members along Black Sea in an effort to weaken NATO's unity.³²⁵

According to Dr. Anna, Russia is weakening militarily during the conflict. It has large economy, resource rich country, deeply authoritarian state, Putin can determine what is victory. This is historically unprecedented period as a result of war in Ukraine, Russia lost its centrality in the Eurasian continent. Russia has always been the middle connecting power between East and West. All the transitive infrastructure, roads, railways and bridges, China is connected to Europe through Russia. So by even if it loses, the sanction regime weakened Russia's position in the world economy even if Russia has been able to engage in build connections, deepened its relations with China, overall its bargaining power has declining dramatically. It is under selling its gas to China, India, Türkiye but very much reduced bargaining position in the world economy relative to this other Eurasian powers.

She emphasized that importantly geographically, geopolitically, geostrategically, Russia has lost its centrality as a connector so this is historically unprecedented. Even if it wins the battle in Ukraine, it lost the war. So from the battlefield of Ukraine, this undermines

³²³ Pavel Baev, "The Black Sea Region Endures Beyond the Theater of War," *PRIO Blogs*, Posted April 20, 2024, <https://blogs.prio.org/2024/04/the-black-sea-region-endures-beyond-the-theater-of-war/>.

³²⁴ Interview with Dr. Paul.

³²⁵ Paul Stronski, "What Is Russia Doing in the Black Sea?" *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, May 20, 2021, <https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2021/05/what-is-russia-doing-in-the-black-sea?lang=en>.

Russia's credibility as a global power relative to its relations with nearby periphery. By justifying its war in Ukraine in imperial terms, now every post-Soviet state is very nervous that this narrative of historical claims on near states that they were not states and created through Soviet Union, this is Russian imperial narrative. By that narrative, every post-Soviet state is a target so as a result every post-Soviet state is trying to bargain and find alternatives. In this respect, Russia has lost legitimacy as well.³²⁶

As West has been forcing Russia to change strategies in Black Sea since 2022. Ukraine with the support of NATO and West, is creating difficulties by attacking missiles and unmanned drone boats. according to Institute of Study of War, by utilizing effective combat skills, Ukraine armed forces has gradually pushed Russian naval vessels from Crimea to Novorossiysk between June and December of 2023. Russia's decreasing presence in disputed areas has been military victory for Ukraine. Ukraine has gained a strategic edge by weakening of Russia.³²⁷ While Russia, in its Foreign Policy Concept of 2023, has delivered a clear message about governing of its neighbours and competition with the West, showing the intentions to change the global order.³²⁸

However, Türkiye followed the Western stance and did not recognize the annexation of Crimea with Russia since 2014. Türkiye believes that the return of Crimea to Ukraine is a requirement of international law. In Feb. 2022, Russia intervened in Ukraine when it was joining NATO. Türkiye condemned Russian presence in Ukraine and believed in Ukraine's territorial integrity, sovereignty, and independence. Recently, in the G20 summit held on 18-19th Nov. 2024, the Turkish President also proposed discussions on Ukraine's accession to NATO be postponed for at least 10 years as a concession to Putin.³²⁹

5.4 Regional Interplay in the Black Sea Region

The important actors in the region have been playing their part, following the convention, pursuing their objectives in the competitive geopolitical environment. Ukraine has a more

³²⁶ Interview with Dr. Anna.

³²⁷ Nicholas Castillo, "Russia on the Back Foot in the Black Sea: Implications for Georgia and the Caspian Region," Caspian Policy Center, Jan. 31, 2023.

³²⁸ Matthew Boyse et al., "The Battle for the Black Sea Is Not Over," Hudson Institute, Apr. 16, 2024, <https://www.hudson.org/security-alliances/battle-black-sea-not-over-matthew-boyse-george-scutaru-mykhailo-samus-antonia-colibasanu>

³²⁹ Dr. Imrana Begum.

tilt towards EU and NATO, which is the biggest challenge for Russia. Moreover, Türkiye is leading the region and balancing the Russia. Türkiye has a huge advantage being embedded in western institutions. It has free trade agreement with EU, it is a member of NATO so it could have played the role in deepening the liberal principals of order building in whether it is South Caucasus whether it is Middle East but Türkiye has made so many enemies in Middle East because it militarize its foreign policy. So Türkiye's democratization down the road does hold the promise for Türkiye to emerge as vices kind of a player even though it will still maintain its strategic autonomy as a value which is fine.³³⁰

Russia and Türkiye, have aspirations to dominate the BSR. For Russia, Türkiye is a complicated partner. Their relations are not limited to Black Sea but there are much wider relations like in Syria, Libya, Nagorno-Karabakh and beyond. Their interests are not identical. But one thing is very good for Russia that Türkiye has pragmatic not ideological approach. Türkiye is the state which pursues its own foreign policy and not the policy of NATO. Montreux Convention is not totally beneficial for Russia. The BSF is not the biggest Russian fleet. Since 2022 Russia cannot get additional ships into Black Sea (from the Pacific or from the North) due to Montreux convention. But Russia in the current circumstance support Montreux Convention and believes that it provides clear rules and predictability. From the 1990s, states in the BSR cooperated within Organization of Black Sea states.³³¹

Russia's military approach is more extensive. Türkiye's approach to Russia is still practical. When required, Türkiye works towards security cooperation with Russia while also exerting intense pressure on its allies. A central line of conflict can be observed between Russia and Türkiye on the one hand and the West and other Black Sea littoral states on the other. It steers clear possibilities of conflicts regarding the classification of Russian ships and depriving NATO boats of preferential treatment. One such international agreement that gives Türkiye the sovereign authority to control ship traffic via the straits is the Montreux Convention.

³³⁰ Interview with Dr. Anna.

³³¹ Interview with Dr. Igor.

Included in the EU's ENP, the Black Sea Synergy aims to address the major opportunities and challenges in the BSR that call for coordinated regional action in areas like energy, transport, environment, migration, and security. It is designed to be a flexible framework that complements current EU policy. In the area of migration and security, improved border security cooperation raises regional security, aids in the fight against organized crime across borders, including human trafficking, and helps to stop irregular migration. The synergy was started in 2008 during a conference in Ukraine, involving the foreign affairs ministers of the EU and Black Sea.³³²

NATO members, especially the USA which have essentially increased their marine presence operations in Black Sea since takeover of Crimea. It is commonly believed that maintaining a maritime presence in Black Sea which includes port calls, military exercises, and naval patrols which is essential to deterring Russia and reassuring allies and members of NATO. However, presence operations have come under fire for being an ineffective and unstable strategy that hasn't been able to stop Russian aggression in Black Sea.³³³

Although this is an intriguing observation in light of Russia's actions, there are a number of other reasons, the NATO's role has been decreased since 2014³³⁴ and NATO members have failed to fill the void and guarantee ongoing deployment to the region. NATO navies conducting round-the-clock patrols of Black Sea and by adopting more extensive and meaningful NATO maritime operations that showcase advanced military maneuvers and interoperability amongst members and partners. Naturally, this would call for increasing the number of NATO members and allies engaged in presence activities in the area as well as utilizing more blatantly advanced combat assets and capabilities during training exercises with littoral allies.³³⁵ The Vilnius Summit amply demonstrated the Alliance's

³³² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania, "Regional and Sub Regional Cooperation Structures: Black Sea Synergy," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania <https://www.mae.ro/en/node/52664#:~:text=It%20was%20officially%20launched%20on,Federation%2C%20Turkey%2C%20Ukraine>.

³³³ Deborah Sanders, "Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: What Are the Maritime Implications in the Black Sea?" King's College London, March 2, 2022, <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/russias-invasion-of-ukraine-maritime-implications-in-the-black-sea>.

³³⁴ Tara Copp, "Sporadic NATO patrols in Black Sea leaving void for Russians," Stars and Stripes, January 28, 2022, <https://www.stripes.com/theaters/europe/2022-01-28/sporadic-nato-patrols-in-black-sea-leaving-void-for-Russians-4443921.html>.

³³⁵ Ibid.

intention to broaden its operational sphere to include the Asia-Pacific region in addition to its current area of jurisdiction, which is the Euro-Atlantic region. NATO is rewriting its *raison d'être* and justifying its expansion by highlighting new areas of collaboration with distant partners and by identifying new 'rivals' and threats. The upcoming eastward shift in the Western Alliance's strategy and outreach is probably not going to be well received by the involvement of major players.

5.5 Chances of Nuclear War

It is important to consider the possibility of nuclear escalation. According to Dr. Igor, 'Ukraine will never be part of NATO as long as Russia exists. If Ukraine joins NATO, is an unacceptable threat for Russia which leads to a war with NATO. Most likely such confrontation will escalate to nuclear level.'³³⁶ Russia used a variety of delivery systems (air, sea, and land) to build one of the largest non-strategic nuclear arsenals over a lengthy period of time. These systems are regularly practiced and tested. According to Russian nuclear doctrine, all means may be used to defend Russia's territorial integrity and essential interests.³³⁷ The decision to send a signal to its rivals is contingent upon how the Russian leadership views the matter, thus managing the escalation becomes a critical component of rival states actions. In order to demonstrate the scenario, a tactical nuclear assault is still a possibility, Russian officials and experts frequently use the phrase which is to de-escalate through escalation.³³⁸

Knowing full well the terrible effects of using WMD in any form, both Russia and Ukraine are discussing the use of WMD.³³⁹ Globalization has suffered as a result of this catastrophe. The conflict has resulted in shortages of food grains and fertilizers, and trade disruptions brought on by sanctions have had an impact on the world economic security. In the current

³³⁶ Mark Galeotti, "What is behind Russia's nuclear escalation threat," Al Jazeera, May 14, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2024/5/14/what-is-behind-russias-nuclear-escalation-threat>.

³³⁷ Steven Pifer, "Russia's Military Doctrine," Arms Control Association, May 2000, <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2000-05/russias-military-doctrine>.

³³⁸ George Scutaru, Marcu Solomon, Ecaterina Dadiverina, Diana Baroian, "Russian hybrid war in the Republic of Moldova" (Bucharest: New Strategy Center, 2023), <https://newstrategycenter.ro/project/russian-hybrid-war-in-the-Republic-of-Moldova/8>.

³³⁹ Valdai Discussion Club, "Russia-Ukraine Conflict: The Global Security Order," Valdai Discussion Club, https://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/russia-ukraine-conflict-the-global-security-order/?sphrase_id=1640708.

Ukraine-Russian crisis, the energy crisis has developed into a fully-fledged weapons of mass destruction that is just as potent as missiles and bombs.³⁴⁰

Conclusion

Black Sea has always been the focal point of relations between Russia and Türkiye, and Türkiye has made an effort to retain a strong regional posture. However, competition does not entail bad relations with Russia. Both Turkish and Russian governments have made an effort to keep amicable relations despite divergent objectives and recent developments in the BSR. NATO members and Türkiye tried to cooperate with Russia to keep non-literal powers out of oceanic body and declined to contribute to efforts to expand NATO posture in the region until the invasion of Crimea in 2014.

