

NATO's Black Sea Bloc: Spreading the “New Cold War” into New Theaters

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The shaky truce in Ukraine has given NATO ample opportunities to spread the New Cold War beyond Eastern Europe and into new theaters, one of which has been the greater Black Sea region. The recent destabilizations in Macedonia and Moldova that endanger Russian interests there can be directly linked to the long-term ambitions of Bulgaria and Romania, the two members of NATO's Black Sea Bloc. These de-facto irredentist states are being used by NATO to instigate proxy conflicts (whether soft or hot) that have a larger chance of succeeding than the semi-failed Ukrainian one, taking supreme advantage of the fact that neither targeted state is adjacent to Russia (unlike the East Ukrainian republics) and thereby unable to receive direct assistance or any realistic Russian deterrent if their respective crises deepened.

The flurry of activity surrounding the Black Sea in recent years (particularly the 2003 Rose Revolution, 2004 Orange Revolution, 2008 Five Day War, EuroMaidan, and the Russian reunification with Crimea) proves that this region is among the world's most politically dynamic areas in the 21st century, and the geopolitical intrigue and tension has now spread past its direct borders into the greater Black Sea states of Macedonia and Moldova. In light of these Western-initiated destabilizations, NATO's Black Sea Bloc has taken on a hefty strategic role disproportionate to its average size, and accordingly, it's the subject of study within this article.

Part I begins by placing the Black Sea Bloc into NATO's strategic context and then describes its composition and targets. Afterwards, Part II analyzes the nascent military grouping's dynamics and concludes with an examination of possible complications that could obstruct the bloc's viability.

Step By Step, Bloc By Bloc

NATO's adaptation to the New Cold War has been to subdivide itself and its affiliated partners into [semi-autonomous military blocs](#) strategically delineated along geographic and historical lines. The purpose behind this self-initiated break down is to make the cumbersome alliance more efficient in specific theaters, with each regional [Lead From Behind](#) partner feeling as though they have an historical stake in carrying out the US' shared objectives. Through this geographic restructuring and the reconceptualization of self-interested motivations, the US aspires to rebrand NATO as a 'swarm' of smaller interlinked blocs that can coordinately chip away at Russia's interests and overwhelm its decision makers through the resultant 'managed chaos' of near-simultaneous destabilizations.

Here's what other regional blocs are currently taking shape besides the one centered on the

Black Sea:

✖ Viking Bloc:

The US has used the convenient excuse of phantom Russian sub hunts to [crystallize a Greater Scandinavian alliance](#) focusing on Sweden, which functions as a de-facto regional leader of the alliance. The rest of the members include Finland, Denmark, Norway, and Iceland, and one can possibly even incorporate Estonia and Latvia into the club as lesser proxies. For most intents and purposes, it functions as the 21st-century version of an expanded Swedish Empire.

Commonwealth Bloc:

Poland forms the core of the next regional bloc, and it also includes Lithuania and Shadow NATO member Ukraine. The objective here is to recreate the vanquished Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, with an eventual eye on [bringing Russian-ally Belarus](#) under their unipolar sway.

West Balkan/Adriatic Bloc:

This [formation](#), which can geographically be described as either the West Balkan or Adriatic Bloc, is less integrated than the previous two that were described, but it doesn't mean it's any less lethal. Instead of one Lead From Behind partner, it utilizes the dual mechanisms of two neo-expansionist states, Albania and Croatia. Each of these aspiring leaders has 'ticking time bombs' of ethnic and/or territorial ambitions in neighboring states that can be activated to destabilize the Central Balkans via Croatian Bosnia and the supposed territory of Greater Albania, respectively. The other affiliated members are NATO-state Slovenia, NATO-aspirant Montenegro, and the NATO protectorates of Bosnia and occupied Kosovo.

Club Med:

The Western Mediterranean countries of Italy, France, and Spain are NATO's attack dogs against North and West Africa. France is the inarguable leader of the bloc, and its waged war in both theaters, specifically against Libya and Mali. Italy, on the other hand, only contributed to the Libyan campaign, while Spain has yet to fully intervene in any African conflict. Madrid has, however, [opened the gates](#) for the US to establish a major presence near Seville that will predictably be used for forthcoming West African and Algerian campaigns, thereby making it an integral part of the bloc whether it's directly involved in the operations or not.

The 'Old Timers':

The two founding anchors of European NATO, France and the UK, no longer have as much of an interest in European affairs (despite their symbolic involvement in Baltic and Polish anti-Russian NATO provocations), and have instead pivoted towards the Greater Mideast. Nowhere is this more apparent than their new Gulf bases (France's air facility in the [UAE](#), the UK in its recently returned naval hub in [Bahrain](#)) and joint participation in the US-led 'anti-ISIL' bombing campaign (France is also [heavily involved](#) in its former African colonies, too). In an ironic twist, 'Old Europe's' most important founding NATO fathers (the 'old timers') are now focusing the majority of their efforts outside the North Atlantic sphere,

while 'New Europe' (the post-Cold War members) has emerged as the US' lead anti-Russian proxy on the continent.

The Cornerstone

Rounding out NATO's regional bloc constellation is the Black Sea Bloc, which functions as the geo-pivotal cornerstone for the restructured alliance. Before describing its importance in terms of the larger picture, the formation itself must be outlined.

✘ Romania and Bulgaria are the two official members of this regional arrangement, but they aren't its only components. Shadow NATO members Moldova and Georgia round out the rest of the bloc, and all together, they occupy the western and part of the eastern reaches of the Black Sea. Eric Draitser wrote a [thorough report](#) about US naval strategy in this region and the latest anti-Russian provocations that it partook in with Georgia, which explains the importance of the trans-Black Sea area and justifies the inclusion of Georgia into the larger Eastern Balkan pro-NATO concept. Moldova, for its part, is an ideologically and politically divided land narrowly presided over by a [pro-Western elite](#) that wants to accelerate the Euro-Atlantic colonization of the country, but [pragmatic, Russian-oriented citizens](#) and the frozen Transnistrian conflict are currently standing in the way.

