

Destabilization and the Geopolitics of NATO's Black Sea Bloc

Part II

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Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

Please read Part I prior to this article: [NATO's Black Sea Bloc: Spreading the "New Cold War" into New Theaters](#) By [Andrew Korybko](#), June 05, 2015

The central dynamic underpinning of the Black Sea Bloc is one of irredentist expansionism and strategic branching, which by its very nature mandates that the group is constantly attempting to export its influence past its understood boundaries. In the case of Moldova and Macedonia, the majority of the population do not want [Romanian](#) and [Bulgarian](#) interference in their domestic affairs, despite Chisinau's [political elite](#) and [fifth column Romanians](#) being all for it and Macedonian Color Revolutionary figurehead Zaev [allying](#) with [existentially dangerous](#) forces. As it pertains to Georgia, however, Tbilisi wants to rapidly integrate itself into the emerging military group through Washington's naval assistance, but it's not envisioned as being anything other than a peripheral appendage of the Black Sea Bloc (albeit one of strategic importance and long-term collaborative interest). Additionally, Georgia is not under any Romanian or Bulgarian pressure, nor do those states have any [historical memories](#) that they can weaponize in pressuring it, so it will always remain as a convenient exception to the bloc's integrated dealings outside of naval cooperation.

Serbia's Indirect Vulnerability:

Serbia remains another exception as well, but for very different reasons. As it currently stands, neither Bucharest nor Sofia have negative relations with Belgrade, and it doesn't appear probable that a realistic scenario for such could present themselves anytime soon. This is an intriguing observation because Serbia is the only country to border both official Black Sea Bloc members, yet it's not under direct threat by either of them. Still, it doesn't mean that indirect aggression isn't present, since if Bulgaria and its allies' plans in destabilizing Macedonia succeed and Balkan Stream is no longer able to traverse its territory (either due to a regime change or dangerously unstable domestic situation), then Serbia would unquestionably become a part of the unipolar world, erasing any trace of its formerly [semi-independent](#) and [multipolar-curious](#) foreign policy. Looked at from this perspective, then Serbia has a paramount interest in seeing Bulgaria's designs over Macedonia irreparably fail, while still maintaining positive surface interactions with the Black Sea Bloc state in order to preserve its strategic depth and to forestall any aggravation of bilateral relations that could be used as a pretext for asymmetrical aggression by Romania (the bloc's core and strongest member).

Greater Claims Equal Greater Problems:

✘ While Georgia and Serbia share the commonality of Romania and Bulgaria not having any realistic designs over their territory or identity, the same can't be said at all for Moldova and Macedonia. Romanians are largely of the disposition that Moldova should be a part of their country and that there's no such thing as the Moldovan language or ethnicity, just as many Bulgarians hold the same views of identity denial about Macedonians. Romania actually went as far as [organizing the 2009 Twitter Revolution](#) in Moldova in a gambit to shoo in a forced 'unification', and Director of the Bulgarian National History Museum Bozhidar Dimitrov [suggested](#) last month that a perversion of the Crimean scenario could be used to annex Macedonia.

These disturbing actions of identity denial and intended geopolitical removal prove that both the Romanian and Bulgarian leaderships harbor the most negative of political intentions towards their Moldovan and Macedonian state neighbors (in the sense of their governments, not necessarily their people), and it's not likely that such anti-state antipathy will ever dissipate. Instead, it's more probable that both Black Sea Bloc aggressors will continue conspiring against their targets and double down in their offensive moves against them, which will adversely affect Russia's interests in both of these states. Bulgaria will presumably [maintain its close connection](#) with Color Revolutionary Zaev, while Romania could conceivably use its influence to organize and rig a unification referendum (excluding the wishes of the non-Moldovan ethnicities such as the Gagauz and others, or possibly outright violating their suffrage) and provoking emboldened Chisinau to request Bucharest's assistance (and possibly that of NATO, if Moldova is recognized by the group as then constituting an 'integral' part of the allied Romanian state) in forcing Transnistria into the unlawful 'union'. Suffice to say, the Russian peacekeepers there would immediately be thrown into the conflict, with dangerously unascertainable consequences for NATO-Russian relations after the Rubicon (or Dniestr, in this case) is crossed.

Breaking The Bloc

The Black Sea Bloc is plagued by three major vulnerabilities that could develop to significantly impede its functioning:

A Hungarian Reawakening In Romania:

Hungarians form a sizeable and increasingly vocal minority located in Transylvania, and there's a risk that they may become even more assertive of various rights and privileges as time goes on. In fact, there have already been [pro-autonomy marches](#) demanding a degree of political separateness from Bucharest, and the [Hungarian Parliament](#) proudly flies the flag of [Szekely Land](#), the majority Hungarian-populated part of Romania. [Other signs of interethnic tension](#) have arisen as well, which while nothing totally inflammatory at this point, could create a situation that boils over sometime in the future.