In order to counterbalance Russia, Türkiye views Ukraine as essential to the regional order. Russia and Türkiye have been engaged in rivalry and hostilities in Black Sea and Southern Caucasus regions for millennia. History currently favours Türkiye 's position in the area. Türkiye 's alliance with NATO cannot be ignored. And the changing geopolitical landscape in the BSR becomes more crucial due to Türkiye's role. Moreover, Türkiye maintains strategic ties with Ukraine despite its close ties to Russia. Particularly in the defence sector, their collaboration has grown. Since both Türkiye and Ukraine oppose Russian hegemony over Black Sea, they are essentially natural allies. The crucial and foremost threat in the region is the possibility of nuclear war. The aggressive stance among nation-states of the BSR could escalate into the nuclear anytime.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

Conclusion, Findings, and Recommendations

Conclusion

Black Sea occupies an important geographical and symbolic space for significant geopolitical actors: Russia and Türkiye which have long history of competition and contention in the BSR. Their regional characters are defined by their national interests which are influenced by different historical and spatial legacies like the Crimean War, Montreux Convention and disintegration of the Soviet Union. The Montreux Convention is a unique historical legacy which brought stability in the region. Türkiye always uses this political and security tool to regulate the maritime affairs of the BSR. It has resulted in the limited role of extra regional actors. Various events after Cold War like Georgia War, occupation of Crimea and then Ukraine Conflict have transformed the nature of political and security dynamics of the region sporadically. Moreover, ethnical and territorial conflicts have also been escalating evenly. Multiple treaties have been signed and ratified to resolve the regional rivalries, to ensure peace, but still, it is a hub of unresolved disputes. Every actor has its own objectives and strategies in the region which have been evolving eventually. To establish control over Black Sea again, Russia has adapted spatial and temporal strategies. Russia has constructed different formal, popular and practical geopolitical impressions as part of its foreign policy to value the importance of Black Sea, Crimea and Eurasia in the world. Since 2014 to 2022, Russia has brought a structural geopolitical change in the BSR by occupying more territories for the completion of its imperial goals.

Conversely, Türkiye has been playing a significant role since the end of the Cold War. A structural geopolitical change occurred with the collapse of the Soviet Union and a power vacuum created which filled by Türkiye by taking regional initiatives for the security and stability of the BSR. From the Practical Geopolitical view, Türkiye began to cultivate relations with the former Warsaw alliance states. Particularly in light of the ongoing political impasse with Russia, the establishment of the new states of Georgia and Ukraine served to strengthen ties with Türkiye. The core tenet of Türkiye's Black Sea policy is bolstering regional security. Since the creation of new states in the BSR, it has been working as an initiator on regional cooperation to achieve this goal. Since it controls the

longest coastline and significant straits, it entails the creation of several regional organizations to improve marine security and peace. It places a higher priority on maritime security than any other security problem in its strategic thinking about the BSR.

Since 2014, Türkiye as a NATO Ally, tries to balance its relations with Russia within the structural constraints of NATO while Russia influences its post- Soviet space and seeks to challenge NATO's engagement in the BSR. John Agnew emphasizes that international relations are deeply structured by the distribution of power among states and the role of international institutions. In this context, Structural Geopolitics claims that geopolitical relations are not only the product of individual state's choices but are influenced by the complex dynamics of the system and structures.

From the Practical Geopolitical view, Türkiye has maintained good diplomatic relations with Ukraine since 2014. To promote security, stability and diplomatic partnership, defense cooperation has been seen between Türkiye and Ukraine. Türkiye has not recognized Russian aggressive actions in the form of Crimean Annexation and supports Ukraine politically by upholding Ukraine's statehood like territorial integrity and sovereignty. According to Klaus Dodds, history profoundly impacts the formulation of foreign policy. The political elites and states are influenced by the historical events when shaping foreign policy in contemporary situations.

While NATO, a significant extra- regional actor, has strong presence in the BSR in the form of three Allies: Türkiye, Bulgaria and Romania and has the aspirations to expand further to include Ukraine in order to eradicate Russian influence. NATO has conducted different summits since Crimean annexation to express its support for Ukraine's sovereignty, affirming its commitment to upholding the territorial integrity and political independence of the Ukrainian state. NATO has enhanced its presence through TFP. This support aligns with NATO's broader strategic goals of fostering regional stability and security, especially in response to regional challenges and geopolitical pressures.

This is perceived as grave threat by Russia in its post- Soviet space. But NATO has been unable to establish a unified policy in response to Russian aggression as there is divergence in threat perception from Russia among the regional members which makes the Alliance's

strategy more inconsistent and less successful in the BSR. The operations of the Alliance and its interactions with Russia are further complicated by the growing criticism on NATO in European public opinion. In this respect, Russia has constructed different formal, popular and practical geopolitical identities against NATO and Ukraine. Russia has framed NATO's presence as a security threat prior to its expansion. Therefore, in order to maintain regional stability and security, the BSR continues to be a focal point of strategic contestation, necessitating complex and multifaceted responses. The regional dynamics are still being shaped by the ongoing tensions between major actors like Russia, Türkiye, and Ukraine which are made worse by the presence of NATO. The BSR's enduring volatility and complex power dynamics are the product of historical legacies which impact the current developments. The divergent geopolitical objectives of these political entities has created a complex regional environment that necessitates close observation and strategic foresight.

The researcher has not found detailed academic work in this domain with respect to Critical Geopolitics; however, Russia's foreign policy has the features employed by Critical Geopolitics. Different pillars of Critical Geopolitics are applied to critically analyze the relations between Russia and Türkiye in the context of Crimean annexation to full scale war of Ukraine having implications for the expansion of NATO in the BSR. It has been observed that the Russian foreign policy is influenced by practical, formal, popular and structural geopolitical factors while Türkiye's foreign policy is pragmatic and prioritized by regional factors. Since 2014, Türkiye seems to be a balancer in the region with respect to Russia, Ukraine and NATO. Meanwhile NATO is pursuing its goals through regional allies and full support in Ukraine War. The research opens further avenues for academic probing of the relevant issue areas and emerging features of the region.

Findings

- The BSR has historically been a battleground for imperial powers, most notably Russia and the Ottoman Empire, and having the authority for controlling strategically significant marine routes and warm water ports. Historical conflicts have affected the political and security dynamics of the region and continues to have an effect on contemporary geo-political relations.

- The end of the Cold War resulted in structural geopolitical change in the BSR as new states emerged which strived to join Western security structures to secure them from Russian aggression.
- Black Sea became a strategic and historical concern for Russia in order to access warm water ports to carry its naval operation and regional influence its near abroad. For the purpose of resurgence after dismantling of the USSR, Russia has gradually evolved its foreign policy to pursue its Imperial ambitions in the BSR. From the practical and formal geopolitical context, Russian elites has built narratives to demonstrate its aspirations to the world.
- Russia's Black Sea foreign policy is firmly anchored on revanchism and historical myths. Russia's actions and words make clear that it is determined to retake lost territory and regain its position of influence in the area. This strategy has historical precedents that go all the way back to Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union. A recurring element has been the emphasis on historical grievances and the idea of defending ethnic Russians and its interests.
- Türkiye has played a leading role in formation of regional security structures to improve maritime security and stability, it launched a number of regional initiatives, including BSEC, OSH and BLACKSEAFOR. Since Crimean Annexation,
- Türkiye is multifaceted being balancer, facilitator and beneficiary of the conflict. A complex regional partner for Russia, has followed the policy of deterrence and dialogue whereas facilitating Ukraine by defence cooperation. In contrast with NATO, has followed a non-bloc approach which make it suspicious in the security bloc.
- NATO'S interests in the BSR has embedded since the dissolution of Soviet Union because this region has unique geographical position and old adversary i.e., Russia which West wants to contain.
- Russia and NATO has two different perspectives about NATO'S Expansion. Russia considers NATO'S expansion a grave threat to its existence while NATO's policy is to provide security and safety to its allies. NATO states bordering Black Sea, Türkiye, Bulgaria, and Romania, have different views on Russia as a danger

and different approaches to dealing with it. Romania shares the security concerns of Ukraine and Georgia and supports a strong NATO military presence. While, Türkiye and Bulgaria frequently take more accommodating positions towards Russia. It is more difficult for NATO to successfully fend off Russian aggression in the BSR when there isn't a unified coherent policy in place.

- The war in Ukraine has increased public skepticism of NATO throughout Europe, with protests and accusations emphasizing NATO's alleged role in the rise in tensions with Russia. A general suspicion of rising defence spending and military presence, which is perceived as inciting conflict rather than maintaining peace, is reflected in public opinion. NATO faces difficulties in retaining popular and political support for its strategic goals in the BSR as a result of this sentiment.
- Russian aggression and Türkiye's regional and non-bloc approach hinder NATO'S Expansion where other factors act as catalyst.
- There is still a threat about the possibility of nuclear escalation in the BSR. Russia poses a serious threat due to its large non-strategic nuclear arsenal and its military doctrine, which permits the use of nuclear weapons to protect its territorial integrity. Effective crisis management and de-escalation tactics are critical given the ongoing conflict in Ukraine and NATO's engagement, which increases the possibility of a battle that could turn nuclear.

Recommendations

- Russia needs to be part of process of dialogues to resolve the conflict.
- Türkiye should play an institutional role to facilitate the peace process.
- NATO should formulate a unified Black Sea policy by bringing together its three BSR's allies to one point to make itself stronger in the region.
- International organizations need to play a role to de-escalate the conflict to avoid nuclear threats.

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Annexure I

Questionnaire

Q1: To what extent, there can be found impact of history on Russia's foreign policy regarding Crimea and Black Sea?

Q2: “Seemingly Türkiye is acting as a Balancer in the region.” Does this policy affect the performance of Türkiye as NATO member?

Q3: What are NATO's interests in the Black Sea Region and what are security and political implications for NATO regarding expansion?

Q4: Why is NATO lacking a Black Sea Policy?

Q5: Why is there a diverging threat perception of Russia among NATO member states?

Q6: What is the status of relationship between Russia and Türkiye since Crimean Annexation (2014) to Ukraine War (2022)?

Q7: What were the attributes of Türkiye’s foreign policy after the inception to the end of the Cold War?

