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Why is the outcome of the Battle of the Black Sea of primary importance?

Baciocchi, Theo Marious Richard Martin

MSc in International Relations, Strategy and Security, School of Social
Humanities, Neapolis University Pafos

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The Black Sea in War

**Why is the outcome of the Battle of the Black Sea of
primary importance?**

Théo Baciocchi

Student ID: 1227609695

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Théo baciocchi

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Student Name: Théo Baciocchi

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Examination Committee:

First Supervisor (Neapolis University Pafos: Dr. Marios Efthymiopoulos, Associate Professor of International Security and Strategy

Member of the Examination Committee: Dr. Gavriil Eleni, Lecturer in International Economic Law and Human Rights

Member of the Examination Committee: Dr. Eleftheriadou Marina, Assistant Professor in International Relations & Security

Abstract

In a protracted and dynamic conflict within the Black Sea region, Ukraine has unexpectedly gained the upper hand against Russia. Ukraine's innovative naval guerrilla strategy, combining anti-ship missiles and naval drone cruises, has severely restricted the freedom of action of the Russian Black Sea Fleet. This unexpected development has profound implications for both Ukraine and Russia, and its repercussions extend far beyond their borders. The Black Sea holds immense economic and strategic significance for both belligerents. For Ukraine, it serves as its primary maritime gateway, enabling trade flows critical for its economy. However, the war and Russian blockade have taken a toll on Ukraine's economic stability. While efforts to reroute trade flows are underway, the losses remain substantial. Moreover, Ukraine's unique rail network gauge complicates land-based exports to Western Europe. In contrast, Russia's dependence on the Black Sea is not as acute as Ukraine's, but it remains strategically vital. It provides Russia with year-round access to European and African markets, hosts key ports like Novorossiysk for grain and hydrocarbon transport, and offers a vital ice-free sea route. Additionally, the Black Sea is essential for projecting Russian military power into the Mediterranean and securing its southern flank against NATO countries. The conflict's outcome in the Black Sea holds global implications. If Ukraine prevails, it may join NATO and the EU, reshaping the regional security landscape. This victory could inspire other countries like Georgia to move closer to the West, further diminishing Russia's influence. Conversely, a Russian victory may see Ukraine reduced to a vassal state, heightening tensions with NATO. Addressing this volatile situation, the West, primarily represented by NATO, must prioritize preventing Russia from gaining the upper hand in the Black Sea. A multifaceted strategy involving military aid, diplomatic efforts to accelerate Ukraine's integration into Western institutions, economic support, and international cooperation is essential. A post-war Black Sea region should strive for reduced tensions, economic prosperity, energy diversification, and enhanced security, setting an example of stability in an increasingly tense global landscape. In conclusion, Ukraine's unexpected success in the Black Sea battle has shaken Russia's geostrategic ambitions, with far-reaching implications for both nations and the global community. The Black Sea's economic and geopolitical significance underscores the need for proactive Western engagement to ensure stability and mitigate potential escalation.

Keywords: supremacy of the sea, food trade, strategic localization

Chapter 1: Introduction

At first glance, the war between Ukraine and Russia might seem like a succession of simple land and air battles. The public is inundated with images of destroyed tanks, damaged buildings, and even drone attacks. But that would be to forget that the two countries are engaged in a fierce battle in the Black Sea. The Black Sea, with its deeply intertwined history of cultures, empires, and civilizations, has always held a central place in the destiny of humanity. Its historical significance goes far beyond the geographical boundaries of its shores, extending well beyond its waters. Since ancient times, this inland sea has been the stage for encounters between Greek, Roman, Byzantine, and Ottoman empires, serving as a commercial, cultural, and political crossroads. The ancient cities lining its shores have shaped the trajectory of Western civilization. Over the centuries, the Black Sea has witnessed epic conflicts, massive migrations, and countless political upheavals, all while remaining a vital artery for trade and transportation, connecting Europe to Asia. It has also played a crucial strategic role in both of the twentieth century's world wars. Today, as geopolitical tensions crystallize in this region, the historical importance of the Black Sea remains indisputable. This inland sea continues to influence the course of contemporary history, shaping the interests and ambitions of conflicting nations and global powers. To understand the current stakes unfolding in the Black Sea, it is essential to consider its rich past and its lasting impact on international relations.

In 2014, with the annexation of Crimea, Russia also seized 75% of Ukraine's naval units and the country's largest naval base: Sevastopol, which would become the headquarters of Ukraine's Black Sea Fleet. The Russian Navy. The Ukrainian navy will then begin a reconstruction process, which was still incomplete when Russia began its invasion. Thus, as of February 24, 2022, Ukraine only has one frigate and a few patrol boats. Facing Russia, a powerful fleet is lined up with several frigates, corvettes, submarines, and a cruiser. To this fleet must be added a large number of maritime troops ready to land on the Ukrainian coast. Faced with these forces, Ukraine will not challenge Russian control over the Black Sea and will adopt a strategy aimed at defending its coasts at the start of the war. Russian strategy will focus on a blockade of Ukraine to harm its economy and prevent any Ukrainian movement on the airwaves. At the same time, the Russian army must secure the coastline to lock Ukraine with the support of the Russian fleet which will launch massive missile strikes against the land as well as several landings on the Ukrainian rear in support of the Army. But circumstances and different events will quickly force both sides to change and adapt their next strategies to the evolution of the war.

The first phase of operations in the sea, roughly the first two months of the war, will see a real domination of Russia over the Black Sea, and Ukraine reduced to sinking its ships or defending its coasts with coastal batteries, the balance forces at the time leaving no other options. But the situation will quickly change, with Ukraine beginning to challenge Russian control of the sea with missiles and drones. This change in strategy was particularly visible with the sinking of the Russian flagship, the Moskva on April 21, 2022: *"On April 14, 2022, the Ukrainians sank the Russian cruiser Moskva with a pair of Neptune anti-ship missiles (Ackerman 2022)"*. Gradually Ukraine succeeded in forcing Russia to withdraw from the western part of the Black Sea and even from its main base, Sevastopol, where many Russian ships were operated until recently, but under Ukrainian pressure, some ships retreated out of reach of the Ukrainians. Today, even if Russia maintains a strong superiority, none of the belligerents can completely control the maritime theater.

Beyond the two belligerents, the Black Sea is of vital importance to the world, through the trade flows it allows, in particular the food trade between Africa and Europe, For example, Ukraine produced according to the SCHOOL OF MARINE AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS *"Although figures vary, Ukraine*

is estimated to produce 20% of the world's supply of high-quality wheat and 7% of all wheat. The World Food Program buys half of its supply of wheat to Ukraine” (ELLISON 2022). The greater influence of the Black Sea on a global level is another important aspect. For example, for the USA, the Black Sea makes it possible to contain Russia, to prevent it from accessing the Mediterranean, or other countries. who seek to develop their trade flows through the Black Sea, China through the New Silk Roads being one of them. This importance of the Black Sea will only grow, both during the war in Ukraine and related issues that will arise after the war.

If the two camps have reached a balance, the importance of the Black Sea has not changed. Ukraine needs the Black Sea to maintain trade flows vital to its economy, but also to prevent Russia from using the Black Sea as a platform for attacks against its territory. Like Ukraine, Russia cannot let control of the sea slip away, although Russia is not as dependent on the Black Sea for its economy, this sea is vital due to its strategic position, protecting the southern flank of the country. and offering it the possibility of influencing the Mediterranean Sea. Furthermore, supremacy in the Black Sea is vital for Russia in its war against Ukraine, whether by blocking Ukraine from its access to the sea or defending Russian interests from Ukrainian attacks.

The strategy followed by Russia in the Black Sea for several decades now can be explained by the Russian situation after the collapse of the USSR in 1991, Russia was faced with the loss of its status as the dominant power in this crucial region, marked by a reduced maritime front and the need to deal with new coastal states such as Ukraine, Georgia, and Romania. In response, Russia sought by all means to once again become the supreme power in the Black Sea during the time of the USSR. The strategic challenges have increased with the enlargement of NATO, the integrating of Romania and Bulgaria in 2004, and the possibility of future membership of Ukraine and Georgia, raised at the NATO summit. in Bucharest in 2008. Russia has responded to these strategic challenges in several ways, including the development of the port of Novorossiysk to increase its strategic independence from Ukraine and the strengthening of its presence in the Black Sea, through hostile actions against its neighbors, such as the invasion of Georgia in 2008 and the annexation of Crimea in 2014. These events not only secured Russia's position in the Black Sea but also transformed regional security dynamics, causing increasing tensions with NATO countries and altering the prospect of Russian domination in the region.

Today, at the end of 2023, the situation in the Black Sea appears stable, Russia has withdrawn part of its fleet from Crimea for the safety of its ships but continues to bombard Ukraine from the sea and use the Black Sea for all logistics of these troops. For its part, Ukraine continues its guerrilla strategy, inflicting more and more losses on Russia, claiming these losses as proof of its future victory: *“Ukraine's military said on Friday its operations had resulted in the destruction of a total of 15 Russian naval vessels in the Black Sea since the start of Russia's invasion and that 12 other vessels had been damaged”* (Reuters 2023). The future of the Black Sea battle is uncertain, however, after the failure of its counter-offensive in 2023, Ukraine may focus on Crimea, exploiting its advances on the Dnieper and increasing pressure at sea Black. The capture of Crimea would radically change the course of the war, hampering Russian attacks and dealing a major blow to Russia's logistics and image. However, this victory seems difficult, given the fortification of Crimea and Western military support which at present is limited both by logistics but also by politics. The future of security in the Black Sea after the war is difficult to determine but we are going to carry out 3 scenarios that can answer this question: the victory of Ukraine, the victory of Russia, and the status quo.

In our study, we will study the different events from the start of the war in February 2022 until today, the end of 202

Research Questions

- what are the different phases of the battle of the black sea?
- How important is the Black Sea to the world?
- Why do both belligerents see control of the Black Sea as a vital part?
- How control of the Black Sea fits into Russian geostrategy?
- What future for the Black Sea after the war?