✘ This possibility becomes more of a reality as the Hungarian government becomes [ostracized](#) and [painted as a threat](#) by its formal European 'partners' over its growing sovereign stance on [foreign](#) and [domestic](#) affairs. Just as Greece and Turkey, both NATO members, almost came to blows over Cyprus, a similar scenario could possibly play out between Hungary and Romania over Szekely Land if either side engages in spiraling provocations. In the event that the Jobbik Party [comes to power in Budapest in 2018](#) or acquires a commanding influence over policy at or before then (perhaps capitalizing off of a Western Color-Revolution-gone-wrong against Orban), then Budapest would likely become much more assertive over the issue, thus raising the prospects for its potential actualization

even more.

Moldovan Paralysis:

A more immediate obstruction to the Black Sea Bloc's plans could be a deepening of the political paralysis in Moldova. The current government has a slim coalition majority over the pragmatic, Russian-friendly opposition, but this could potentially be reversed if [burgeoning protests](#) lead to early elections (and [without any restrictions](#) on Russian-friendly parties like last time). Another factor that could freeze the radical process of Euro-Atlantic servitude that the ruling parties are pursuing would be some type of [revolt or large-scale resistance](#) in Gagauzia, a small region in Moldova outside Transnistria where the people are [looking towards Russia](#) for [their future](#). It doesn't matter by what means, but if the unstable pro-Western Moldovan coalition can become paralyzed and its state leadership even possibly reversed with early elections, then the likelihood of a Romanian absorption and intensified Shadow NATO membership becomes diminished, although frighteningly, the embattled government might look to distract attention and/or deepen Western support for its rule through anti-Transnistrian provocations.

Bulgarian State Failure:

The anti-Macedonian state is the [poorest country](#) in the EU and has a level of corruption that's [three times higher than the EU average](#). Bulgarian news outlet Standart [reported](#) that there are more Bulgarians working outside the country than within it, and Novinite, another of the country's national news media firms, [assessed](#) that remittances totaled 6.2 billion euros in the past decade, now representing the main source of foreign capital in the country. So many Bulgarians have fled the country for work that Risk Monitor, a Bulgarian research group, reports that [26% of schoolchildren](#) have at least one of their parents living abroad, and these children typically perform worse in their studies and have higher incidences of drinking and smoking than their peers. For these and many more reasons, Bulgaria appears slated to one day become the 'Tajikistan of Europe', or put differently, a country disproportionately dependent on migrants and their remittances to the degree that such a relationship becomes one of its defining economic and social characteristics (like Moldova).



Bulgarian migrants arriving at Sofia bus station to leave for other countries

Bulgaria's entire stability is thus vulnerable to any sudden changes in foreign currency exchange rates and the strength of the Euro. If a situation occurs where Bulgarian migrants flock back to their home country (either out of a major recession in their host market or perhaps unbearable discrimination against them there), then the disastrous combination of poverty, joblessness, and inefficient state services could compel individuals to take part in organized crime, further destabilizing the state. Bulgarian politics isn't exactly known for its stability either, and domestic pressures could quickly travel upwards through the system and result in government turbulence. Such a scenario would be facilitated if [existing tensions between Bulgarians and ethnic Turks](#) boil over during this period of edgy uncertainty.

Should Bulgaria's domestic stability continue to unravel, as it shows signs of doing in the near future, then the failing state that it becomes would be incapable of pushing its de-facto

identity irredentism over Macedonia and would no longer pose the same threat that it once did. On the flip side, however, economic refugees from failing Bulgaria might be attracted to Macedonia owing to the same cultural closeness that they once evoked to justify aggressive attitudes against it, except in this case, any uncontrollable migration to their [economically prosperous and growing neighbor](#) could one day lead to the same irredentist risks that Albanians created for Serbia when they moved en masse to Kosovo for similar economic reasons. While this scenario may appear distant, it shouldn't be absolutely discounted.

Concluding Thoughts

The Black Sea Bloc is the physically weakest yet most strategically dangerous of NATO's regional fighting formations. It derives its strength not from the caliber of its armed forces (which are embarrassingly shabby), but from the manner in which it can inflict damage on Russia's peripheral interests Transnistria and Macedonia. Destabilization in both areas is difficult for Russia to respond to, and in the case of Macedonia, it has no direct means to do so. As regards Transnistria, it's very likely that a strategic entanglement might be unavoidable if certain contingencies don't prevent its occurrence first, because at the end of the day, the US and its NATO allies hold all the cards in deciding whether or not to initiate hostilities there and lure Russia into the planned trap. They already decided to destabilize Macedonia, which just deflected a failed Color Revolution attempt and [dismantled a violent terrorist cell](#), but there's no guarantee that a second round of external revolution or terror isn't being plotted which could eventually sideline the Balkan Stream project. Because of these strategic uncertainties and the constraints that Russia has in responding to them and defending its grand strategic interests in the region, the Black Sea Bloc has unexpectedly sprung to the front of Russia's concerns, although the threats it's unleashing are by no means insurmountable.

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