Annexure II

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Russia's Perspective about NATO

Russian foreign policy is very much defined by history. History plays an important role in the formation of foreign policy. Russia has a very long and tragic history. One of the major events was WWII/ the Great Patriotic War for Russian foreign policy and Russian identity. It was tragic event where almost 30 million soviets died. Nazi Germany had surprised attack on Russia in 1941. Soviet Union was not fully prepared for the attack and it suffered significant loss. This is an important lesson for Russian foreign policy decision making that they can't allow their selves unprepared for the potential military attack. This is the potential threat to Russia. Perhaps one of the reasons why Russia has such a strong feeling about NATO right now. As NATO, since its inception, created to deter and contain Soviet Union. As first Secretary General Lord Ismay said:

“NATO was created to keep the Soviet Union out, the Americans in and the Germans down.”

After the dissolution of Soviet Union, Moscow suggested several times an inclusive non-bloc European security architecture to dismantle military alliances and to create collective security organization which will represent all. After 1991, Warsaw Pact was dismantled and the original reason for NATO did not exist anymore. As NATO was created to deter Soviet Union which pursued the world revolution. The Soviet Union was based on the idea that the whole world should be communist. Russia is different from the Soviet Union in this regard. It does not want to promote any particular way of life or any particular ideology. So, during meetings with the US presidents, Russian leaders repeatedly asked: as we are not in any competition with each other then why to have a military alliance, military bloc to keep it. That is very hard to understand from the Russian perspective.

During 1990's, when NATO started to expand, there were rosy relations under the presidency of Boris Yeltsin. During the meeting with the US vice-president Al Gore, Yeltsin once said that Moscow has no problem when East European states had good relations with NATO, but on one condition: Russia should have a little bit warmer relations with NATO than the rest.

During the 1990's and even in 2000's, there were several suggestions from Russian side that Moscow can join NATO, but NATO said no.

To sum up: NATO is a military alliance which expands towards Russian borders and doesn't want Russia as member. This combination obviously increases the perception of threat on the Russian side. And this perception becomes especially acute due to the clear analogies between NATO advancing to Russian borders today and Germany advancing to the Soviet borders in the 1930s. Moscow does not want to become an object of surprise attack from the West.

How these concerns translate into the situation in Black Sea region? Türkiye remained the member of NATO since Cold War but Bulgaria and Romania became member in 2000's. From Russian perspective, it was not clear what was the reason to incorporate these states in NATO. Under Obama administration, US introduced Missile Defence Program in Romania which became operational in 2015. This is problematic for Russia for two reasons. First of strategic balance because it is clear that Russia has enough strategic nuclear arms to provide balance between Russia and US. But if US expands missile defence around Russia then it can launch surprise attack on Russia. There is a concern that Russia won't have capability of retaliation in this case. Second concern is that US can use place missiles for attacking Russian territory in the launchers that it placed in Romania aimed for missile defense. Technically speaking, the MK-41 launchers are capable of firing both anti-missiles and missiles. Given their location close to Russian border they very destabilizing, as the flight time from Romania to the Russian territory is so much smaller than from the US.

In the 2000's, Ukrainian President Yushchenko started to cooperate with NATO. Majority of Ukrainian were against NATO enlargement according to polls. However, in 2008 in Bucharest Summit, NATO took a decision that Ukraine and Georgia will eventually be part

of NATO. It had not provided specific timeframe for Ukraine and Georgia to be member of NATO. But it was an open ended pledge.

In 1997, there was an agreement between Russia and Ukraine. Russia leased military facilities for its BSF in Crimea. But in 2006, Ukraine and NATO jointly organized military exercise in Crimea right next to Russian BSF. People of Ukraine started to protest against the arrival of NATO troops. Which led to cancellation of exercise at that time. However, the whole instance was a signal for Russia that situation became dire.

Russian concerns, anyhow neither listened nor addressed. And by that time West became especially deaf to Russian grievances. When the first wave of NATO enlargement came in 1990's, there were negotiations between Russia and NATO and the Russia-NATO Founding Act created. It included the pledge by NATO not to place nuclear weapons in the new members like Poland, Hungary, and Czech Republic. There was also a pledge that there would be no deployment of major military forces in the newly joining members by NATO. So, Russia was engaged in the first wave of NATO and diplomatic guarantees were there. In 2002, when second wave of NATO enlargement was happening (states became members in 2004 but decision was taken in 2002) Moscow and Brussels established Russia-NATO Council. There were at least some dialogues between two actors. But when Bucharest Summit happened in 2008 to bring Ukraine and Georgia into alliance. NATO made no additional assurance to Russia. NATO was not responding to Russian concerns. This military bloc is expanding which is perceived as threat to Russian security. NATO expansion is counter-productive as it brings more conflict in the Black Sea Region. Ukraine will never be part of NATO as long as Russia exists. If Ukraine joins NATO, is an unacceptable threat for Russia which leads to a war with NATO. Most likely such confrontation will escalate to nuclear level.

Importance of Black Sea and Crimea for Russia

Crimea is having an interesting history. Different empires have ruled Crimea like Mongols, Tatars, Ottomans, Tsars and then Russians. After Cold War, Crimea came under the control of Ukraine. Then in 2014, Russia started to control Crimea by the will of the Crimean people as they perceive themselves Russian. Actually, Crimean people voted for

incorporation into Russia on the verge of dissolution of the Soviet Union and pro-Russian feelings remained strong in the peninsula throughout the 1990s and 2000s.

There were several reasons why Russia wanted to have access to the Black Sea region throughout history. For example, during the late 17th century it was perceived important for commercial reasons. In the 19th century Russia supported separation of Slavic people from the Ottoman empire and pan-Slavic feelings were important at that point. Crimea has always been key to the Russian Black Sea ambitions, due to its central geographical position. It also acquired additional symbolic importance in the 19th due to the Crimean war that Russia fought against Britain, France and Türkiye.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union the majority of Russians believed that transferring of Crimea to Ukraine was a major historical injustice. Moreover, Russian BSF was located there since the Soviet times. In 1990's and 2000's, Russia didn't have enough resources to relocate the BSF as it was very expensive to build new infrastructure. So, Russia negotiated with Ukraine to keep this base. Crimea has symbolic will for Russia. Majority in Crimea are Russian people who perceive them Russians. During the dissolution of Soviet Union, Crimean wanted to switch from Ukraine. Crimea organized a referendum to move under Russian sovereignty. At the time of dissolution, every state was claiming something on the basis of history. There were feelings of abandonment among the people of Crimea.

Nevertheless, Ukraine and Russia had cooperative relations till Orange Revolution. Most contentious issue was resolved under a treaty that was signed between Russia and Ukraine in 1997. Since Soviet times their remained close human-to-human ties, with freedom of movement, no passport and identification required. But after Orange Revolution in 2004, things started to change. There were more restrictions on Ukraine side. In 2014, coup d'état in Kyiv happened, a strong pro-Russian movement started in Crimea. There was a perception that Ukraine Nationalist were creating problems in East Ukraine and Crimea. After the coup there was no sovereign government to represent and protect the people of Ukraine and Crimea. So Crimean people had right to conduct their own referendum, chose to be part of Russia. Russia decided to not to go against the will of the people so it was not the Crimean annexation.

Russia's diplomatic role in the region

In 1991, many in Russia expressed a feeling of relief when dissolution of Soviet Union was happened. As economic situation was very bad, only two parts of the USSR were self-sufficient and profitable i.e., Russia and Belarus while other thirteen republics were dependent and received subsidies from these two. Nevertheless, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union Moscow continued to support other post-Soviet states. During difficult times in the 1990s and 2000s it helped to consolidate their statehood largely through provision of cheap energy. Russia was providing oil and natural gas to Georgia, Crimea, Moldova, Belarus and Ukraine at a price lower than the Western Europe. Russia was basically subsidizing the states around it. Instability in Russia's neighbourhood could produce instability in Russia. Russia wants to have stability in its borders. It does not want genocide, which became possible in its neighbourhood. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, there were complex processes of nation formation. For example, in Georgia there were people who did not perceive themselves as Georgians. The region of Abkhazia had an autonomy within Georgia under the Soviet Union. The Georgians Nationalists who came to power in 1991, they wanted single nation state. So Russia was try to mediate and negotiate a ceasefire between Abkhazia and Georgia.

Another example of Moldova where Russian army prevented attack by Moldovan forces on Transnistria in 1992. At the same time Russia continued to recognize Transnistria as the part of Moldova but Russia wanted that there should be diplomatic solution to this problem. Russian military bases were in Georgia in 1990's but Russia had pledge to withdraw its forces from Georgian bases in 2006-7. Once Russia withdrew its forces in 2008 Saakashvili launched an armed attack on a breakaway region of South Ossetia. From Russian perspective, there were a lot of attempts by local actors to resolve complicated disputes by military means so this could lead to ethnic cleansing. Russia strived to prevent this from happening. In 2002 Moscow came close to negotiating a deal in which Transnistria would reintegrate into Moldova under conditions of federalization. Both sides support this deal (Kozak Memorandum), but at the last moment Western representative pressed the president of Moldova into non-signing of this document.

Russian foreign policy was very aware of the example of Croatia as a negative instance. After dissolution of Yugoslavia, in parts of Croatia, Serbian population created a de-facto state as they didn't feel themselves Croats. There was a state of war between the two entities. When ceasefire happened then UN peacekeeper came there. In 1995, when Croatia became more stable and its army got stronger, it launched two military operations on Serbs to cleanse where they had fled to other states. It was hard to find a resolution to this conflict. So Russia did not want to happen this on its borders.

In Central Asia, Russia also helped to Resolve the Civil War in Tajikistan back in 1990's. In Kazakhstan, at the time of dissolution, there was a large Russian ethnic population. But Russia did not try to destabilize Kazakhstan, it had no territorial claims vis-à-vis Kazakhstan.

So, to sum up, Russia remained always interested in stability in its neighborhood, which suffers due to the multiple internal disputes within post-Soviet states. Russia tried prevent military conflicts in its neighborhood, tried to resolve these disputes diplomatically even if it took time. And it supported the stability of its neighbors economically.

Türkiye as a regional partner

For Russia, Türkiye is a complicated partner. Their relations are not limited to Black Sea but there are much wider relations like in Syria, Libya, Nagorno-Karabakh and beyond. Their interests are not identical. But one thing is very good for Russia that Türkiye has pragmatic not ideological approach. Türkiye is the state which pursues its own foreign policy and not the policy of NATO.

Montreux Convention is not totally beneficial for Russia. The BSF is not the biggest Russian fleet. Since 2022 Russian cannot get additional ships into Black Sea (from the Pacific or from the North) due to Montreux convention. But Russia in the current circumstance support Montreux Convention and believes that it provides clear rules and predictability.

From the 1990s, states in the Black Sea region cooperated within Organization of Black Sea states. However, once Romania and Bulgaria became members of the EU, Brussels decided to launch its own competitive initiative called Black Sea Synergy which had

nothing to do with other littoral states. It was designed and implemented unilaterally. This was totally a counter-productive approach. This shows a clear difference as Türkiye is open to dialogue even when we disagree and the EU or the US are not eager to compromise and seek to dictate conditions from the dominant position.