Objectives of the study

The objective of our study is to understand how Ukraine, a country almost without a navy in the traditional sense of the term, managed to deny the use of part of the Black Sea to Russia. Furthermore, we want to understand why the Black Sea is of crucial importance for both belligerents and the world.

Hypothesis

Today, Ukraine has achieved the feat of pushing Russia back from part of the Black Sea, but the two camps still compete for control of this body of water and this will continue as long as the war lasts. The world needs the Black Sea, both for hydrocarbon flows but also for essential food flows for a large part of the world's countries. But Russia's ongoing defeat is proof that all the geostrategy followed by Moscow for several decades, with the war with Georgia in 2008 or the annexation of Crimea, is a failure, preventing it from becoming the supreme power again in the Black Sea.

Research method

To carry out our study, we used the quantitative method, by collecting data from several different sources, including press articles, journals, government sources, and articles from international organizations. All the data we have collected will allow us to create the following structure for our study. This essay focuses on two areas of research, the course of combat in the Black Sea and the strategic importance of this sea at the global level. Our first chapter will deal with the first part of the war in the Black Sea, Russian domination, and then in a second part, we will show how Ukraine slowly succeeded in eroding Russian naval power to challenge its control of the waves. Our third part will study the consequences of the new strategic situation in the Black Sea. After studying the conflict in the Black Sea, itself, we will see the strategic importance of the Black Sea, first for the two belligerents, then a fifth part will focus on the importance of the Black Sea for the world. Finally, in our sixth and final part, we will deal with the different avenues for the evolution of the conflicts in the Black Sea and the related consequences.

Theoretical Framework

In the context of our study, the theory which is directly imposed is the theory of realism. The two belligerents and, further, the rest of the world act in the Black Sea mainly according to the interests of each country. Ukraine and Russia are fighting for supremacy in the Black Sea, considering only their interests and logic in this struggle. The rest of the world follows this approach, choosing their movements according to the situation at sea and their interests.

Chapter 2: Literature review

For our first chapter on NATO-Ukraine relations, we used different sources, mainly articles from the press and think tanks. Before the war, the Ukrainian Navy acted as a dwarf against the Russian Black Sea Fleet. Indeed, the majority of these ships, inherited from the USSR, were seized by Russia with the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Despite a reconstruction process from 2014 to 2022, the Ukrainian navy remained very weak: *"When the Russian invasion began earlier this year, there was little more than a "mosquito fleet" of patrol boats to stand in their way"* (ARMSTRONG 2022). At the start of the war in February 2024, Ukraine's defeat in the Black Sea seemed inevitable. The first months of the war seemed to support this opinion, with Russia organizing a total blockade of the Ukrainian coast, pursuing every Ukrainian ship and increasing amphibious landings: *"Russia performs multiple amphibious demonstrations where landing ships, supported by minesweepers and other warships, threaten amphibious landings near Odesa"* (Sutton 2023).

In the second part, we also used mainly journalistic sources, but also government reports on the various events that occurred in Ukraine. Russian domination over the Black Sea did not remain unmatched for long, very quickly the Ukrainians sought to challenge Russian control but they did not succeed until April 2022 and the destruction of the Moskva, *"US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said that the way the Moskva saga has unfolded is a big blow to Russia"* (Locke 2022). Following this loss, Ukraine will begin to gradually drive the Russians out of the western part of the Black Sea, first by retaking Snake Island, but above all by a real naval guerrilla war using drones and missiles to inflict the most damage on the Russian fleet, *"In September 2022, Ukraine used British cruise missiles to attack Russian submarines in Sevastopol, as well as the Black Sea Fleet headquarters. This likely prompted Russia to move its submarines out of Sevastopol"* (Mongilio 2023).

In our third part, we again used articles from think tanks and the press. Today, at the end of 2023, Ukraine has achieved the feat of forcing the Russian fleet to stop operating in a large part of the Black Sea, calling into question the traditional way of seeing control of the seas, it is said with a powerful fleet made up of submarines, frigates... Ukraine has achieved this objective through the intensive use of drones, the support of NATO, and the overconfidence of the Russian navy: *"Ukraine first used sea drones in a large-scale attack in October 2022, striking Russia's naval base in Sevastopol"* (Lauren Jackson 2023). The consequences of what must be called a Russian defeat are enormous, both from a military and geopolitical point of view. By limiting Russia's access to part of the Black Sea, Ukraine has stopped a large part of the Russian bombings on its territory, put Crimea within striking range and even allowed the restriction of supply flows between Crimea and Russia: *"Russia has reportedly withdrawn most of its Black Sea Fleet from occupied Crimea in recent weeks following a series of successful Ukrainian attacks"* (Dickinson 2023). But the geopolitical consequences were also enormous, thus the loss of snake island allowed the establishment of the cereal corridor in the summer of 2022, and even with the withdrawal of the agreement by Russia in July 2023, Ukraine has succeeded in ensuring that several ships continue to operate despite Russian threats: *"With the grain deal collapse, Ukraine sets up a humanitarian corridor for commercial ships to travel to and from Ukrainian ports. The corridor does see ships pass through it, although on a more limited scale than under the grain deal"* (Mongilio 2023).

For our fourth part on the importance of the Black Sea at the global level, we once again used articles from the press and think tanks to carry out our study. One of the main problems encountered early on by the war in Ukraine was the endangerment of part of the world's food supply. Indeed, several countries, particularly in Africa and the *Middle East*, depend on food imported from Ukraine and Russia via the Black Sea. According to the EU, *"Ukraine is the world's largest exporter of sunflower oil (50% of world exports), the third largest one of barley (18%), the fourth largest one of maize (16%) and the fifth largest one of wheat (12%). In 2021 Ukraine exported cereals worth almost \$12 billion (about €11.5 billion)"* (Council of the European Union 2023). But in addition to food, the Black Sea plays a central role in the world, a true crossroads between West and East. Due to its strategic position, the Black Sea is a major issue for powers around the world. Russia is seeking to regain control of this sea, the West wants to prevent it while other countries are interested in it, such as Azerbaijan, China... *"In its attempts to free itself of its energy dependence on Russia and to develop alternative sources, the EU focused on possibilities for cooperation in the field of oil and gas exports with Azerbaijan"* (Stercul 2023).

The fifth part, which deals with the importance of the Black Sea for the two belligerents, saw the use of government reports and press articles. The importance of the Black Sea for Russia and Ukraine cannot be underestimated; a large part of the two countries' trade passes through this sea, especially for Ukraine. The war has devastating consequences for the Ukrainian economy, particularly the blockade imposed by Russia. Even if today, it has been partially lifted by Ukrainian actions, its existence continues to hurt Ukraine: *"In peacetime, over 50% of Ukraine's total exports went through Odesa, the country's largest Black Sea port"* (Latschan 2023). For Russia, the Black Sea is also of key importance, although due to its geographical location, the Russian economy is not as affected as the Ukrainian economy. The Black Sea has always occupied a prominent place in Russian strategy and control of this sea is of paramount importance for Russia: *"An important piece of Moscow's strategy in challenging the West included reestablishing Russia's position on the Black Sea, which the Russian state historically saw as vital to extending and controlling its borders and as a springboard for projecting power into Europe, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean"* (Borshchevskaya 2023).

Then, for the sixth part, relating to Russian geostrategy in the Black Sea, we mainly used think tank articles, but also statements from Russian officials. Russian geostrategy in the Black Sea began very early with a central objective: for Russia to once again become the supreme power in the Black Sea, as in the days of the USSR. Under the presidency of Vladimir Putin, this movement towards the Black Sea accelerated considerably and very quickly this strategy was almost admitted by several Russian officials: *"Already in the 2001 edition of Russia's Maritime Doctrine the advance of the legal framework for the functioning of the Black Sea Fleet of the Russian Federation on the territory of Ukraine, maintaining the city of Sevastopol as its main base had been identified as a foundation of national maritime policy"* (Kollakowski 2023). From 2008 Russia reinforced the role of violence in Russian geostrategy with the Russian invasion of Georgia than in 2014 the annexation of Crimea and the unrest in Ukraine, reinforcing tensions in the region but allowing Russia to strengthen its influence in the Black Sea: *"Russia won the war and Georgia lost 20% of its territory. As a result, Russia came closer to re-establishing itself as a Black Sea power"* (Borshchevskaya 2023). The invasion of Ukraine in 2022 aims to continue this strategy of controlling the Black Sea, but Ukraine's resistance poses a new challenge to Russia on a global geopolitical scale.

The seventh and final part of our study attempts to understand what future is possible for the Black Sea, firstly how the fighting in the Black Sea can take place, then in the second part 3 possible scenarios on security in the Black Sea after the war. Being largely an exercise in the mind, we used a lesser amount of sources compared to the other parts. However, the sources used are either Think-Tank articles conferences, or interviews organized by different parties, for example, the CISS interview entitled *“The Future of Security in the Black Sea Region”* (Fenton 2023). The future of the Black Sea battle is uncertain, it largely depends on future Western deliveries to Ukraine, only new weapons with disruptive potential seem capable of changing the current status of the sea battle black: a Russia harassed by Ukraine. After the war, the status of the Black Sea will depend on the outcome of this conflict, whether Ukraine wins and the West sees the Black Sea as a new bulwark to contain Russia. If Russia wins, the Black Sea will become a springboard for these strategic ambitions: *“Neither Ukraine nor Russia will get to decide which of the two possible scenarios is realized. Both sides are doing and will do everything they can to win, and they cannot do much more than they are now doing. Instead, the winner will be decided by the West”* (MIKLOS 2023).

