



There Is An Urgent Need For U.S. Black Sea Strategy

The U.S. strategy for the Black Sea should provide for security, economic dynamism and social stability through long-term investments in security sector, transportation, energy, and agriculture.

[2023 National Defense Authorization Act](#) confirms the essential role of the Black Sea for the U.S. national interests as well as for the security of NATO. In light of Russia's unjustified war in Ukraine, it is high time Washington developed a new comprehensive strategy towards the region. Here are some ideas to consider for the U.S. whole-of-government approach in the Black Sea region.

To counter and disrupt Russia's imperial ambitions, it is important first to identify *the modules of strategy of subversion* used by Moscow in the Black Sea states. Since the end of the Cold War Russia relied on five main approaches to maintain influence in the region:

- the Kremlin has cultivated ineffective governance by corrupt local elites, thereby harming prosperity of people and undermining trust in nascent democratic institutions;
- the Kremlin has instigated ethnic conflicts and through "peacemaking" forces gained politico-military and economic levers over the former satellite states;
- the Kremlin has paid special attention to armed forces, security and police agencies of the Black Sea states to infiltrate, corrupt and control them;
- the Kremlin either compromised trans-regional transportation and energy projects, or developed their own parallel initiatives to reduce the competitive advantage of the former; and lastly,

- the Kremlin has used tireless and cynical propaganda to portray the West (first of all the U.S., and democratic form of governance in general) as the main cause for social injustice, poverty and conflicts.

Russia's ongoing war against Ukraine, as well as previous aggressions in Georgia and elsewhere have clearly demonstrated the need for the U.S. to reformulate her strategy towards the Black Sea states. Here, the Black Sea states refer to Ukraine, Georgia, Turkey, Romania, Bulgaria, and Moldova. This list echoes the definition in [a bill](#) introduced by Sen. Jeanne Shaheen (D-N.H.) to provide security in the region. Three out of six states (Turkey, Romania, Bulgaria) are already NATO members, Ukraine and Georgia are official aspirant countries, while Moldova has close cooperation with the alliance.

The new strategy for the Black Sea region will fit the overall [U.S. National Security Strategy](#) that aims "to advance and defend a world that is free, open, prosperous, and secure." More specifically, the new U.S. approach should focus on enhanced security, economic dynamism and social stability in the Black Sea states. There are four different sets of policies that must be adopted to achieve these goals.

First, domestic security concerns are as acute as external ones in the region, especially, in the cases of Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova. Thus, security assistance (financing, training, equipment) should aim to bolster regional partners' armed forces, as well as police and domestic security agencies. Intelligence sharing and joint counterintelligence operations should be prioritized among partners. An emphasis on strengthening of the democratic oversight will ensure that the Black Sea states act in accordance with the values of the United States.

Second, railway and ferry services are the key transportation modes to connect European and Asian producers and consumers through the Black Sea region. Long-term investments in new port infrastructure, such as in Anaklia, Constanta and Varna, will facilitate international trade. U.S. backing can play a decisive role in realizing [Rail-2-Sea project](#) under the Three Seas Initiative, connecting Constanta on the Black Sea with Gdansk on the Baltic Sea. Concomitant development of ferry and railway transport in Georgia can facilitate trade between the EU and other South Caucasus and Central Asian states. The United States can serve as a dynamo for the integration process in the region.

Third, the U.S. support of energy projects will ensure independence of and facilitate long-term growth in the Black Sea states. [A recent agreement to construct an electric cable](#) from Azerbaijan through Georgia and the Black Sea bed to Romania is an excellent example of regional cooperation. In coordination with the EU, the United States can play a decisive role in diversifying energy sources in the regional states. By providing green technology and

funding, Washington can help mitigate adverse impact of climate change in the U.S. partner states.

Fourth, agriculture remains vital to the economies in the Black Sea states. The ongoing war in Ukraine highlighted the importance of grain supplies from the region for food security in the world. Significant parts of population still live in the countryside in the partner states. Hence, reinvigorating agricultural production and business will alleviate food security concerns; it will also help bring about social stability. As an agency with largest purchase agreements in the world, the Pentagon can play the key role in providing long-term contracts to local farmers, and thus, stimulate U.S. partners' economies.

The implementation of comprehensive U.S. strategy in the Black Sea region will ensure independence, safety and prosperity in the partner states. It will deter, disrupt and defeat any aggressive actor, trying to undermine rules-based order in the region. By providing security, energizing economies and enhancing social stability, the U.S. will invalidate a longstanding Russian propaganda theme: "the West brings conflicts and poverty; regional states can only survive through Russian protection and markets." Instead, the effective U.S. strategy will set a powerful positive example, and provide long-term peace and prosperity in the Black Sea region.

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