Another example of cooperation with Türkiye: Türkiye suggested another initiative which is 3+3 for Caucasus. Three members are regional states i.e., Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and three are from surroundings i.e., Russia, Türkiye and Iran. It is based on inclusive and regional approach. This is the way to make diplomacy.

Annexure III

Dr. Paul D'anieri

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Political Science Department, University of California.

Q1: To what extent, there can be found impact of history on Russia's foreign policy regarding Crimea and Black Sea?

Putin has made extensive references to history in making claims on Crimea and on the territory he calls "*Novorossiya*," which includes much Ukraine's Black Sea coast, including Odesa. It is hard to know whether he really believes these historical arguments or just uses them to justify goals driven by Russia's traditional imperial goals.

Q2: "Seemingly Türkiye is acting as a Balancer in the region". Does this policy affect the performance of Türkiye as NATO member?

Türkiye's role in the conflict, as a country able to talk with both Russia and NATO, is potentially important. But Erdogan's increasing authoritarianism and his unwillingness to condemn Russia also make him suspect of NATO's perspective.

Q3: What are NATO's interests in the Black Sea Region and what are security and political implications for NATO regarding expansion?

NATO's long term goals for the Black Sea Region have not changed since the Cold War. The goal is to maintain freedom of navigation on the seas and, for that reason, to prevent Russian expansion. That goes back even further in history, to the time of the Crimean War.

Q4: Why is NATO lacking a Black Sea Policy?

I'm not sure I'd agree with the premise of the question, but with Türkiye as a NATO member and a Black Sea power, and not NATO including other members that border on the Black Sea, arriving at a joint position may not be easy.

Q5: Why is there a diverging threat perception of Russia among NATO member states?

It's not just among NATO states. Some people believe that Russia has the right to control Ukraine, and that this should be acknowledged. In this view, Russia is not responsible for starting the war, and would be peaceful if it just was allowed to have this territory. Others think that is both naïve and unjust.

Annexure IV

Dr. Taras Kuzio

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National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, Ukraine.

Q1: To what extent, there can be found impact of history on Russia's foreign policy regarding Crimea and Black Sea?

Russian imperial nationalism falsely views Sevastopol and Crimea as “always having been Russia” – even though the Russian Empire only conquered the region in 1783. This myth is racist as it ignores 600 years of Crimean Tatar rule of Crimea under the Ottoman Empire.

Q2: "Seemingly Türkiye is acting as a Balancer in the region". Does this policy affect the performance of Türkiye as NATO member?

Türkiye is not a balancer. It is acting in Russia’s interests by allowing Russia to evade Western sanctions through Türkiye, giving sanctuary to Russian oligarchs, selling Russians Turkish passports, and not allowing NATO naval ships to enter the Black Sea.

It pursues its interests separate to NATO. It is aligned with Azerbaijan and Pakistan against Iran and Armenia. Türkiye and Russia have different interests in Syria and Libya.

Türkiye, like most Islamic countries (including Pakistan) is hypocritical. While condemning Israel for repressing Palestinians, the Islamic world ignores Russia’s mass murder of Muslims in Chechnya (100,000 victims) and Syria (600,000 victims) and China’s imprisonment of one million Muslims and the genocide of Uighurs.

Q3: What are NATO's interests in the Black Sea Region and what are security and political implications for NATO regarding expansion?

NATO has not articulated clear interests in the Black Sea. There is no NATO expansion in the Black Sea as the last 3 US presidents (Obama, Trump, Biden) do not support Ukraine and Georgia joining NATO.

Q4: Why is NATO lacking a Black Sea Policy?

Because NATO members Romania, Bulgaria and Greece have different interests in the Black Sea. And until the war, Russia was the dominant country in the Black Sea. Now we are in transition as the Russian BSF has left Sevastopol and is being destroyed by Ukraine. It has lost one third of its ships.

Q5: Why is there a diverging threat perception of Russia among NATO member states?

This is not true. There is a growing threat perception of Russia and a fear that if Ukraine is defeated, Russia will continue its expansion and attack NATO members. Most NATO members are now believing there will be a war with Russia in the next five years.

Only Hungary is pro-Russian.

The bigger problem is that all NATO members did not spend the required 2% as a minimum of GDP on defence. In 2014, only 5 NATO members spent 2%. Today 18 out of 32 members spend 2%. The urgency to spend more on defence is brought about by the growing perception of Russia as a threat and of the fear of Donald Trump wins the US election, he will withdraw the US from NATO.

Annexure V

Samantha de Bendern

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Q1: To what extent, there can be found impact of history on Russia's foreign policy regarding Crimea and Black Sea?

History is very important to Russia. Catherine, the Great was the first empress who made Crimea Russia. Before that Crimea was not part of Russia. It was inhabited by Tatars and before that by Greeks. Russia considers Crimea to be Russian in many ways. Crimea is populated by ethnic Russians more than by other peoples and in last seventy years, also Russia deported many Tatars from Crimea. Russia's war in Ukraine needs to be viewed via the prism of a colonial Russia was an empire different to British Empire which had its territories overseas. Russia's empire is contiguous to the Russian mainland. So it is very difficult for the Russia mindset to accept that there have to be a limit to its own borders and its neighbours are not part of Russia. So Crimea was part of the Russian empire. Letting go of Crimea is also letting go of empire. Letting go of Crimea is also what Russia needs to do to have proper decolonization. So of course history is fundamental here. International borders are recognized by international laws and international says that Crimea is Ukrainian.

Q2: "Seemingly Türkiye is acting as a Balancer in the region". Does this policy affect the performance of Türkiye as NATO member?

All decisions are taken by consensus in NATO. Erdogan's relation with Putin could be an issue for NATO that considers Russia to be its number one enemy. At the same time Türkiye could be a very good mediator in Peace Talks because Russia trusts Türkiye more than other members of NATO.

Q3: What are NATO's interests in the Black Sea Region and what are security and political implications for NATO regarding expansion?

If Ukraine joins NATO, it is not an existential threat for Russia, but Russia is an existential threat for Ukraine. There is a reason why countries which border Russia, want to join NATO: because they feel threatened by Russia. If they did not feel threatened they would not want to join NATO. Finland joined NATO and has a much longer border with Russia than Ukraine, and that is not existential threat for Russia either. Again this is a colonial war. Putin believes that Ukraine should be part of a reconstructed Russian empire. The Black Sea is more important for Russia than for NATO as Black Sea has warm water ports, and most of Russia's maritime ports are frozen for part of the year and Black sea ports particularly Sevastopol port on Crimea is only the warm water port that Russian navy has. It is geopolitically important for Russia to be able to use the Black Sea as an access to Mediterranean.

Regarding NATO expansion, it is important to note that NATO has many times reached out to Russia for partnership, for dialogue on European security, but Russia has constantly invaded its neighbours.

NATO has expanded through democratic process. States that want to join NATO have to qualify and once they qualify, NATO then decides whether they can join.

When Russia wants a country to be part of Russia it invades, and that is the big distinction. Regarding Ukraine, it has been asking to join NATO since the late 1990's but NATO has constantly said no. Ukraine is not part of NATO. Ukraine is not about to be part of NATO. Even the NATO Secretary General said, "Ukraine will not be invited to join NATO at the NATO summit in July (2024)." And Russia knows that. It is a false argument. It may be join one day, but it is not the case today. That is Russia's false narrative.

Q4: Why is NATO lacking a Black Sea Policy?

Actually I don't really know how to answer this question.

Q5: Why is there a diverging threat perception of Russia among NATO member states?

Within NATO, different countries have different experiences with Russia. Countries in the East of Europe, Romania and Bulgaria have lived under Russian or Soviet occupation and

dominance. They understand Russia's behavior much better than west European countries. They understand the threat. As an example, the Estonian prime minister said "we understand what Russian peace means. Russian peace means deportation, destruction of our nationhood, our language, our culture. It means torture, imprisonment of anybody who has different opinions to the official Russian government viewpoint." All these countries including Bulgaria and Romania know what it means to be controlled by Russia. They have known that in their living memory that it means dictatorship and lack of freedom. Türkiye has not lived under Russian occupation, so it has a completely different historical perspective on the region. It is also a former empire and was very strong in Black Sea region. Probably Erdogan's desire is to be the dominant power in the region again. he believes that he can do that in cooperation with Russia. Because both Erdogan and Putin have similar dictatorial impulses. Within NATO, West European countries have not lived under Russian occupation, and have had very strong financial links with Russia, they became used to cheap Russian gas and oil, they have taken longer to wake up to reality of the Russian threat.

Annexure VI

Dr. Tobias Kollakowski

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German Institute for Defence and Strategic Studies,

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Q1: Why do the perceptions of NATO member states vis-à-vis Russia are so different?

There are some countries which are pursuing liberal foreign policy like Germany. Its foreign policy is embedded in norms and values. Russia violates UN Charter by attacking Ukraine which Germany does not tolerate. Same is true for UK and France. Other countries have more realist outlook in international relations, like Hungary is pursuing realist foreign policy. It is a minor country and looking for power distributions for positioning itself in the system of international relations. They see the realist view of Ukraine conflict that in longer run, Ukraine cannot stand the chance against Russia so why they sacrifice their relation and economic growth. Even in the ethical point of view, why prolonging the suffering of the people there if the entries are clear from the beginning. These are two very different thinking about international politics.

Another point concerns different states' perception of history, especially when it comes to the Cold War and WWII.

1. As far as the perception of Cold War is concerned, there is one point of view which in US, a lot of people support that the Soviet Union lost the Cold War as they could not sustain the arms race with US and NATO Allies. They had invested so much in military development which resulted in the burden on their economies too large and the Soviet system fell apart and NATO achieved success in the Cold War. A second interpretation which, to a certain degree, contradicts the above-mentioned view relates to the engagement policy by some European countries towards the USSR. According to this second point of view, building trust, deepening trade relations and creating opportunities for people to travel fostered social and political change. The conclusion drawn from this interpretation

of history has been, for the most part, to strengthen relations with Moscow as this would ultimately lead to change and more open and democratic societies.

2. Similarly, the interpretation of WWII has also been very different among NATO member states. In western Europe and in Germany itself, historical discourse has very much focused on Nazi – Germany as the main aggressor of WW2. For many years this image has continued to influence policy making in Europe. In Eastern Europe, however, the Soviet Union's role in WW2 and Soviet aggression (Invasion of Poland 1939; Invasion of Finland 1939; Annexation of the Baltic States 1940; Soviet occupation of Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina 1940; Soviet occupation since 1944) plays a much stronger role in the historical discourse. For example, Romania still has a very vivid memory of Soviet aggressive policies. Therefore, the idea that Russia could pursue aggressive policies was much stronger there than in Western Europe.