Chapter 3: The beginning of the war, Russian domination

The naval situation of the two belligerents before the war

To understand the balance of forces in the Black Sea, we have to go back to 2014 with the annexation of Crimea. When Russia seized the region, it also seized the majority of the Ukrainian fleet, its main base, Sevastopol, and this with the complicity of the majority of the crews of the Ukrainian fleet. In fact, after 2014, the Ukrainian Navy had to be rebuilt from scratch: *“With Sevastopol Naval Base gone, the Ukrainian Navy essentially needed to start from scratch. Seventy percent of naval personnel either defected or were dismissed, and the fleet was now just one frigate — a ship that had been deployed at the time”* (Eckstein 2021). Thus, Ukraine has begun a major effort to rebuild its navy with the help of NATO, ordering several patrol boats from the United States, training with NATO, and above all several partnerships with Turkey. Thus in 2020, Ukraine ordered two Ada-class corvettes while in 2021, the first Bayraktar drones were delivered to the Ukrainian navy. But this effort was still incomplete when the war broke out on February 24, 2022, the Ukrainian navy is mainly composed of small coast guard patrol boats and the only frigate that has remained loyal to Ukraine. In comparison, the Russian Black Sea Fleet appears like a behemoth capable of crushing the Ukrainian navy effortlessly. Having several frigates, submarines, and a cruiser, in addition to a myriad of auxiliary vessels, it can rely on several bases including Sevastopol. Finally, the Russian fleet can also count on several thousand men belonging to the naval infantry, or paratroopers. For example, at the start of the war, a large number of these troops were used to land on the Ukrainian coast: *“A Russian amphibious assault is underway in Ukraine, pushing thousands of Russian naval infantry from the Sea of Azov onto land west of port town Mariupol, according to a U.S. defense official”* (Ozberk 2022). And before the invasion, Russia reinforced its fleet with ships from other fleets, and other soldiers, in the end, this allowed it to have 21 surface ships, 7 submarines, 200 support ships, and nearly 28,000 marines¹. When the special military operation begins on February 24, 2022, the balance of naval forces present is largely in favor of Russia. Despite everything, in this war, Ukraine only faces part of the Russian fleet, in fact, due to geographical constraints, it is divided into several commands around the country. But when war was declared, Turkey closed the Bosphorus Strait to all military vessels, effectively preventing Russia from sending reinforcements of large ships from other fleets to the Black Sea fleet.

The start of the fighting and Russian domination

When Russia launched its invasion on February 24, its first move in the maritime theater was to ban all commercial shipping in the northwestern part of the Black Sea, the entire EEZ of Ukraine, including the Sea of Azov, although officially it is not a blockade in the legal sense of the term: *“Apart from an unspecified announcement of suspension, nothing more indicates that Russia has established a blockade that might give Russian naval and air forces enforcement powers against merchant vessels”* (Fink 2022). Russia wants to create a Russian lake by completely controlling the waters surrounding Ukraine. Several landing operations were then launched to quickly seize the Ukrainian coasts, it was a great success for Russia, Kherson and the island of Snakes fell in a few hours, Mykolaiv was heavily bombarded and the port of Berdiansk was taken on February 28. Faced with the Russian advance, the Ukrainians scuttled their largest ship on March 3, the frigate Hetman Sahaydatchniy in the port of

¹ Xavier Tracol, « 300 jours de guerre en Mer noire », Los n°66, march 2023 :5

Mykolaiv for fear that Russia would seize it. Quickly all the coasts of the Sea of Azov were in the hands of Russia, only Mariupol resisting for many months despite the determination of the Russians to seize it, in fact the control of Mariupol was vital to establishing a land bridge between the Russian territory and the “island” of Crimea surrounded by Ukrainian territory. Following these successes, a group of Russian amphibious ships was on their way to Odesa to carry out a landing, but ultimately, undoubtedly for fear of the Ukrainian defenses, the Russian squadron cruised off the coast of Odesa for 15 days before leaving. retreat. In addition to the blockade and deployment of troops on the ground, from the first days of the invasion, Kalibr land attack cruise missiles launched from the Black Sea Fleet took part in the bombardment *“With over a thousand missiles launched into Ukraine by Russian forces it is safe to say that several hundred of those were naval strike missions, particularly around Odessa and coastal targets”*. (ARMSTRONG 2022). But from the second half of March 2022, we see a clear slowdown in Russian operations in the Black Sea, no more amphibious assaults, only missile bombardment missions. Two hypotheses can explain this according to Xavier Tracol², first the intensive mining of their coasts by the Ukrainians, undoubtedly not planned on such a scale by Russia, then by the presence of several batteries of Ukrainian Neptune anti-ship missiles, preventing the Russian fleet from to get too close to the coast.

The Russian naval strategy in the Black Sea

It will be understood that the Russian naval strategy in the invasion of Ukraine was overall a success with the capture of a large part of Ukrainian territory and the neutralization of the offensive capabilities of the Ukrainian navy. The Russian naval strategy was interspersed with the overall plan to seize Ukraine, a real blitzkrieg in the country, using the full force of the Russian army to outflank Ukraine and paralyze its decision-making process. According to the US Naval College, *“Russian leaders predicted that Zelensky would flee within days, leaving Kyiv naked and allowing Russia to install a puppet government by mid-March”* (Cropsey 2022). As we said in section B, the Russian navy had two main tasks, to destroy the Ukrainian capacity to retaliate at sea, but more importantly to support the operations of the Russian army in its advance westward. Finally, a last task, less important for Moscow given the expectation of a quick and short invasion of Ukraine, was to block the Ukrainian coasts from all commercial navigation, although officially, it was not a blockade in the legal sense. of the term. Russia's naval strategy was resolutely committed to supporting land operations, but given the failure of the initial Russian strategy of the rapid collapse of Ukraine and the arrival of more and more Western weapons, it required rethinking the role of the navy in a longer war. Faced with the need for a new strategy, the Russian Navy focused its resources on three different tasks. Firstly, the maintenance and strengthening of the blockade of Ukraine to stifle it economically, with its ships equipped with anti-ship missiles but also with the intensive mining of Ukraine's coast. Second, which is the most important task of the navy, supporting land operations with missile strikes against land and establishing a protective bubble against air attacks. The final task was to create secure maritime links to supply the Russian army and counterbalance the latter's failing logistics. The Russian army depends on rail for its logistics but the south of Ukraine is poor in terms of the rail network. Although Ukraine did not seem to be able to fight against this strategy, it was not the case that NATO could intervene, so to deter NATO, Russia implemented a second strategy, that of the bastion. This strategy consists of locking down part of a sea with land (coastal battery), air, and naval means to guarantee Russian superiority: *“This bastion can then be used to maintain sea control, deter foreign naval interference, and make any*

² Xavier Tracol, « 300 jours de guerre en Mer noire », Los n°66, march 2023 :6

political settlement” (FIOTT 2022). This is the Russian naval strategy for the first months of the conflict against Ukraine, but quickly, it appears that Ukraine refuses to play Russia's game and counterattacks in the Black Sea.



Grain stores destroyed at Odessa by Russian bombardments, Source: BBC News

Chapter 4: A slow erosion of the Russian naval power

The clap of thunder: the Moskva destruction

On April 13, 2022, the Ukrainians announced that they had succeeded in seriously hitting the cruiser Moskva, the Russian flagship of the Black Sea Fleet. On April 14, Russia announced the loss of the ship, officially due to an accidental munitions explosion. It is certain today that it was indeed two Ukrainian Neptune missiles that caused the loss of the ship. This event is a real shock because it showed the whole world that Russia, supposed to be invincible at sea, did not have it, and by what symbol?



The destruction of its flagship by a nation without a navy and according to Russian propaganda suffering losses impossible to bear. Several factors explain Ukraine's success, firstly the predictability of its trajectory the ship followed the same operational plan since the start of the war with around ten days of operation followed by resupply in Sevastopol, and those each time in the same area: *“The entire sailing itinerary of the Moskva began to fit into a predictable pattern — something that no warship ought to be comfortable with”* (Agnihotri 2022).

The Moskva shortly after Ukrainian strikes, Source: CNN

Then the Ukrainians would have located the ship first with the help of a NATO device according to several Western media: *“Intelligence shared by the U.S. helped Ukraine sink the Russian cruiser Moskva, U.S. officials told NBC News”* (Ken Dilanian 2022), and precisely with a TB2 Bayraktar drone that the cruiser would have had difficulty locating, the drone making it possible to easily guide the

missiles, but the Russian navy at this stage of the war did not see the Ukrainians as capable of threatening a ship at sea, particularly the Moskva. Finally, the last reason is the age of the ship, despite Russian declarations on the power of this ship, it was put into service under the USSR in the 70s and little modernized since³. The Ukrainian Neptune missiles, on the contrary, are very modern, having entered service in March 2021. It is this combination of causes that caused the loss of the ship and this real humiliation for the Russian navy. But beyond the psychological effects, this loss greatly reduced the action capabilities of the Russian navy the Moskva was the only ship carrying the S-300 anti-aircraft system, the only one capable of providing cover air and anti-missile attacks to the rest of the Russian fleet, effectively forcing Russian ships to move away from the Ukrainian coast. As a result, the entire Russian naval strategy had to be redesigned in the face of the deterioration of Russian naval capabilities, for example not being able to risk sailing with large ships from Serpents Island, Russia had to abandon the island in June 2022. Two more important consequences have been created, the increased vulnerability of the Russian fleet to drone and missile attacks, as shown by the numerous attacks against Russian ships: *“Jun 17: Russian ship Vasiliy Bekh, carrying a SA-15 GAUNTLET (Tor) air-defense missile system, is sunk by Harpoon or Neptune missiles”* (Sutton 2023), and the obligation to loosen the blockade of Ukraine.