When one adds the Black Sea Bloc of Romania, Bulgaria, Moldova, and Georgia to the previously mentioned Viking and Commonwealth Blocs of Greater Scandinavia and the former Polish conquests, a startling realization occurs – Pilsudski's Intermarium 'cordon sanitaire' has finally been created. Stratfor's George Friedman, who has [advocated its revival](#), describes it as a belt of anti-Russian states stretching from the Baltic to the Black Seas, which is the pure geographic definition of the interlinked Viking-Commonwealth-Black Sea Bloc. This Intermarium allows NATO to form three separate fronts against Russian interests, targeting it from the Arctic/Baltic, Eastern Europe, and the Black Sea, respectively.

As an incidental strategic touch, however, it is the Black Sea Bloc, the weakest and least integrated of the three, that could ultimately destabilize Russian interests the most. This is because it threatens two important Russian-affiliated outposts, Transnistria and the security of Balkan Stream's central peninsula corridor through Macedonia. The next section will discuss this in detail and explain the gravely negative implications that either of the two destabilization operations would have for Russian grand strategy.

The Indirect Approach

The Viking and Commonwealth Blocs directly target Russian territory or its overall border security, but the Black Sea Bloc's intended victims are not immediately adjacent to Russia, and one of them (Macedonia) doesn't have any direct connection to its military security. By destabilizing Transnistria and Macedonia via the ambitions of Greater Romania and Greater Bulgaria (whether de-jure or de-facto), NATO hopes to chip away at the international security and stability architecture that Russia has built, aiming to score 'cheap shots' while it's still able to do so. Here's how it looks more in-depth:

✘ [Transnistria](#):

This self-declared independent republic is narrowly positioned alongside the Dniestr River and smudged between Moldova and Ukraine. Russia retains a contingent of around [1,500 peacekeepers](#) there, which while serving as a deterrent against Moldovan aggression for the

past two decades, inversely may become a temptation for multilateral Moldovan-Romanian-Ukrainian aggression under NATO's Lead From Behind supervision. In the contemporary context, the whole point of the Ukrainian Civil War was to draw Russia into a strategic entanglement from which it couldn't extricate itself, thereby creating a [21st-century repeat](#) of Brzezinski's 1980s Afghan trap. If Transnistria were to fall victim to the combined aggression mentioned above (its already being [blockaded](#)) and ominously warned about by The Saker in his [must-read analysis](#), then Russia would find itself in an extremely unfavorable military and strategic situation that could be disastrous to extricate itself from, but much to the delight of Brzezinski and his acolytes.

Macedonia:

The Central Balkan country is the [lifeline](#) for Balkan Stream, but it's facing two-pronged destabilization from Greater Albania (the West Balkan/Adriatic Bloc) and Greater Bulgaria (the Black Sea Bloc). Concerning the latter, Macedonia's [historical 20th-century stalker](#) hasn't eased off its obsession with the country and still wants to enforce its soft (and perhaps hard) influence on its people. This goal overlaps with the US' own, since it wants to apply as much pressure on Macedonia as possible to get it to abandon Russia's [geopolitically revolutionary](#) pipeline project. Impoverished Bulgaria doesn't even have to play a conventional role in this scenario, since all it needs to do is [offer its soldiers up as 'bait'](#) to create a false-flag pretext for a larger NATO intervention. Albania might be the loud, yapping dog of war when it comes to Macedonia, but it's 'unassuming' Bulgaria that poses the greatest threat since not many are aware of its hegemonic intentions over its neighbor. Thankfully Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov [recognized this fact](#) and called Sofia out on it, which drew attention to its designs and may have thwarted any planned provocations that could have worsened Macedonia's domestic turmoil.

Exception: Crimea

Unlike Transnistria and Macedonia, Crimea and Sevastopol are part of Russia's sovereignty territory and direct jurisdiction, but just like those two aforementioned areas, they too are under threat of indirect destabilization, albeit way more long-term. Romania and Bulgaria, as Black Sea littoral states, aren't subject to the [restrictions of the Montreaux Convention](#) that mandate a temporary and limited naval presence for non-regional states' vessels (such as those of the US). The significance here is that the US can [build up](#) these two state's naval forces in order to create a proxy navy that won't ever realistically compete with its Russian counterparts, but could turn out to be quite a nuisance for them if left unchecked and allowed to grow, especially if they establish regular sea lines of communication with Georgia (e.g. between Constanta and/or Varna and Batumi).

The other indirect threat to Russia's newest federal units comes from Romania's [missile defense cooperation](#) with the US. In an of itself, a single facility in the country poses no threat to Russia's nuclear deterrent, but as with the Polish situation, Moscow is concerned that it could grow into a network of bases and/or become a front for offensive weaponry directed against it. Combining the previous threat, missile defense infrastructure could also be [integrated into naval units](#), which would give the system a mobile platform and increase its threat assessment vis a vis Russia.

In either case, Russia's forces in Crimea would be under a strategic threat, with the US having neutralized some of their capabilities and therefore adjusting the balance of military

power (if even still largely to Russia's favor, the relative shift is against it). The forecasted timeframe in which the Black Sea Bloc's naval and missile defense components begin to actually threaten or inconvenience Russia is at least a few decades away, but still, these emerging strategic difficulties must be recognized beforehand in order to prevent them from reaching their peak efficiency in the medium-term future.

[To be continued...](#)

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