Furthermore, from an economic point of view, certain countries are more reliant economically on Russia with regard to export of goods and import of resources. The Baltic states are still integrated into the energy system of Russian Federation but they are very much hardliners when it comes to the policies towards Russia. Other countries like Austria, Hungary, Italy, when it comes to energy resources and pipelines etc., have been much softer in their stance towards the Russian Federation.

Russia made it very clear for two decades that NATO is an existential threat to its sovereignty. Certain countries in EU like France and Germany particular, will lukewarm about the idea of including Ukraine in NATO. NATO member states generally refrain from accepting countries into the alliance which have unresolved territorial issues. Ukraine, of course, has suffered from an ongoing conflict in the East and the Crimean issue for past ten years. In my personal opinion, the chances of Ukraine entering NATO are extremely low. Still, Ukraine has politically moved very close to NATO, it has restructured (parts of) its armed forces in accordance with NATO doctrine and changed its rank system to fit in NATO's rank system. The adoption of NATO procedures and the training according to NATO standards many Ukrainian soldiers have received during the past decade is one factor that can explain why Ukrainian has managed to put up a lot of resistance against Russia when the Kremlin launched its invasion.

Q2: What is the importance of Sevastopol and Crimea from a naval perspective?

Russia did invest a lot into Novorossiysk but Sevastopol port's infrastructure is advanced and offers different capabilities especially maintenance, construction, command and control capabilities. For example, the headquarters of Black Sea is located in Sevastopol. Furthermore, apart from the opportunities that Sevastopol offers, the geostrategic position is very important that is offered by the Crimean Peninsula to Russia. It is situated in the center of Black Sea while Novorossiysk is in the northeast corner of Black Sea if Russia only deploy its force from there, it is pretty much cornered. In the current war, Russians has the advantage that they can withdraw forces from Crimea to Novorossiysk and further to Abkhazia because they have geostrategic space. This gives the Russian Navy space to deploy forces, to withdraw and to react to different developments. If Russia had not annexed Crimea, then it would have been stuck in Novorossiysk surrounded by NATO member states or at least NATO partner countries. Most of the littoral states are NATO states, particularly Türkiye is a powerful NATO member state and two states like Ukraine and Georgia have very strong aspirations to join NATO. By annexing Crimea, Russia put a powerful roadblock in the way of Ukraine's accession to NATO.

Annexure VII

Dr. Marion Messmer

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Chatham House, London.

Q1: To what extent, there can be found impact of history on Russia's foreign policy regarding Crimea and Black Sea?

History is really important for Russian foreign policy. When look throughout the actions of Russia, Crimea is strategically important providing access to Black Sea as it has an important port which is home to BSF. So Russian invasion of Ukraine is started in a way. If Russia manage to deny the access of Black Sea to Ukraine, then Ukraine would be much less viable as a state similarly if Russia loose access to Black Sea then it would be detrimental for Russia. Because it doesn't have port like this. Black Sea allows access to certain shipping routes, it's been important for grain transport, transport of goods and other type of shipments so it is economically really important port. Strategically, it is important for Russian navy and also historically, a lot of Russian foreign policy has been framed in this idea that Russia is trying to or may be return to its historical homeland and Crimea is playing a very important role in this narrative how Russia understands itself.

Q2: "Seemingly Türkiye is acting as a Balancer in the region". Does this policy affect the performance of Türkiye as NATO member?

Yes, it does. Türkiye has been a tricky NATO member for a long time. So, on the one hand it is really important part of the alliance. It got important geostrategic position and geographically where it is. But at the same time, the government, for number of years has trying to find out a position in between the NATO allies and it's also been close to Russia. Few years ago, before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, there was a debate about Türkiye acquiring S-400 air defence system from Russia and this caused a huge internal discussion within NATO while Türkiye argued that it was its right as a sovereign nation to buy air defence system or military system from any supplier including Russia. But at the same

time, Other NATO member states were extremely reluctant to connect a Russian system within the NATO system for fear of providing Russia access to secret information. Interoperability of military systems within the alliance is a huge point of contention for NATO. So it is a good example which shows to an extent that Türkiye has sort of try to find the balance between NATO membership and off course the relationship with the Russian government for the number of years now. So far in this conflict, it has acted very carefully as it has try to use international law to impede Black Sea access and so on. So it has been very important in the sense that it hasn't allowed Russia to get sea superiority. It means it is much more difficult for Russia to replace any naval access for damage and sunk in Black Sea.

But at the same time, the Turkish government is still very close with the Russian government and that relationship could also go in different direction. So it is a tricky position for all involved especially for Türkiye which really values NATO as an alliance but at the same time also for other NATO member states that are already dealing with members such as Hungary very close with Russian government and the situation is going to be with Türkiye that how the actions might impact on the alliance on the longer turn.

Q3: What are NATO's interests in the Black Sea Region and what are security and political implications for NATO regarding expansion?

I don't think so NATO as an organization has interests in Black Sea. The NATO member states that are bordering Black Sea have interests so it would be the Romanian interest, Bulgarian interest and Türkiye's interest. I think with respect to Ukraine War, NATO has interests in Black Sea from security perspective that how does the war affect the BSR, how does it affect the civilians and how does it affect the grain shipment. NATO does not have mind of its own and it has 32 Allies and its interest will be the interest of Allies.

Ukrainian NATO membership is really difficult because of the ongoing war. I don't think the deciding factor is going to be Black Sea but the deciding factor is going to be what the war is looking like and how the war is unfolding whether the conflict is active or not. NATO membership could be the part of security guarantee for Ukraine after some sort of peace settlement. But we also know that Russia would view this really unfavorably and would be unlikely to accept. I can't see how this would be settled in a way and how this

would be decided given states' current positions. I don't think so Black Sea is going to be the decisive factor for NATO. The decisive factor in whether Ukraine would become the member of NATO or not, whether the war is going, what the relationship with Russia is like, whether there is any risk of escalation of the conflict through accepting Ukraine into NATO.

Q4: Why is NATO lacking a Black Sea Policy?

Few NATO member states border Black Sea like Türkiye, Bulgaria, Romania. These three are being very important in the conflict and the Black Sea activities. But with the exception of Türkiye which has been NATO member state for number of years now, both Bulgaria and Romania are actually recent additions to NATO and conflict in Black Sea prior to the invasion of Ukraine, wasn't really something that NATO was thinking about too much. This is also ways the additional difficulty that Ukraine is not the NATO member state. So that was not necessarily into defending Black Sea. It is kind of similar how the Baltic has changed a lot. Having Denmark and Germany as NATO member states in the early 90's to now having 8/9 Baltic states in NATO. As for now, Baltic is going to be very important from NATO's perspective. But before you have critical mass of NATO member states around the Baltic, it was just another maritime theater and it is not surprise in case of Black Sea that less attention has been paid to it. With the exception of Türkiye, the other two states on border are new NATO members and prior to Russian invasion, it probably didn't necessarily risk assessment of something that really happened. Even though there is no formal NATO policy there is a need to look at the actions of Bulgaria, Romania and Türkiye and the extent to which they are coordinating among each other because they would take the lead in developing the NATO policy and figuring out in this regard.

Q5: Why is there a diverging threat perception of Russia among NATO member states?

Diverging interests of Bulgaria, Romania and Türkiye in the BSR. Türkiye's experience is very different to the experience of Bulgaria and Romania with Russia. Romania and Bulgaria were behind the Iron Curtain, more affiliated with Soviet Union back in the day. Türkiye was completely independent and they did not have the colonial association. That has been the most wariness in Romania and Romania also has the minority issues and it

borders Moldova which has one of the secessionist regions that Russia has been manipulating by the time. If anything militarily is going to happen in Moldova, it will heavily impact on Romania and refugees' flows in the area. That really influences Romania security position. Bulgaria is similar in this regard that also having negative history of previous association with the Soviet Union. But at the same time, some government factions have favoured Russia more than others. So Bulgaria favors a more balanced approach overall. But Türkiye doesn't have the same history package. They are much more used to encountering Russia and they have been also trying for more balanced approach on the one hand. Yet they are NATO members and they want to be in NATO and value of military alliance. But at the same time, they don't necessarily want to write off relationship with Russia completely and there are some aspects on which the government aligned. So this might be the reason of not making an effective NATO policy in the Black Sea.

Annexure VIII

Dr. Anna Ohanyan

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Stonehill College, Department of Political science and International studies, Washington.

Q1: To what extent, there can be found impact of history on Russia's foreign policy regarding Crimea and Black Sea?

When analyzing Russian foreign policy, many scholars and analysts mostly tend to focus on Putin in particular, his personalized style. History does shape the behavior of Russian foreign policy. At the same time, Russia's engagement in the Crimea like annexation were against the International Law. Historically, Russia has treated its neighbourhood as a zone of security. Historically, territorial expansion has been a way to produce the security inside the Russia. It has been a source of perceived security for Russian state. Even in the pre-Soviet period, Russia as most empire was struggling between territorial expansion and need of internal modernization. So the more territory you have, the harder it is to govern. So this tension between territorial expansion and centralization of power is created this dilemma. That's one way to situate Crimea in terms of how history shaping Russia's foreign policy behavior. In context of Crimea, Russia does have a special historical narrative. When it comes to Ukraine and the Slavic nation in particular, Russia has had *Novorossiia* initiative which exceptionally goes back to Yeltsin. The argument that Russia reserves the right to protect the Russian minorities in other states in its vicinity that would be the big chunk of Post-Soviet world. It contradicts the International Law. Imagine if China announce that it is going to protect ethnic Chinese in other countries, the whole world system will destabilize. So by using this concept Russia protecting *Novorossiia*, Russia essentially justifies and legitimizes it in international system and in this respect it merges as revisionist power. So in terms of Ukraine, historically Russia does cease a part of the Russian empire which is again against the International Law because Russia recognized the territorial integrity of Ukraine in exchange for Ukraine to give up the nuclear weapons so this again regardless of what history said, is against the international law. Very specific the Russia's

attachment to claim to Ukraine and Slavic nation in particular seems to Kremlin using historical narratives to justify.

In justifying foreign policy, it conflicts with the International Law. It makes Russia revisionist power. Using that same logic, Russia has making claims on Ukraine and Crimea that same applies to Russian claims to Kazakhstan, for example to all of the Post-Soviet states. It's a very dangerous precedent which Russia has set with the Russian invasion of Ukraine as well as Crimea. Even though, these are two different stages. Putin is using history to justify to advance revisionism which on set of every middle power and small state needs to be worried about this. The Biden administration has done a good job in making this argument that this war is a revisionist war and dangerous to every state.

Q2: "Seemingly Türkiye is acting as a Balancer in the region". Does this policy affect the performance of Türkiye as NATO member?