Russia is pushing-out of the west Black Sea

As we have seen, the destruction of the Moskva allowed Ukraine to begin a real counter-offensive in the Black Sea, from May 2022, several elements will gradually allow Ukraine to threaten Russian ships with approaches at sea and then to their home ports. First, the delivery of Harpoon anti-ship missiles by NATO made it possible to supplement the Ukrainian inventory of these weapons and force Russian ships to move further away from the coast. Ukraine will use its various missiles to create a climate of permanent tension in the Black Sea with multiple attacks, whether against Russian ships or oil platforms. But the majority of Ukrainian efforts in the summer of 2022 in the Black Sea will be against Serpents Island, as we have said, the destruction of the Moskva prevented the Russians from properly resupplying their troops but also made them vulnerable to attacks. Ukrainians follow one another, with TB2 drones, planes, or even gunner fire, in particular the CAESARs delivered by France. Finally, Russia announced that it was withdrawing from the island on June 30, "having accomplished its objectives", with this loss, most of the Russian ships withdrew from this part of the Black Sea: *“Threatened by Harpoon and Neptune, Russian ships largely withdrawn from western side of northern Black Sea. This is a significant change in the balance”* (Sutton 2023). The loss of the island allowed the Ukrainians to clear a corridor to allow ships to circulate near the coast and “bizarrely” on June 27, the two belligerents agreed on the Black Sea Grain Initiative (BSGI), effectively breaking the blockade of Odesa. Even so, Russia can still interdict Ukraine's maritime traffic, albeit at a greater cost. In response and to facilitate future counter-offensives on land, Ukraine will begin to attack Crimea and especially Sevastopol with maritime and aerial drones and cruise missiles.

These attacks resulted in the destruction and damage of several crucial Russian ships and installations. We will not deal with each of these attacks but only some that clearly show the dynamics that have taken place in the Black Sea. On October 29, 2022, several naval drones attacked the ships remaining in the Sevastopol base, and the new Russian flagship, Admiral Makarov, was damaged. Following this attack, Russia temporarily withdrew its fleet to send it to Novorossiysk, drastically limiting its navy's capacity for action. Despite several attacks, the maritime theater remained generally calm until July 2023, on July 18 Russia announced that it was withdrawing from the grain agreement which allowed

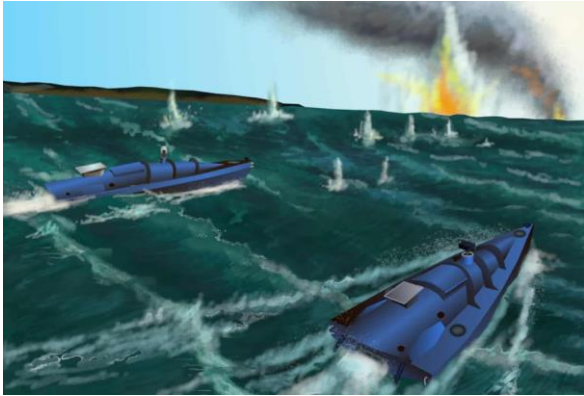
³ Pascal Colombier « La perte du Moskva, Tentative d'analyse », Los n°62, July 2022 :7

ships carrying grain to pass without being disturbed by the forces of the two countries: *"To mark its withdrawal from the grain deal, announced two days earlier, Moscow declared that any vessels that sailed to Ukrainian ports would from now on be seen as military targets"* (Vincent 2023). Ukraine indicated in response that it would continue to use this corridor to transport grain and would continue to shell the Russian fleet. More and more attacks will then be carried out against Crimea, in particular with the Anglo-French Storm Shadow (or SCALP) missiles. Thus on September 13, 2023, several Storm Shadow missiles hit the Sevastopol base, seriously damaging a landing ship and especially the Rostov-on-Don submarine, to the point of making its repair almost impossible, this is the first loss of a submarine in combat since the loss of the Argentinian Santa Fe during the Falklands War. This remarkable success was followed on September 22 by the strike, again with Storm Shadow missiles, on the headquarters of the Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol: *"The Sept. 22 strike on Crimea kills 33 Russian officers, with Ukraine initially claiming that the commander of the Black Sea Fleet Viktor Sokolov died in the strike"* (Mongilio 2023). Ultimately these multiple strikes forced Russia to permanently move part of its fleet to Novorossiysk to protect them from Ukrainian attacks. This is a real defeat for Russia, which can no longer use its fleet to have a lasting impact on the battlefield. Ukraine, a country without a navy, has forced the world's third fleet into retirement. This success of Ukraine was also claimed by President Zelensky on October 24, 2023: *"The Russian fleet is no longer able to operate in the western part of the Black Sea and is gradually fleeing from Crimea. And this is a historic achievement"* (Germond 2023).

How Ukraine succeeds?

Ukraine managed to drive the Russian fleet from much of the Black Sea, a gigantic accomplishment for a country with almost no navy, but how did Ukraine achieve this feat? Several answers are possible, Western aid, Russia's overconfidence in its strength, Ukraine's ingenuity... It is a set of factors that allowed this result. First, it seems appropriate to discuss the role of drones in the Ukrainian naval strategy these weapons have become the face of the Ukrainian forces in the battle of the Black Sea in the eyes of public opinion due to their novelty and their impact on the conflict. Ukraine began using and developing naval drones very early in the conflict, surprising Russia who did not seem to expect such effectiveness from its weapons, for example in the attack on the port of Sevastopol. in October 2022, *"Ukraine has employed explosive uncrewed surface vessels (USVs) as formidable weapons against Russian fleets and even infrastructure"* (McClure 2023). After the drones, we will explain the important role played by NATO's support for Ukraine's fight, for almost two years now, the news has been flooded with images of tanks, cannons, and planes sent to Ukraine but a very important element is much less discussed, the sending of Harpoon anti-ship missiles to secure the country's coasts. These missiles, added to the Ukrainian Neptune missiles that we spoke about above, made it possible to destroy several Russian ships and defend the Ukrainian coasts but also to restrict their freedom of action in the Black Sea, leaving them more vulnerable to drone attacks. In addition to these purely anti-ship missiles, the delivery of cruise missiles like the SCALP increased Ukrainian strike power, allowing it to destroy targets at long range and with great precision, as we saw in the attack of September 13, 2023, to thwart Russian air defense and attack the Black Sea Fleet in its most secure base. But when you add on top of that the various intelligence provided by NATO, we understand how vital Western support is for the success of Ukrainian weapons in the Black Sea. The third factor that explains Ukrainian success is the geography of the Black Sea, which conditions all the fighting. The Black Sea is closed, and as a result, it is difficult for ships in operation to have the correct freedom of action like what could be found in the Atlantic.

This is one of the reasons that explain the success of the Ukrainians, by restricting the evolution capabilities of Russian ships, they made themselves more predictable and therefore easier to attack. In addition, Turkey has prohibited any warship from the two belligerents from entering the Black Sea through the Bosphorus, using the Montreux Convention of 1936⁴: *“When the Ukraine war began, Türkiye used the authority granted to it in the convention to prevent Russian warships from entering the Black Sea”*. This Turkish decision especially limits Russia, which cannot therefore send reinforcements naval forces of these other fleets in the Black Sea. Ultimately, it is the combination of these elements, as well as a certain dose of overconfidence on the part of Russia, which allowed Ukraine to push the latter out of a good part of the Black Sea. Today, it cannot be denied that Ukraine



Ukrainian drones attacking Sevastopol, Source: USNI News

has won this phase of the naval war between it and Russia. This victory led to a large number of implications, whether military, political, or even economic.

Chapter 5: Today, a near victory for Ukraine

The situation now

At the time of writing these lines, i.e., the end of 2023, the situation is stable between the two belligerents, Ukraine continues to launch more and more attacks against Russia in the Black Sea while, conversely, Russia instead seeks to protect its fleet and infrastructure with a view to a long war. The Ukrainian strategy has not changed since the start of the war now: harass the Russian forces to inflict the greatest possible number of losses, and clear the western part of the Black Sea of any Russian presence. In addition, attacking the Black Sea and Crimea forces Russia to strip the front to protect this vital region for the Russian war effort, particularly since the launch of the Ukrainian offensive in June 2023. Each Russian soldier or equipment withdrawn from the front to protect Crimea is a victory for Ukraine. This strategy is still effective, largely illustrated by the Russian decision to withdraw part of its fleet to Novorossiysk: *“This forced many Russian vessels to leave Sevastopol and relocate to Novorossiysk in pre-2014 Russia. British Armed Forces Minister James Heappey described it as the functional defeat of the Black Sea Fleet”* (Sharpe 2023). Every day more and more merchant ships can arrive in Ukraine without being worried by Russia, increasingly usurping the reputation of Russian

⁴ Permanent Delegate of Turkey, “TRANSLATION CONVENTION REGARDING THE REGIME OF THE STRAITS SIGNED AT MONTREUX”, League of Nations Communicate, 20 July 1936.

forces. But even if Ukraine won this round, we should not conclude that Russia can no longer act in the Black Sea, it still has very significant resources, a navy far superior to Ukraine, and the capacity to attack and act on the ground if Russia chooses to ignore losses like what is happening on the land front: *“Russia has managed to achieve tactical progress at the expense of intense loss of human life in meat grinder assaults”* (SHANDRA 2023). This is what the situation is today in the Black Sea, Ukraine is on the offensive which seeks to accentuate its advantage, while Russia on the side wants to preserve its forces with a view to a long war that could give it back the advantage.

The non-military consequence of the Ukrainian victory

The Ukrainian victory in the maritime theater of the war is a huge surprise, as we have said, and this victory has generated a large number of consequences not only on the military level.

One of the first consequences was the grain deals, as soon as Ukraine was able to force the Russians away from their coasts in July 2022, Russia stopped opposing a deal to allow the Passage of ships collecting Ukrainian grain, although the quantities transported were much lower than before the war, this helped to relieve some of the pressure on the Ukrainian economy.

More recently when Russia withdrew from the agreement in July 2023, trade ceased again before Ukraine created a humanitarian corridor for grain flows, Ukraine's progress at sea and the apparent weakness of the Russian navy have allowed more and more ships to use this corridor to reach Ukraine: *“A bulk carrier has left Ukraine's Odesa port, deputy prime minister Oleksandr Kubrakov said on Friday - the fifth to sail since Russia withdrew from a safe-passage deal for grain ships”* (Pruchnicka 2023). In response to the loss of effectiveness of its blockade, Russia attempted to destroy Ukrainian port capacities although Ukraine's air defense managed to limit the damage: *“Since its withdrawal from the Black Sea Grain Initiative, Russia has damaged 26 port infrastructure facilities in Odesa, Chornomorsk and Reni”* (Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office 2023). From a propaganda point of view, it is also a great victory for Ukraine, which strives to highlight the slightest feat of arms of these troops on this front, in part to hide the failure of its counteroffensive. By showing its success at sea, the country shows its ability to win the war and reassures not only its population

Ukraine's corn exports through Black Sea drop as deal ends



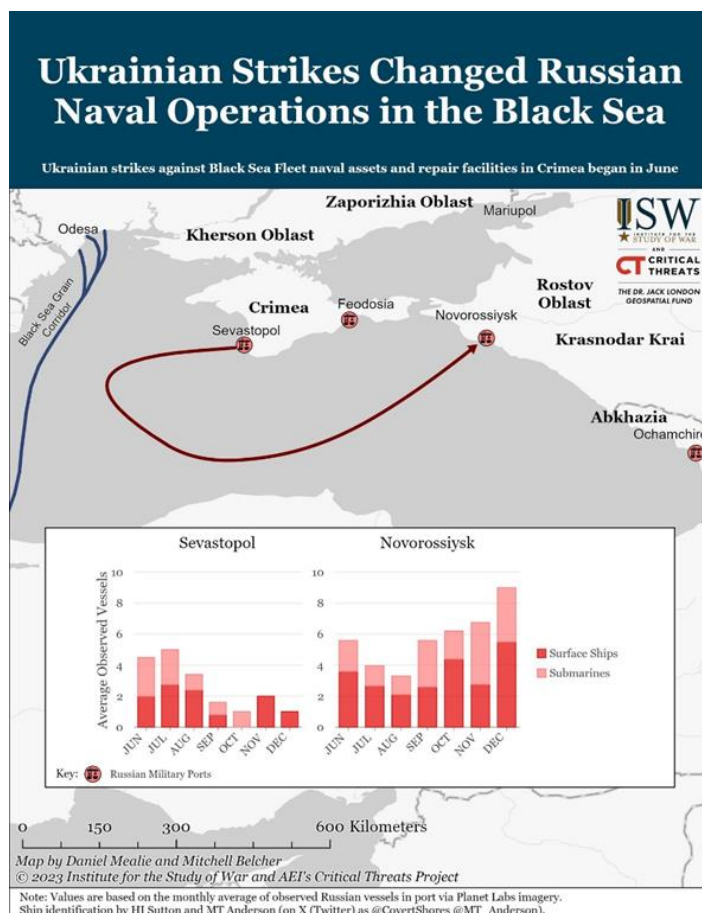
Source: Ministry of Agrarian Policy and Food of Ukraine

Source: Ministry of agrarian policy and food of Ukraine

but also public opinion and Western governments. Finally, the success of Ukraine also allows diplomatic successes, so at the time of writing, an agreement would be on the verge of being concluded between Turkey, Romania, and Bulgaria to create a joint demining force in the Black Sea: *“NATO members Bulgaria, Turkey, and Romania are close to reaching an agreement on the creation of a joint mine-clearing force to address the issue of mines drifting into their respective territorial waters”* (desk 2023). This agreement demonstrates that for Westerners the priority in the Black Sea is to create secure maritime routes with Ukraine, making it possible to reduce costs, particularly insurance costs,

and to help the Ukrainian economy. Additionally, it would be NATO's first operation in the Black Sea since the start of the war, sending a powerful message about the erosion of the Russian navy's perceived threat capability: *"This is a very important and strong political, diplomatic and military statement in favor of the defense of freedom of navigation and upholding freedom of the seas. Indeed, it would demonstrate that there is no going back to the situation when Russia's threats were credible enough to dictate the terms and conditions of navigation and maritime trade in the region"* (Germond 2023).

The military consequence



Source : *The Economist*

withdrawal of Russian naval units, most of them heading towards Novorossiysk to protect them from increasingly destructive Ukrainian attacks. In addition, Russia signed an agreement for a permanent naval base in the separatist Georgian region of Abkhazia, to complement the Novorossiysk base: *"A Day after he met President Vladimir Putin, Aslan Bzhania, the self-styled president of Russian-backed Abkhazia, said on Thursday that an agreement had been signed for a permanent naval base in the Ochamchira region"* (Faulconbridge 2023). In addition to preventing these ships from intervening in the conflict, their withdrawal makes Crimea ever more vulnerable to Ukrainian attacks, which have not

Now we will study the military consequences of the Ukrainian victory, as for the political or economic consequences, they are multiple and as the war continues, they will only increase in number. Firstly, the retreat of the Russian fleet from the western Black Sea prevents it from playing a role in the land battle, it cannot logistically support the troops near Kherson for example, or use missiles to strike Ukraine (apart from submarines), missiles which, moreover, are in very limited numbers today⁵. We see that for more than a year now, Russia has mainly used inexpensive drones rather than exorbitantly expensive missiles to bomb Ukraine: *"A new night attack by Russian drones has left one dead and damaged the port infrastructure of the region of Odesa, in the south of Ukraine, the country's authorities said on Thursday, saying they had shot down 15 of the 18 aircraft"* (AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE 2023). The second military consequence of this

Ukrainian victory is the partial

⁵ Nardelli, Champion and Drozdak, "Unexploded Missile Suggests Moscow Is Rushing Weapons to the Front", Bloomberg, August 17, 2023

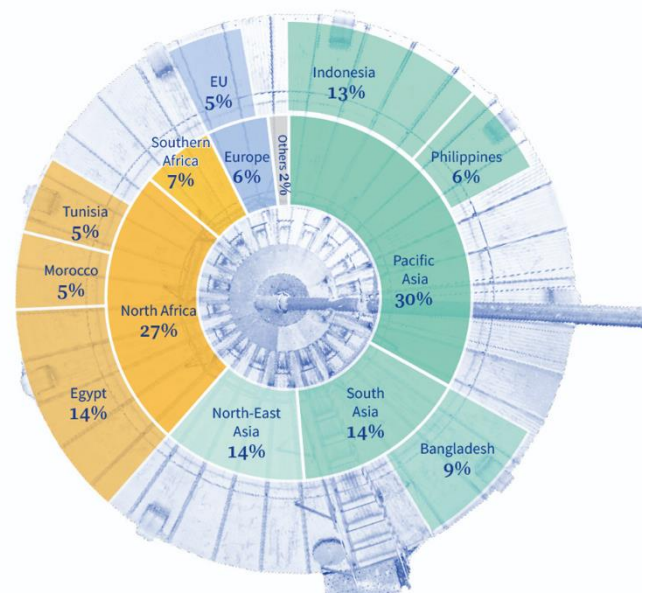
let up, particularly since the start of Ukraine's offensive in June 2023. These ships can neither participate in supplying Crimea nor defend it from air and sea attacks from Ukraine; Russia thinks that the threat to its fleet prohibits leaving too many of them stationed in Sevastopol or the rest of Crimea, an opinion quickly verified by facts: *"The Askold missile corvette was successfully destroyed while it was still at the Zaliv plant in the temporarily occupied Kerch before it could even get commissioned to the Russian Navy"* (Defense Express 2023). This Russian loss is all the more significant as the ship and its shipyard were located near the Kerch Bridge, a major strategic link between Crimea and Russia, and were protected by the best Russian anti-aircraft system, the S-400. This is a direct demonstration of Crimea's growing vulnerability to Ukrainian attacks. Ultimately, each ship, each infrastructure that Ukraine destroys allows it to get closer to its objective, defeating Russia and recovering all of its territories.

The Russian defeat in the Black Sea therefore had major consequences on the course of the war. But the importance of the Black Sea on a global level means that the Russian defeat has enormous consequences on the two belligerents, consequences that go beyond the war between Ukraine and Russia.

Chapter 6: The Black Sea for the World

The Black Sea, an essential way for the transport of food

The Black Sea is of critical importance to global food security, due to its central role in the transportation of grains and other essential agricultural products. This region is the heart of a major agricultural zone, where Russia and Ukraine, two of the world's largest exporters of wheat, corn, and other cereals, ship a significant part of their production: *"Ukraine is the world's largest exporter of sunflower oil (50% of world exports), the third largest one of barley (18%), the fourth largest one of maize (16%) and the fifth largest one of wheat (12%)"* (Council of the European Union 2023). The war in Ukraine has highlighted the vulnerability of these trade routes and their impact on global food security.



Ukrainian wheat Export, Source: International Grains Council, data 2016-2021 average

First, the Black Sea is a strategic sea route for grain exports. Ukrainian ports such as Odesa and Russian ports such as Novorossiysk play a crucial role in transporting these products to Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East. This region represents a transit point for approximately 30% of global wheat exports and a substantial proportion of global corn and sunflower oil exports. Thus, any disruption in this region can have significant repercussions on global grain markets. The war in Ukraine has led to

major disruptions in these trade flows. Russia's blockades of Ukrainian ports, damage to port infrastructure, and security risks have severely limited Ukraine's export capabilities⁶. This situation has caused a rise in global grain prices, particularly affecting import-dependent countries, such as Egypt and Lebanon: *"Ukrainian exports – especially of wheat – are of crucial importance to some Asian and African countries. From 2016 to 2021, they received 92% of Ukrainians wheat"* (Council of the European Union 2023). Even if the situation improved with the June 2022 grain agreement, Russia's withdrawal caused a further rise in prices. Additionally, insecurity in the Black Sea has hampered the delivery of agricultural inputs such as fertilizers, of which Russia is also a large producer, exacerbating challenges to global agricultural production: *"The sanctions against Russian oligarchs have made it more complicated for their companies to operate and more than 400,000 tons of fertilizer were initially stranded in European Union ports, though some have now been released and exported to Africa"* (Angel 2023). The dependence of many developing countries on grain exports from the Black Sea increases their vulnerability to food shocks. These countries face increasing difficulties in securing affordable alternatives, and worsening problems of hunger and malnutrition.