I would not say that Türkiye has acted as a balancer, it could have acted as a balancer. Domestic politics is very important in context of Türkiye, it has weak democratic institutions, authoritarianism is creeping up since 2016, has personalized the power system which seems to be driving Türkiye's foreign policy. So as a middle power, Türkiye is similar to India, China and Iran, has played a role in taking advantage of the Russian invasion in Ukraine. Türkiye has been not necessarily a balancer but Türkiye has been taking the advantage of the weakening Russia whether in terms of very cheap energy supplies, energy purchase, building up nuclear stations, nuclear energy, nuclear power stations. Türkiye is trying to become an energy hub which is essentially would mean that Russia would bring its oil and gas at to Türkiye which Türkiye hopes to sell to Europe which essentially Europe does not want to do. So it is more accurate to say that Türkiye has positioned itself as a beneficiary of the rift between Russia and Ukraine.

There is a concept of powerhood in political science about middle power that how they govern in their neighbourhood. So at the same time, when compare Türkiye to other middle powers like Indonesia, Brazil, South Africa, Türkiye ranks to very low. Simply because Türkiye is not investing in building structures, not a responsible middle power in its neighbourhood. It has militarized its foreign policy. Its military support in Azerbaijan, Nagorno Karabagh War in 2020, all are the examples of Türkiye's military power. But

Türkiye is presenting it as strategic autonomy. Türkiye has a huge advantage being embedded in western institutions. It has a free trade agreement with European Union, it is a member of NATO so it could have played the role in deepening the liberal principals of order building in whether it is South Caucasus whether it is Middle East but Türkiye has made so many enemies in Middle East because it militarize its foreign policy. So Türkiye's democratization down the road does hold the promise for Türkiye to emerge as veases kind of a player even though it will still maintain its strategic autonomy as a value which is fine.

But so far Türkiye has not advanced the interests of NATO, in fact it sabotaging. It has been very transactional and not an institutional player. Actually Erdogan gave Sweden hard time in joining the NATO. So in many ways. Türkiye is not a trustworthy partner for which Türkiye justifies its strategic autonomy. Because it is more transactional, individualize, so it is not always in interest of Türkiye. As its economy is sinking. Right now, Azerbaijan, a tiny state is holding Türkiye a hostage, will not enhance Türkiye Armenia relations. There is push on Armenian side for rapprochement but there is a deadlock because Türkiye won't do anything come by sit has the permission from Azerbaijan. So this is fascinating that a tiny state that put money into Erdogan's presidential campaign. So having a tiny state holding this middle power hostage. This is historic opportunity for Türkiye to build relations with South Caucasus and by establishing relations with Armenia. It would have stronger institutional presence in the Caucasus. So it is one of the example of Türkiye's foreign policy not advancing its interests.

In Ukraine conflict, Türkiye is acting as a transactional player, mediator, third party services but not a credible player. Because it is taking advantage of weakened Russia, as all kinds of relations with Russia are sabotaging its relations with the West. By simply offering good offices to the Russia and Ukraine which a lot of other countries are doing, it could have been more effective in doing that. But it a lot more taking advantage just as transactional player. The fact that it has presence in Black Sea which Türkiye uses as an advantage. If Russia will try to reduce Ukraine's access to Black Sea, in that respect Russia and Türkiye, back door deals would happen.

Militarily Russia is weakening during the conflict. It has large economy, resource rich country, deeply authoritarian state, Putin can determine what is victory. So on a battlefield,

Ukraine is on a defensive. But I do think this is historically unprecedented period as a result of war in Ukraine, Russia lost its centrality in the Eurasian continent. Russia has always been the middle connecting power between east and west. All the transitive infrastructure, roads, railways and bridges, China is connected to Europe through Russia. So by even if it loses, the sanction regime weakened Russia's position in the world economy even if Russia has been able to engage in build connections, deepened its relations with China, overall its bargaining power has declining dramatically. It is under selling its gas to China, India, Türkiye but very much reduced bargaining position in the world economy relative to this other Eurasian powers. Importantly geographically, geopolitically, geostrategically, Russia has lost its centrality as a connector so this is historically unprecedented. Even if it wins the battle in Ukraine, it lost the war, I would argue. So from the battlefield of Ukraine, this undermines Russia's credibility as a global power relative to its relations with nearby periphery. By justifying its war in Ukraine in imperial terms, now every post-Soviet state is very nervous that this narrative of historical claims on near states that they were not states and created through Soviet Union, this is Russian imperial narrative. By that narrative, every post-Soviet state is a target so as a result every post-Soviet state is trying to bargain and find alternatives. In this respect, Russia lost legitimacy as well. It does not mean that it is weakened, it can engage in this types of war fares in Central Asia and South Caucasus absolutely. Russia is also trying to win the minds and hearts of the global south in general. Places like Pakistan, India, African countries, are doing that it's the West which is a colonial power and Russia is a liberator that's the Kremlin narrative. To the countries outside the Eurasian continent, which obviously small which Russia is trying to advance its narrative in the global South, it might be a big more constraint in Central Asia and South Caucasus. But it remains the dangerous power.

Q3: What are NATO's interests in the Black Sea Region and what are security and political implications for NATO regarding expansion?

I don't research it specifically but I do think maintaining Türkiye is important for NATO. Because it maintains NATO's influence in the BSR. Ukraine is obviously going to be important. But NATO is dependent to what happens to war in Ukraine. Bulgaria, Romania and Türkiye, all are NATO members which obviously gives NATO an influence over

Black Sea. Black sea is an important route of connectivity. If Russia can maintain the dominance over Black Sea, Russia is so dependent on Türkiye. If Russia can maintain influence, it will cut off this process of connectivity from Asia to Europe that bypasses Russia. In this respect, if NATO can maintain the influence over the BSR and pull Türkiye closer in this effort which is why Türkiye is able to bargain between Russia and West but if NATO is able to maintain its influence in the BSR, it can continue to reduce Russia's bargaining wall over connectivity in Eurasian continent. So if Russia is push down then connectivity is push down from Russia to the middle corridor, that is Russia will try to fight. So NATO is important in keeping Russia contained with a lower bargaining power. NATO needs to maintain its influence over Black Sea to contain Russia this is why Türkiye is playing from both sides. That's why we wouldn't say a balancer. It does not play an institutional role but it can play an institutional role but it's being very transactional.

I am not sure that NATO is in position to expand especially with Ukraine. There is a lot of rhetoric. President Biden also said that US will have eject Ukraine joining NATO as long as this conflict is ongoing which essentially gives Putin an incentive to continue the conflict so this is kind of pervasive incentive. But the alternative of this is happening that bilateral security relations are developing outside of the NATO, between the West and the countries that are not NATO members for example Georgia. Armenia is very much threatened by its neighbour Azerbaijan, Türkiye and Russia are very much using Azerbaijan to attack Armenia. Even the Armenia is nominally Russian ally. It is a tiny state and does not have NATO aspirations because it knows if it does so it will get attacked by Russia but there are other ways to providing security to these countries like Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia in between these gigantic blocs. Even before the war in Ukraine, Russia securitize the NATO expansion. Ukraine and Georgia, both have conflicts. Russia built conflicts in both countries so that's the guarantee that these countries will not joining NATO in time soon. So Russia really securitizes to justify this imperial war. For now, I don't see the NATO expansion is just not in the card, EU expansion may be, but I don't see NATO taking up new security obligations. Particularly considering dependent what happens in the US elections. There is a greater pressure on Europe to emerge as autonomist actor who is capable to take care of its security and that's the case if US takes the back seat, I don't see NATO expansion happening as Europe is trying to take care of its security.

Q4: Does Russian propaganda create political implications for NATO?

Russian propaganda has always uses NATO. Russian propaganda has always cultivated Russian authoritarianism, has always cultivated this image of West as enemy. So this is not new. In NATO, was used as a tool to justify its domestic authoritarianism. Many analysts like Mearschiemer has been arguing that it is because of NATO's expansion, have this war. I don't buy this argument. The driver of this war is largely domestic, largely deepening authoritarianism. If Russia has modernized and became a democratic state, it would become a player in world economy, it would have a productive sector. But in this case, largely dependent on oil, even though it does have diversified economy. Russia just not sabotages its interests in world economy so NATO's expansion is a boogie man to scare the public, to create the narratives that Russia is a besieged oyster and Russia is attacked by the West. If look at the map, population concentration is mostly on the south-west side; south-east is totally bare. If think in strategic terms, if Russia worries about security of the state, it probably worried from the side of China, on the eastern frontier rather than the western frontier. Where this is rich Europe, they are not engaging in war fares, they have not try to containing Russia, NATO's expansion has stalled, they are not going to take Ukraine or Georgia and Russia having normalize its influence inside European countries, inside NATO countries. So NATO's expansion is not the factor for this war but Russia will continue the propaganda to build this image that Russia is under attack and this is not a new narrative. It has always been there, historically predetermined.

Q5: Why is NATO lacking a unified Black Sea policy? Diverging interests among NATO' member make NATO to organize summits only since Crimean Annexation but no proper policy.

It is very carefully, narrowly specific question so I am speculating here because I did not research. I do think that managing Türkiye has been difficult. I think to have a coherent Black Sea policy, Türkiye needs to be an institutional player so that could be number one. Number two could be organizational. Lacking a Black Sea strategy, NATO has been a lot more worried about US wavering support for NATO so that may preoccupy by NATO.

Annexure IX

Dr. Gloria Shkurti Özdemir,

Researcher in the Foreign Policy Directorate and Assistant Editor of Insight Türkiye,

The SETA Foundation, Istanbul Türkiye.

Q1: To what extent, there can be found impact of history on Russia's foreign policy regarding Crimea and Black Sea?

The impact of history on Russia's foreign policy regarding Crimea and the Black Sea is profound and multifaceted, deeply rooted in historical, strategic, and cultural factors.

- In terms of historical ties, we can go back to the annexation of Crimea by Catherine the Great (1783) marking the beginning of Russian control over the region. This historical event established Crimea as a significant part of Russian territory. Another important event can be considered also the Crimean War (1853-1856) which highlighted the strategic importance of Crimea and the Black Sea for Russia, emphasizing the region's role in Russian defense and power projection.
- As we know, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Crimea became part of an independent Ukraine, which led to a complex and often tense relationship between Russia and Ukraine regarding control and influence over the peninsula.
- Yet it is also important to state that a significant proportion of Crimea's population identifies as ethnically Russian, fostering cultural and nationalistic ties to Russia. This demographic factor has been used to justify Russian claims and actions in the region.
- Despite these, the most important factor are the strategic ones. Specifically, Crimea is home to the port of Sevastopol, the primary base of the Russian Black Sea Fleet. This base provides Russia with a crucial naval presence in the Black Sea, allowing for power projection into the Mediterranean Sea, the Middle East, and beyond. So it can be argued that control over Crimea and a strong presence in the Black Sea reinforce Russia's position as a dominant regional power. Furthermore, the Black Sea is a region of strategic competition with NATO. By controlling Crimea, Russia can counter NATO's influence and presence in the region, maintaining a balance of

power.