For example, in Africa, where several countries rely heavily on imported wheat for their food consumption, price increases have led to acute food crises: *"Inflation in Ghana reached a record high of 37.8% in September, mainly because of the price of food, according to the Ghana Statistical Service"* (ADF redaction 2022). Additionally, price volatility caused by disruptions in the Black Sea is having ripple effects on global markets. High grain prices increase the cost of animal feed, which impacts the prices of meat and dairy products. This situation also affects global agricultural producers, who face increased costs for inputs and increased market uncertainty. The conflict in Ukraine and tensions in the Black Sea also highlight the need to diversify food supply sources and strengthen the resilience of global food supply chains. Overreliance on a small number of large exporters creates systemic risks, highlighting the importance of developing agricultural capacity in other regions and supporting local food systems.

The strategic importance of the black sea for the world

The Black Sea is of crucial importance as an economic crossroads and strategic space and plays a key role in global geopolitics. Its geographic location makes it a vital focal point for international trade, energy security, and defense operations. Economically, the Black Sea is a major axis for international trade.



Grain Transport in Odessa, Source : France 24

It serves as a corridor for the transportation of energy resources, including oil and natural gas, from the Caspian region to Europe and the Middle East. This includes energy infrastructure projects such as the Southern Gas Corridor, essential for diversifying Europe's energy sources and reducing its dependence on Russian suppliers, an issue that has become critical with the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

⁶ (Ministry of Agrarian Policy and Food for Ukraine 2023), "Foreign trade in agriculture products", Tableau Public, December 6, 2023

Azerbaijan, for example, has become one of the main gas suppliers to the EU, with a large part of this gas transiting through Turkey and the Black Sea: *"In July 2022, the European Commission signed a memorandum of agreement with Azerbaijan to increase natural gas imports to at least 20 billion cubic meters a year by 2027 from the Azeri gas fields"* (Kotzakioulafis 2023). Black Sea ports, located in countries such as Turkey, Bulgaria, and Romania, are hotspots for the transportation of these resources, as well as for trade between Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. But other players have a great interest in the Black Sea, China being one of the most important. China's Belt and Road Initiative, an ambitious plan to expand Chinese trade and infrastructure networks across Eurasia, sees the Black Sea used as a strategic crossroads and access for the European market: *"Trains coming of China pass through Kazakhstan from the hub of Khorgos to the port of Aktau on the Caspian Sea. The goods are then transported by barge to the port of Baku in Azerbaijan to head towards the port of Poti in Georgia then that of Constanta in Romania"* (Larçon,2022).

Thus the importance of the Black Sea for China lies in its key role in the extension of Chinese economic and geopolitical ambitions. In addition, the Black Sea is, as we have seen, a vital center for agricultural exports. The region is an important departure point for exports of cereals and other agricultural products to global markets, playing a significant role in global food security. From NATO's perspective, the Black Sea is strategic for containing Russian influence. Several countries bordering the Black Sea are members of NATO (such as Turkey, Bulgaria, and Romania) or aspire to become one (such as Ukraine and Georgia). NATO's presence in the region aims to ensure the security of its members and counter Russian force projection, particularly since the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

The Black Sea helps contain Russia and prevent it from spreading its influence, particularly military influence, too strongly. Due to Russian geography, Russian naval forces are naturally contained in seas that are either closed, such as the Baltic or the Black Sea, or seas at risk of being caught in ice, such as the Barents Sea or the Pacific. Moreover, ensuring access to "warm seas" has been a constant in Russian strategy at least since the 18th century *"One of Russia's primary motivations in entering World War I was to seize control of the Turkish Straits"* (Toucas 2017). Conversely, for a large part of history, rival states of Russia managed to contain the latter to prevent it from accessing warm seas, particularly the British Empire in the 19th century in the "great games"⁷.

Today, NATO and particularly the USA have every interest in repeating the British strategy and preventing Russia from spreading its influence: *"First and foremost, the Black Sea region is an area of critical geostrategic importance, it is also a key front line for transatlantic security"* (Garamone 2023). NATO activities in the region include joint military exercises, strengthening the defense capabilities of member states, and surveillance operations to maintain regional stability.

⁷ "The Great Game": rivalry in the 19th century between the Russian and British Empires, who competed for influence on the borders of Central Asia and India.

Chapter 7: The importance of the Black Sea for the two belligerents

The importance of the Black Sea for Ukraine

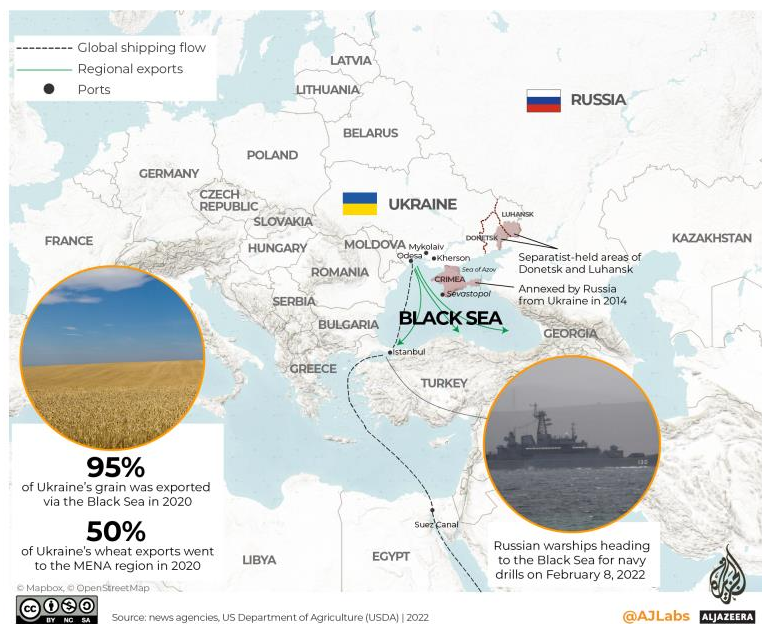
We will not return to the military importance of the Black Sea for Ukraine, here it is rather the economic and political importance of the Black Sea for Ukraine that will interest us. The Black Sea is Ukraine's only maritime facade, it is the only opening to the world that does not depend on other countries (if we exclude Turkey and the Dardanelles) and as such, it is through this sea through which the majority of trade flows leaving and entering Ukraine passed. For example: *"In peacetime, over 50% of Ukraine's total exports went through Odesa, the country's largest Black Sea port"* (Latschan 2023). The war and the Russian blockade have enormously weakened the Ukrainian economy which has faced multiple shocks, invasion of national territory, multiple destructions, bombings...

Even if Ukraine can today pass more and more ships through a corridor near its coasts with the weakening of the Russian blockade: *"Latest figures suggest that over 200 ships have now used the western corridor, carrying over 7 million tons of cargo from Ukraine"* (Sharpe 2023), the quantities transported do not are still not comparable to those they were before the war. Helping the Ukrainian economy was one of the priorities of Westerners, with multiple financial aid *"The Council reached agreement on a legislative package which will enable the EU to help Ukraine financially throughout 2023 with €18 billion"* (Council of the EU 2022), but also by diverting trade flows from the Black Sea to land, which although positive cannot fully compensate for the quantities lost due to the war.

TRADE

Geoeconomics of the Black Sea

Ukraine relies on **Black Sea ports to export** agricultural goods **around the globe**.



Source : Al Jazeera

This situation was also reinforced by the country's railway situation. Ukraine, like the rest of the former countries of the Russian Empire, has a rail network with a track spacing different from the rest of Europe, limiting the volume of flows that can use the rail route: *"The Ukrainian products now have only one possible outlet: Western Europe. But there are many obstacles, notably the difference in track gauge between Ukrainian rails (1,520 mm) and those of other European countries (1,435 mm) – a legacy of Tsarist Russia"* (Pecqueur 2022).

Finally, following the war, the losses for the Ukrainian economy are terrible, but the country is starting to recover according to the World Bank, and the virtual lifting of the Russian maritime blockade will allow the Ukrainian economy to go without doubt much better in 2024: *“Ukraine's economy is likely to grow by 3.5% in 2023 and 4% in 2024 after contracting by almost 30% in 2022, thanks to ongoing donor support, more stable electricity supply, increased government spending, a better harvest, and the rerouting of some exports across the country's western borders”* (World Bank 2023).

As for the political importance of the Black Sea for Ukraine, it is indisputable, that one of Russia's goals is to dominate the Black Sea like that of the USSR, Ukraine cannot allow Russia to achieve its objectives. Furthermore, the Russian annexation of Crimea is still rejected by Ukraine, which claims total control of the peninsula, including its war objectives: *“Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy vowed on Wednesday to end Russia's occupation of Crimea although Russia shows no sign of abandoning the peninsula”* (Gillespie 2023).

The importance of the Black Sea for Russia

The Black Sea is also of great importance to Russia, although due to its geography, it is not as dependent on it as Ukraine. The fact remains that the Black Sea, a strategic crossroads between Europe and Asia, is one of the main entry and exit points for goods in Russia. The war with Ukraine is undermining the Russian position in this sea. Economically first, the Black Sea allows Russia year-round access to European and African markets, in particular with the port of Novorossiysk, which is a hub for grain or hydrocarbon flows for example. Thus in 2018, *“the Novorossiysk Commercial Sea Port has the largest cargo turnover among Russian ports and the fifth-largest in Europe. The port handles approximately 20 percent of all export and import cargoes shipped via Russian seaports”* (Tsereteli 2018). Additionally, the Black Sea is Russia's only perpetually ice-free seafront, further reinforcing its importance to the world. In addition to the port of Novorossiysk, the Black Sea sees the passage of several pipelines transporting Russian hydrocarbons to Europe and Turkey. The Blue Stream, for example, connects Russia to Turkey and represents nearly 20% of the quantities of gas consumed by Turkey: *“The 15.98 billion cubic meters (bcm) of natural gas (2021) marks the highest annual volume via this major trans-Black Sea gas pipeline since commissioning in 2003. The growth in supplies coincided with a historical record of gas consumption in Turkey. According to preliminary estimates, in 2021 it amounted to around 61 bcm”* (Kuczyński 2022). Then strategically, control of the Black Sea is of enormous importance for Russia's geostrategy and its military deployments. We have talked about the importance of the Black Sea to the Russian economy, but the Black Sea also provides Russia with crucial access to warm seas, a necessity for maintaining its year-round naval presence. The Sevastopol Base, for example, allows the easy projection of force not only in the Black Sea but also in the Mediterranean and the rest of the world, as shown by the numerous Russian deployments to support the Syrian ally: *“Two Russian guided-missile cruisers from Russia's North and Pacific fleets put off the coast of Syria as part of a 16-ship Russian Navy formation”* (LAGRONE 2022). The Black Sea also allows Russia to secure its southern flank against a large number of NATO countries such as Turkey or Romania, but also to use its influence over the Black Sea to carry out surveillance operations, intelligence collection, and maritime interdiction against NATO countries, increasing its strategic influence and strategic reach in the region. We can therefore understand why Russia attaches such strong importance to the Black Sea, but in addition to the weight of this body of water in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, the Black Sea is also of vital importance to the rest of the world. to the point that events taking place in the Black Sea can influence the entire world.