- It is also important to state that Sevastopol and other Crimean ports are warm-water ports that do not freeze in winter, unlike many of Russia's northern ports. This allows for year-round naval operations and trade activities, which are crucial for military and economic reasons.
- Lastly, Crimea and Black Sea are important for Russian foreign policy considering the energy and trade security. The Black Sea is a vital transit route for oil and natural gas pipelines connecting Russia to Europe and other regions. Control over this area allows Russia to safeguard its energy export routes and influence energy supply to Europe. At the same time, the Black Sea is a critical artery for commercial shipping, providing access to international markets. Control over Crimea allows Russia to dominate key maritime trade routes and ports in the region.

Q2: "Seemingly Türkiye is acting as a Balancer in the region". Does this policy affect the performance of Türkiye as NATO member?

During the last years, Türkiye has made significant changes in its foreign policy, following a more pragmatic and autonomous foreign policy. This has allowed Türkiye to pursue a policy that is primarily focused on its national interests. Seen from this perspective it can be said that a destabilized region is not in the interest of Türkiye. Furthermore, the fact that Türkiye has good diplomatic relations with both Ukraine and Russia, especially in the leadership level, make it necessary but at the same time possible for Türkiye to act as a balance in the region. Only by maintaining such a position is possible for Türkiye maintain stability and balance in the region.

In terms of Türkiye's performance in NATO, we should not forget that Türkiye is the second military power within the alliance. This brings Türkiye in a very important position within the alliance. It is also important to state that while in some cases Türkiye has been criticized for its closeness with Russia, the war in Ukraine showed perfectly how Türkiye followed a successful policy and made possible to reach important milestones including here the food corridor agreement. At the same time, we should not forget the fact a few months before Türkiye supported the inclusion Sweden and Finland into NATO which prove also the stance of Türkiye within the alliance.

Q3: What are NATO's interests in the Black Sea Region and what are security and political implications for NATO regarding expansion?

NATO's interests in the Black Sea region are shaped around the general objectives of the NATO alliance. Considering the Black Sea region's proximity to Europe and its strategic implications, NATO wants to see a politically stable region.

The possible effects of the Black Sea on other regions, especially Europe, Asia and the Middle East, affect NATO's security concerns in many ways.

NATO plays an active role in the Black Sea despite Russia's expansionary policies. Preventing Russia's expansion and military influence is another interest in the Black Sea region. One of NATO's goals is to eliminate Russian influence and ensure security among the alliance member states.

In addition, the Black Sea is considered an important corridor in terms of maritime. Protecting maritime borders in the Black Sea, which has great strategic importance in terms of trade and energy, is of great importance for NATO.

In line with these interests, among the consequences of NATO's implementation of its expansion policy in the Black Sea is the strained relations with Russia. These results are followed by an increase in military armament, anti-NATO rhetoric and movements, and on the contrary, support for NATO.

Q4: Why is NATO lacking a Black Sea Policy?

NATO's lack of a cohesive Black Sea policy can be attributed to several factors, despite recent efforts to address security concerns in the region.

- **Complex Geopolitical Environment:** The Black Sea region is a strategic fault line between NATO and Russia, with significant geopolitical tensions. Russia has been actively working to establish a sphere of influence in the region, using a combination of military, economic, and informational tactics to assert control. This includes military buildups in Crimea and hybrid warfare strategies.
- **Montreux Convention Limitations:** The 1936 Montreux Convention restricts the naval presence of non-Black Sea nations, including the US, in the Black Sea. This

convention limits the tonnage and duration of naval forces from outside the region, which complicates NATO's ability to maintain a consistent and robust naval presence.

- Ongoing Conflicts: The war in Ukraine has significantly impacted NATO's posture in the Black Sea region. The outcome of this conflict will be crucial in shaping NATO's future strategy, especially regarding freedom of navigation and regional stability. NATO has provided substantial support to Ukraine, but a definitive strategy that addresses both the immediate and long-term threats posed by Russia is still in development

Q5: Why is there a diverging threat perception of Russia among NATO member states?

Although the NATO alliance and its values require joint action, at some point it can be observed that the attitude towards Russia among member states changes as each state acts according to its own national interests. In some cases, this varies depending on the historical experiences of the states with Russia, and sometimes it varies in line with their economic, political and security interests.

Annexure X

Dr. Imrana Begum,

Associate Professor, Department of Essential Studies, NED University of Engineering and Technology, Karachi.

Q1: What is the status of relationship between Russia and Türkiye since Crimean Annexation (2014) to Ukraine War (2022)?

Russia—Türkiye relations deteriorated when the residents of Crimea voted in favour of Russia's annexation. The people of Crimea refused to recognize the legitimacy of authorities brought to power allegedly by the United States. Türkiye followed the Western stance and did not recognize the annexation of Crimea with Russia in 2014. Türkiye believes that the return of Crimea to Ukraine is a requirement of international law.

In February 2022 Russia had to intervene in Ukraine when it was joining NATO. Türkiye condemned Russian presence in Ukraine and believed in Ukraine's territorial integrity, sovereignty, and independence. Recently, in the G20 summit held on November 18-19, 2024, the Turkish President also proposed discussions on Ukraine's accession to NATO be postponed for at least 10 years as a concession to Kremlin ruler Vladimir Putin.

Q2: "Seemingly Türkiye is acting as a Balancer in the region". Does this policy affect the performance of Türkiye as a NATO member?

Türkiye's role as a regional balancer is not a recent phenomenon but rather a continuation of its long-established foreign policy. Having joined NATO in 1952, Türkiye has been a critical member of the alliance, while simultaneously positioning itself as a prominent actor within the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) since its establishment in 1969.

In recent years, Türkiye has sought to diversify its strategic and economic partnerships beyond the traditional Western bloc and NATO. Its interest in joining BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) highlights Ankara's intention to expand its geopolitical and economic influence. This balancing act, however, has raised questions about Türkiye's evolving role within NATO, particularly as it delayed Sweden's accession to the alliance, sparking concerns about Türkiye's alignment with NATO objectives.

Despite these developments, Türkiye asserts that its outreach to non-Western platforms will not compromise its commitments to NATO. Nevertheless, its growing engagement

with Russia and China, two nations often viewed as adversaries by NATO, is likely to cause unease among the alliance's Western members, particularly the United States. This dual approach underscores Türkiye's strategy to navigate a multipolar world while balancing its traditional alliances with its pursuit of broader partnerships.

It is noteworthy that both Russia and Türkiye have frequently faced criticism from the West for their perceived lack of commitment to liberal democratic principles and freedoms in their approach to social development.

Q3: What were the attributes of Türkiye's foreign policy after the inception to the end of the Cold War?

Türkiye emerged from the collapsing Ottoman Empire, which endured for six hundred years, spanned three continents, and ruled the Islamic world as well as swaths of Europe. Since its inception in 1923, the Republic of Türkiye forged close economic and military ties with the West as part of its vision of becoming a modern, secular nation.

After World War II, Türkiye faced significant issues from the Soviet Union including the territorial claims by Moscow in eastern Türkiye. The foreign policy of Türkiye during the Cold War period was designed to avoid isolation and insecurity. Türkiye felt the need for security guarantees against Soviet aggression that paved the way for its alignment with the West. It received military and economic aid through the Truman Doctrine (1947) and the Marshall Plan, which were part of the U.S. strategy to contain communism.

The country has built a close partnership with the West through its membership of NATO and deepening trade relations with the EU. The parameters of its foreign policy were determined by the strategic exigencies of its leading NATO allies. Türkiye's geopolitical position made it a vital partner for the West in containing Soviet influence. Despite its strategic importance, Türkiye faced hurdles in its pursuit of European integration. From 1949 to 1991, only a few times Türkiye came to the forefront of international politics mainly due to the crises in its relations with Greece or Cyprus.

Annexure XI

Dr. Piotr Pietrzak,

Independent Political Analyst, Sofia University, Bulgaria.

Q1: What is the status of the relationship between Russia and Türkiye from the Crimean Annexation (2014) to the Ukraine War (2022)?

The last 12 years of the bilateral relations between Russia and Türkiye can be compared to a bumpy roller coaster ride whose passengers (the ordinary citizens of both countries) have very little control over the direction of the wheeled cars running down the track. Each time these countries climb the stairway (i.e., reach new heights of their bilateral cooperation), they are automatically exposed to abrupt, wobbly descents caused by steep slopes like when Türkiye shot down Russian military jets during Russia's military operations in Syria to prop up Bashar al-Assad regime (i.e., unexpected series of pitfalls in bilateral relations). However, anyone with a basic familiarity with regional politics realizes that paradoxically Russo-Türkiye relations improved after Russia first annexed Crimea in 2014 and the recent escalation of the war in Ukraine, and it looks like there is even a chance of an improvement of the bilateral relations. Türkiye is one of the few NATO countries that maintains very amicable ties with Putin's Russia and try to act like a balancer and an impartial negotiator in the region. Ever since February 2022, Türkiye hosted several peace negotiations between Russia and Ukraine that resulted in several de-escalations, prisoner exchanges, and temporary ceasefires of the hostilities in the conflict in Ukraine. This is happening even though Russia supports al-Assad in Syria. At the same time, Türkiye was keener to support the opposition to his rule, and even though Türkiye supports Azerbaijan, Russia traditionally backs Armenia in the war over Nagorno-Karabakh that saw at least two significant escalations in recent years in September 2022 and September 2023. This is a paradox, given that historically, Turko-Russian relations have been tense. It could be explained by the fact that both leaders, Putin of Russia and Erdogan of Türkiye, are not perfect democrats; they drive their countries into authoritarianism, but geostrategically, they have shared interests in expanding their trade relationship; Türkiye buys and sells Russia weapons, while Russia bypasses Western sanctions through Türkiye. So, upgrading their strategic relationship is in both parties' interest. Türkiye sees global politics as a

transactional bazaar, so it really does not concern itself with the fate of the Ukrainian people.

Q2: "Seemingly Türkiye is acting as a Balancer in the region." Does this policy affect Türkiye's performance as a NATO member?

To answer this question precisely, we need to acknowledge that NATO is a very conservative organization that was established to protect its member states from Soviet aggression in 1949; after the collapse of the USSR in 1991, NATO has expanded several times. Today, it consists of 32 member states, which are all different. The strongest one is the US, which is in charge of the organization; even though officially every single country has an equal say, the US is the primary decision maker, for it has the strongest army in the world and the most robust economy. So, when it comes to Türkiye, located at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, its role is strategically essential for NATO to protect its southern flank. Türkiye is NATO's bridge to the Middle East, North Africa, Caucasus, and Asia.