Chapter 8: Russian Black Sea Geostrategy

To regain a supreme position

Now that we have seen why the Black Sea is of such importance to Russia, we will explore why Russia chose to go to war with Ukraine. It must be understood that as soon as the USSR collapsed in 1991, Russia lost its position as an undisputed power in the Black Sea, it only had a reduced maritime frontage and had to deal with many different countries, the Ukraine, Georgia, Romania... Regaining control of the Black Sea, a true bastion of Russian power, will become a near constant in Russian strategy to this day: *“Already in the 2001 edition of Russia's Maritime Doctrine the advance of the legal framework for the functioning of the Black Sea Fleet of the Russian Federation on the territory of Ukraine, maintaining the city of Sevastopol as its main base had been identified as a foundation of national maritime policy” (Kollakowski 2023).*

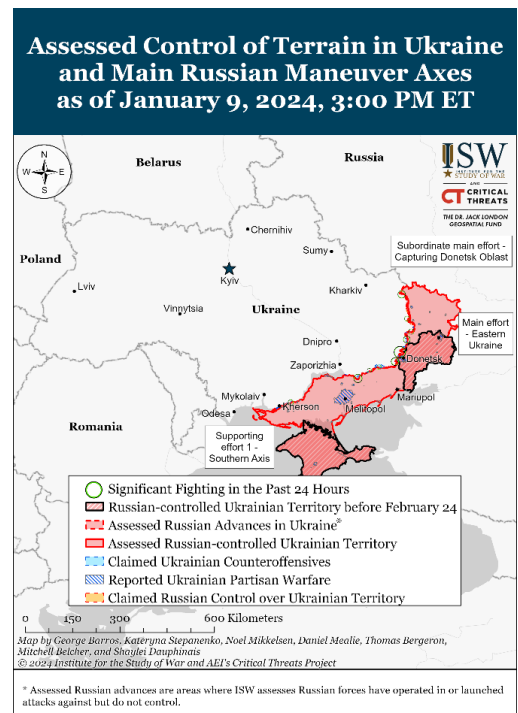
Following the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, Russia faced major naval strategic challenges. Loss of access to key infrastructure, for example, the Mykolaev shipyards⁸, and the threat of NATO expansion in the Black Sea region have posed considerable problems for Moscow. In 2004, Romania and Bulgaria joined NATO, then in 2008 during the NATO summit in Bucharest, the heads of state of the different states agreed that Ukraine and Georgia would eventually become members of NATO: *“We [the NATO heads of states and governments – editor's note] agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO” (Nato 2008).* If two countries joined NATO, Russia would find itself with control of a small part of the Black Sea coast, which would become a veritable lake for NATO naval forces. In response, the Kremlin has made every effort to counter these developments, seeking to improve its strategic position in the face of NATO's naval superiority.

Russia has therefore been motivated to strengthen its geostrategic posture to maintain a balance in the Black Sea region, but also as we saw above, regain control over the various economic flows of the Black Sea and preserve its freedom of action in the Mediterranean. Finally, a final theme has emerged from Russian actions since the dissolution of the USSR, Russia's desire to regain the rank of world power occupied by the USSR, the equal of the United States with a power capable of influencing the whole world: *« A chief cause of Moscow's current hostility towards the US originates in the Soviet Union's collapse after the Cold War. Russia's ruling elites could not accept their country's loss in the greatest geostrategic rivalry of the century as the story's final chapter” (Borshchevskaya 2023).*

⁸ The Mykolaev shipyards were one of the main shipyards in the USSR, building most of the Soviet ships in the Black Sea Fleet, the Moskva for example was built in this yard.

Russia reaction

With its purpose of finding a higher position in the Black Sea, Putin Russia has accomplished many actions over the past two decades, sometimes by hostile actions against its neighbors. First Russia has set out to develop the port of Novorossisk to increase its strategic independence from Ukraine and the port of Sevastopol: *"The Black Sea fleet of the Russian Federation will receive more than 86 billion Roubles for its development by 2020 said on Tuesday the Minister of Army Sergei Choïgu"* (Batunov 2014). Chronologically, it was in 2008 that the actions of Russia took increasingly numerous jobs of the force as a means of action with the invasion of Georgia by Russia during a short war Following latent tension in the separatist regions of southern Ossetia and Abkhazia. Although not directly concerning the Black Sea, the control of these regions by Russia has enabled it to improve its position in the Black Sea, this has also been demonstrated by the announcement of the construction of a future naval base in Russia in Abkhazia.



The results of Russian reaction, Source: The Economist

Then in early 2014, taking advantage of disorders in Ukraine with pro-Russian separatists, Russia seized Crimea and Naval Installations of the Region, Sebastopol the first with as we had approached the capture of most of the Ukrainian fleet. The annexation of Crimea which followed allowed Russia to secure its position in the Black Sea, transforming what was a precarious position, risking being surrounded by NATO, into a solid position allowing it to extend Always further towards the outside, at the cost of its relations with Ukraine which now sees Russia as its greatest enemy and continues its rapprochement with NATO as we indicated in the first part.

The following years saw the incidents multiply in the black sea, both between the Ukrainians with multiple clashes before the war: *"On November 25, 2018, Russian Coast Guard Vessels Fired on and Seized the Three Ukrainian Ships and Their Crews"* (RFE/RL 2019), but also with Westerners as shown by the HMS Defenders incident in 2021: *"On June 23, The Hms Defender - British Type 45 Destroyer - Was Involved in A confrontation with the Russian Military While Sailing Near the Crimean Peninsula. As it passed through territorial Waters Claimed by Russia, The Ship was closely shadowed by Russian Forces. Furthermore, the Russian Military claimed that It Fired Warning Shots and Dropped Bombs in the Vicinity of the Ship, Forcing It To Move Into International Waters"* (Gorenburg 2021).

Finally, when Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine last year, it was only the last episode of the Russian attempt to recover supremacy in the black sea, even if other equally important factors are present (ex: Russia's desire to prevent Ukraine from joining NATO).

The Russian geostrategy situation in black sea today

Since February 24, 2022, the strategic situation for Russia in the Black Sea can be described as mixed, on the one hand, Russian forces have managed to secure a significant part of the Ukrainian coast, increasing the autonomy and influence of Russia in the Black Sea and beyond but its navy has suffered significant losses, its conquests remain uncertain in the long term and Crimea, the jewel of Moscow's conquests, is increasingly threatened by Ukraine as its forces are reinforced. In addition, the invasion of Ukraine has considerably increased the distrust and resentment of many countries, uniting NATO behind a clear threat and increasingly distancing countries that belong or belong to the Russian sphere. Thus countries like Moldova or Georgia are moving further and further away from Russia to get closer to the West, invalidating one of the primary goals of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, to dissuade the former members of the Russian sphere. to get closer to NATO.

Take the example of Georgia, this nation, invaded by Russia in 2008, today sees its people in favor of a rapprochement with NATO and aspires to join the EU *"The European Union recommended on November 8 that Georgia be granted its long-awaited candidate status, an essential step to future membership of the bloc"* (Emil 2023). Paradoxically, the government in power in Tbilisi, on the contrary, seeks to increase ties with Moscow and distance itself from the West: *"Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, trade with Russia has grown threefold, and direct flights resumed, while ties with Brussels have grown strained"* (Borshchevskaya 2023).

At the same time, NATO has strengthened its forces in the Black Sea, to ensure that the increase in Russian influence remains limited, mainly through the deployment of combat aircraft (in the face of Turkey's refusal to leave ships foreigners passing through the Bosphorus Straits), but also by the powerful support for Ukrainian operations in the Black Sea, for example, intelligence. These different elements have created strong tensions in the Black Sea, moreover incidents breaking out between NATO and Russia: *"The Pentagon on Thursday released video footage of the events leading up to a collision between a Russian fighter jet and a U.S. reconnaissance drone on Tuesday that forced the American aircraft down into the Black Sea"* (Bigg 2023). Despite this, it is unlikely that after almost two years of war, the level of tensions will rise even further due to the Black Sea; neither Russia nor the West wants a drastic rise in tensions. Russia's near defeat in the Black Sea today invalidates a large part of Russian geostrategy, the war and defeat in the Black Sea have endangered its diplomatic relations while the numerous losses against Ukraine have humiliated and damaged the reputation of Russian weapons: *"The Indian government canceled or suspended several agreements with Russia to acquire new or upgraded weapon systems a few months after the Russian invasion of Ukraine began."* (Stein 2023), today the return of Russia as the supreme power in the Black Sea can be stopped by the West and Ukraine. Russia's future actions in the Black Sea will be dictated by the evolution of the war, whether it is a victory for Russia or Ukraine or a stalemate between the two belligerents.