On top of that, Türkiye is one of the most critical NATO members. Its army is one of the strongest in the alliance. Just like France, Germany, Poland, or the UK, it should have its opinion heard. Türkiye can afford a different opinion, which will always be different from the opinion of Poland, Lithuania, and Estonia regarding Russia. In the meantime, however, Greece, Cyprus, Italy, Hungary, and Austria would see Türkiye's close relations with Russia as something normal, for they don't see Ukraine's NATO membership as something ever possible. NATO has a minimal appetite to enter the war with Russia, which is why NATO does not support Ukraine directly. The only support that Ukraine gets is from the NATO member states or the European Union – of course, most of the EU members happen to be in NATO, but it is not NATO that adopted a more confrontational attitude to Russia; it is its member states.

Q3: What were Türkiye's foreign policy attributes after its inception and the end of the Cold War?

This year, we celebrated the 101st anniversary of Turkish independence on October 29th, and this is one of the oldest countries in the world. The country remembers its strong Ottoman-Imperial Tradition. Türkiye is proud of its past achievements, such as being one

of the leaders of the Muslim world, conquering Constantinople in 1453, and colonizing most of the Balkan peninsula for almost 500 years. Yet, thanks to its founding father, Kamal Atatürk, who liberalized and westernized its political system, Türkiye has a clear separation of politics and religion and an independent judiciary. Kemalism is a political doctrine and a geostrategic standing that emphasizes the country's role as a bridge between Asia and Europe, the Muslim world, and Christianity. Secular tenants of Kamalism survived the political and economic upheaval period and several military takeovers, hunts, and military dictatorships that lasted until the mid-1980s.

More democratic rule began with leaders such as Tansu Çiller, Yıldıırım Akbulut, Mesut Yılmaz, Bülent Ecevit, Abdullah Gül, Binali Yıldıırım. Still, the country is slipping into an authoritarian path with Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of the Justice and Development Party (AKP). Its foreign policy and strategic culture are increasingly vital. Ahmet Davutoğlu – Former Prime Minister of Türkiye (28.08.2014 – 24.05.2016), Minister of Foreign Affairs of Türkiye (01.05.2009 – 29.08.2014) who has had a lasting influence on Turkish external affairs for the last decade.

His Zero-Problems with Neighbors Foreign Policy Geopolitics Initiative rests on rebuilding and maintaining close relations with former territories of the Ottoman Empire. For these reasons, it is very often believed to be closely associated with, yet another flagship idea of this scholar called Neo-Ottomanism, which assumes that Türkiye is destined to become more than just a regional power within Europe and the Middle East and is destined to exercise a far more influential role in world politics. Despite some of Davutoğlu geopolitical ideas, especially his government's handling of the European Union refugee deal and various terror attacks by ISIS and Kurdish groups has created a massive rift between him and the country's president, it is still believed that Davutoğlu's successor, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Binali Yıldıırım and Hakan Fidan remain under powerful influence of his foreign policy ideals.

Annexure XII

Dr. S. Bushra Batool,

Research Officer, Rabta Forum International, Visiting Faculty, Bahria University, Karachi.

Q1: What is the status of relationship between Russia and Türkiye since Crimean Annexation (2014) to Ukraine War (2022)?

There are many instances that reflect Türkiye's position as a neutral state between Russia and Ukraine. In recent years, Türkiye has pursued what can best be described as foreign policy independence. As an important power in the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and the Caucasus, Türkiye has sought a multifaceted foreign policy that has, at times, conflicted with its NATO allies. Türkiye has largely been seen as a country that can talk to either of the warring parties regarding war settlement. Although, neither of the two sides; Russia and Ukraine, are completely happy with Türkiye's position in the war, but each has their own reason to be satisfied with Türkiye. Russia would like to see less Turkish military assistance given to Ukraine, but is happy with the economic lifeline Erdogan has provided to Putin. Türkiye is also a destination for Russian tourists and an importer of oil and gas. To the extent that this war affects these ties and drives up energy prices, the Turkish economy, which is already experiencing upwards of 50 percent inflation, will feel the repercussions. Ukraine would like Türkiye to cut off economic ties with Russia, but is happy with the stream of Bayraktar and other weapons flowing from Türkiye to help with its defense. Türkiye supports Ukraine's territorial integrity and has provided the country with armed drones and other military support, but it is also strengthening its energy ties with Russia and opposes Western sanctions on Russia. In 2017 also, Türkiye purchased S-400s from Russia which also included dialogue between Ankara and Moscow that included moves to upgrade economic ties and discussions about deepening diplomatic and even military relations. At the same time however, Türkiye and Russia have found themselves on opposite ends of major regional conflicts, including in Syria, Libya, and Nagorno-Karabakh.

The Grain Corridor agreement underlines the fine-tuned balance Erdogan has managed to achieve by placing Türkiye between NATO, Russia, and Ukraine during the war. Notwithstanding, Erdogan denounced Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea and has

advocated on behalf of Crimean Tatars (a Turkic ethnic group) who have suffered under Russian rule. Türkiye sold armed drones to Ukraine ahead of Russia's most recent invasion, though some reports indicate that only about twelve to twenty were delivered. Still, in whatever number, Turkish Bayraktar TB2 drones are lethal and have been deployed to great effect in Libya, Syria, and Nagorno-Karabakh. Turkish drones, small arms, ammunition, armored vehicles, training, and other forms of military support played a role in keeping Kyiv in the fight between 2014 and the amplification of Western aid in mid-2022. Ankara's track record of stalwart support to Ukraine has not wavered over the past decade. For its long-term security, Ukraine can likely count on the battle-tested partnerships with Türkiye. A Turkish weapons manufacturer is teaming with the U.S. to open a munitions factory, while another Turkish firm is set to open a drone factory in Ukraine. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has said he is 'surprised' that Türkiye is continuing to supply weapons to Ukraine while offering to act as mediator in the conflict.

Q2: "Seemingly Türkiye is acting as a Balancer in the region". Does this policy affect the performance of Türkiye as NATO member?

As an important regional power, Türkiye has condemned the war from the beginning and continued its high-level mediation efforts to end the war. Türkiye as a neighbouring country has made the most intense efforts to end the Russia-Ukraine war through talks. In spite of increasingly economic relations and acting as a balancer between Ukraine and Russia in wake of the Ukraine war, Türkiye's inclination towards Ukrainian territorial integrity and defence is quite visible which attests its loyalty as a NATO member state in accordance to the NATO's collective defence mechanism, although Ukraine has not yet been admitted as a full-fledge member but is only a NATO partner country. Türkiye was among the ones voted for a UN General Assembly resolution condemning Russia also reflects to the former's commitment to Ukraine's integrity. In particular, due to Türkiye's role in the Grain Corridor Agreement, it has earned praise from US and other NATO member officials for helping alleviate global food security risks. Another reason for Türkiye's commitment to Ukrainian security is that Ukraine is an important ally for the balance of power around Black Sea. After the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, the Ukrainian government appealed to Türkiye to exercise its authority under the

Montreux Convention to limit the transit of Russian warships from Mediterranean to Black Sea, and with reluctance, Türkiye had declared the invasion of Russia into Ukraine as a ‘War.’

Turkish support for Ukraine’s defense capabilities has been critical, despite the fact that it has been surpassed in volume by Western transfers of arms and money. As part of the Military Framework Agreement between Türkiye and Ukraine in October 2020, both countries agreed to the exchange of military intelligence, cooperation between the armed forces and defence industry, mutual education and training activities. A recent example being the new joint artillery ammunition production lines the Turkish defense industry is helping US partners set up.

Therefore, in spite of Türkiye’s efforts to act as balancer in this war, Türkiye’s inclination towards Ukrainian defence is quite visible, further consolidating its position as a NATO member in this particular issue. However, it keeps its efforts intact to make a balance between Russia and Ukraine to the maximum extent possible and the fact that it has not sanctioned Russia or closed its airspace to Russian aircraft is an evidence.

Annexure XIII

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Q1: What is the status of relationship between Russia and Türkiye since Crimean Annexation (2014) to Ukraine War (2022)?

The relationship between Russia and Türkiye has been complex and multifaceted since the Crimean annexation in 2014. Despite being on opposite sides of the conflict, they have maintained a delicate balance of cooperation and competition. Türkiye has refrained from fully imposing sanctions on Russia, instead opting for a more nuanced approach that allows for continued cooperation in areas like energy. However, their relations have been strained by competition for influence in Black Sea and the South Caucasus. Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 was a sensitive topic for Türkiye, which has historical and cultural ties to the region. Türkiye has consistently maintained that Crimea should be returned to Ukraine, which has been met with rejection from Moscow. The situation has become even more complicated with the ongoing Ukraine War. Türkiye has walked a fine line, providing support to Ukraine while also maintaining its relationship with Russia. The Turkish government has been actively involved in negotiations to establish a grain export corridor from Ukraine, which has helped to ease tensions

Q2: "Seemingly Türkiye is acting as a Balancer in the region". Does this policy affect the performance of Türkiye as NATO member?

Türkiye's balancing act in the region is indeed a complex and delicate endeavor. By maintaining relationships with various global powers, including Russia and China, Türkiye aims to expand its economic and geopolitical influence beyond its traditional Western alliances. This approach, however, has raised concerns about Türkiye's commitment to NATO. The purchase of the Russian S-400 missile defense system, for instance, was seen as a significant breach of NATO protocols. Nevertheless, Türkiye's engagement with non-NATO countries can also be viewed as an opportunity to enhance dialogue, trade, and peaceful conflict resolution. In the BSR, Türkiye's strategic position is crucial, and its collaboration with NATO allies Romania and Bulgaria to establish a Mine

Countermeasures Task Force demonstrates its commitment to ensuring safe navigation and regional security.

Q3: What were the attributes of Türkiye's foreign policy after inception to the end of Cold War?

Following its inception in 1923, Türkiye's foreign policy was characterized by a commitment to secularism, nationalism, and Western-oriented diplomacy. Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the country's founder, pursued a policy of neutrality during WWII, maintaining diplomatic relations with both the Axis and Allied powers. After the war, Türkiye aligned itself with the Western Bloc, joining NATO in 1952 and the Council of Europe in 1949. During the Cold War era, Türkiye's foreign policy was marked by a strong anti-communist stance and a reliance on the United States for military and economic aid. The country participated in the Korean War as part of the United Nations coalition and hosted US military bases on its territory. Türkiye also pursued close relations with other Western countries, including the UK and France. In the regional context, Türkiye's foreign policy focused on maintaining good relations with its neighbors, particularly Greece and the Middle Eastern countries. However, the Cyprus dispute with Greece, which began in the 1950s, remained a contentious issue throughout the Cold War era.