Chapter 9: The Future of the Black Sea

The Future of the Battle of the Black Sea

As we write these lines, the fighting in the Black Sea has continued in the same pattern for several months, the Ukrainians attack Russian military assets with drones or missiles while the latter periodically bombard Ukraine with missiles fired from ships at sea or drones fired from land. As for the Land Front, no change seems on the agenda shortly for the two belligerents. But given the failure of its 2023 counter-offensive, Ukrainian success in the Black Sea could encourage Ukraine to concentrate its efforts on Crimea, using the few advances present on the occupied bank of the Dnieper, and increasing pressure by the Black Sea, this strategy seems to be supported by President Zelenski: *“Isolating Crimea, annexed by Russia in 2014, and degrading Russia's military capability there, is extremely important for us because it's the way for us to reduce the number of attacks from that region » (The Economist 2024).*

If Ukraine manages to take Crimea, the entire face of the war will change, firstly, preventing new Russian attacks from the peninsula, will seriously damage Russia's logistical capacity, the Russian blockade would undoubtedly become almost ineffective and finally the capture of Crimea would be a terrible humiliation for Russia and President Putin. Indeed, the capture of the peninsula would demonstrate the blatant failure of the Russian strategy to control the Black Sea. But achieving this victory will be very difficult, Crimea is heavily fortified, and the Ukrainians would have to cross powerful defense lines and install a real bridgehead on the Dnieper before reaching the peninsula. Moreover, Western support in terms of military aid has never been so weak, the Americans locked in political struggles do not seem to be able to agree on aid to Ukraine (*“In a joint statement on Tuesday, Senate leaders said that any military support for Ukraine will be deferred until 2024 as Republicans continue to insist on stringent border concessions (Le Monde with AFP 2023)*) and Europe is today reaching the limits of these capacities. Without Western weapons, it seems doubtful that Ukraine will succeed in taking Crimea, even if the upcoming delivery of F-16 fighters could help. For its part, Russia does not seem to put the Black Sea and Crimea as the next point of importance for the war, instead continuing to attack the land front, for example at Avdiivka: *“Russia has made confirmed advances near Avdiivka and notes that several Russian sources claim its forces are trying to push Ukrainian troops out of*



positions in the Avdiivka Coke Plant, which occupies a key tactical position” (BBC Visual Journalism Team 2023).

In the Black Sea and Crimea, apart from bombing operations, Russian forces do not carry out offensive actions, contenting themselves with defending Crimea and military assets, preserving as much as possible the military potential of the Sea Fleet black. Today, Russia has moved on all fronts to a logic of war of attrition, betting on the time and fatigue of the West to achieve victory, so it does not seem necessary to risk the Russian fleet beyond the necessary and any large-scale Russian naval operations seem unlikely unless there are huge changes in the conflict.

The Black Sea after the war, 3 scenarios

Dealing with the security of the Black Sea after the war is delicate, as was said at the end of 2023, neither of the two belligerents seem to have the strength to impose themselves. Despite this, it is possible to do a thought exercise with three scenarios, first a scenario of a Ukrainian victory, then that of a Russian victory, and finally the scenario of the status quo, without a winner or loser emerging from the situation. conflict.

- **First scenario: a Ukrainian victory**

In this scenario, we consider that Ukraine manages to reconquer all territories occupied by Russia, including Crimea. If Ukraine wins the war, it is almost certain that it will then join NATO and the EU to prevent a new Russian invasion but also to help rebuild its devastated economy, and to guarantee the security of vital maritime routes for the country. With the loss of Crimea and other occupied territories, the Russian Black Sea coastline will be significantly reduced, the loss of Crimean infrastructure will make the reconstruction of the Russian Black Sea Fleet even more time-consuming and complicated, while almost two years of war have already taken its toll: *“In 23 months of hard fighting, the Black Sea Fleet has lost—to Ukrainian drones and missiles—its cruiser, four amphibious ships, a submarine, a supply ship and several patrol boats and landing craft” (Axe 2024).* In addition to these losses, Russia will face a much less favorable naval environment than it is today; with Ukraine joining NATO, the alliance's presence in the Black Sea will increase drastically. , further reducing Russia's freedom of action. But the Ukrainian victory will certainly encourage other countries to move closer to the West while Russian power has so far hovered over them. The first of them is Georgia which, as we have seen, is sending more and more signals to join the EU and ultimately undoubtedly NATO. This vision of a new security environment for the Black Sea is particularly desired by Ukraine: *“Ukrainian authorities promote creating a new system of international security guarantees in the Black Sea region with NATO countries, to prevent all attempts at Russian aggression » (UATV English 2023).* In sum, a Ukrainian victory could radically transform the security environment in the Black Sea, with implications for regional stability, power dynamics, economics, and maritime security.

- **Second Scenario: a Russian victory**

This scenario would see a victory for Russia but this victory is more difficult to define, Russia has changed its war objectives several times without declaring precisely what a victory would be unlike Ukraine which aims to retake its territory. But today, we can consider that a Russian victory would see

the annexation of the territories today occupied by Russia, or even the annexation of part of Ukraine today free like the city of Odesa, a ban for Ukraine from joining NATO or the EU and a drastic reduction of Ukrainian armed forces: *“The fundamental, unquestionable goal of President Vladimir Putin’s Russia can be seen from the outset as denying a Ukrainian victory: preventing Ukraine from existing as an independent, sovereign country that not only controls its territory but also freely decides its future based on the will of the majority of its people”* (MIKLOS 2023). In this scenario, Ukraine could continue to exist but in the form of a rump or vassal state of Russia, moreover, the latter would see its control and its influence over the Black Sea increase tenfold, finding itself much closer to the countries of NATO like Bulgaria or Romania. But this Russian attempt to increase its presence in the Black Sea would risk a much more tense security situation; NATO in response would deploy means to contain Russia, increasing the risk of incident. Finally, Russian victory would dampen the hopes of countries wishing to move closer to the West, thus guaranteeing firmer Russian control over the Black Sea.

- **Third Scenario: the status quo**

In the case of the status quo scenario, it is difficult to take a starting position, because if one chooses to take a stalemate with the situation at the end of 2023, Russia retains a large part of Ukrainian territory and that is a victory of Russia and it is, therefore, a victory for Russia: *“In this light, there are not three, but only two essential scenarios for the course of Russia’s war against Ukraine. There is no “draw.” Any outcome other than a Ukrainian victory, as they define it, would qualify as a victory for Russia”* (MIKLOS 2023). As such, we assume that the status quo would unfold as such: Ukraine manages to retake the territories it occupied before the war but fails to retake Donbas and Crimea, and the situation returns to what it was before the war but this time with Donbass as belonging to Russia and no longer to puppet republics. In this scenario, Ukraine probably joins NATO and the EU, reducing Russian freedom of action but in a very weak way, because it still controls Crimea and the Kerch Strait. NATO increases its operations in the Black Sea but Russia does the same, neither side can change the situation, resulting in tense face-to-face and permanent incidents between the two, comparable to what is happening in the Baltic Sea but in this case with a more influential and powerful Russia in the Black Sea: *“In 2023, NATO air forces across Europe scrambled well over 300 times to intercept Russian military aircraft approaching Alliance airspace, with most intercepts occurring over the Baltic Sea »* (Nato 2023).

Recommendations

We now understand why the battle taking place between Ukraine and Russia in the Black Sea is important for the entire world. Preventing Russia from winning this battle must be one of the vital goals of Western countries in the war in Ukraine. As such, the West, represented in the majority by NATO, should institute a large number of measures not only to help Kyiv in its fight but also to create a stable and sustainable security environment. To do this, Westerners must act not only in Ukraine but throughout the world with an economic, diplomatic, and military strategy. Militarily first, NATO countries must strengthen military aid to Ukraine, which is now under strain, the United States in particular had to use its enormous reserves of equipment to deliver F-16s by example (today the United States has only authorized other NATO countries to deliver F-16s, they do not do so) but also more weapons that would be capable of driving Russia out of Ukraine. Today, despite real massive deliveries, either the West reaches the possible limits of the aid they can provide, or refuses to deliver

in large numbers weapons capable of drastically changing the military situation, these delivery efforts must be intensified. Then, using NATO mechanisms, provide comprehensive security assistance to the Black Sea States in terms of deterrence and defense, and strengthen existing devices "*The French army tested its ability to deploy a device brigade-level emergency within the framework of NATO, a stone's throw from Ukraine*" (RIBOUT. 2023). For the naval domain, NATO will create a naval force after the conflict in the western Black Sea to protect international trade and deter Russian maritime aggression, like the anti-mine force that we have mentioned. upper. Finally, the West should help Ukraine but also other countries bordering the Black Sea to develop their naval forces, such as Georgia, Bulgaria, or Moldova to strengthen their independence from Russia. Diplomatically, Westerners must accelerate as much as possible the entry of Ukraine into the EU and NATO, but also that of other candidate countries such as Georgia. There is also a need to exert stronger influence on China, India, and other neutral or non-aligned states to condemn Russian aggression and help Ukraine, although this will be very difficult. Economically, the West must continue to provide large financial resources to Ukraine to support its war effort, strengthen the already existing sanctions on Russia, or even try to win over China to encourage it to reduce its support for Russia. Finally, adopt a measure increasingly discussed in the media: seize and use frozen Russian funds to help Ukraine: "*Despite legal reservations, policymakers are weighing the consequences of using \$300 billion in Russian assets to help Kyiv's war effort*" (Report 2023). More broadly, the post-war period if Ukraine manages to achieve victory should see Westerners act for the withdrawal of Russian forces from Georgia and Moldova; a resumption of negotiations on arms control; closer economic integration of the Black Sea states with the West, and a corresponding increase in prosperity and living standards; stronger democratic institutions and political stability; a reduction in energy dependence on Russia; and a relaxation of tensions and a reduction in the potential for conflict in the region. The final goal of the Westerners should be to reduce tensions in this unstable region of crucial importance for the world, this is all the more important at a time when tensions between states are becoming greater and greater., an example of stability would be an excellent example to ease tensions elsewhere in the world.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we can see that Ukraine is defeating Russia in the Black Sea using a combination of anti-ship missiles and naval drone cruises in an innovative naval guerrilla strategy. This strategy allowed Ukraine, a country with almost no navy, to drastically limit the freedom and action capabilities of the Russian Black Sea Fleet. This victory, which no one would have bet on February 24, 2022, is a terrible blow for Russia, which sees its entire geostrategy in the Black Sea called into question. Russia's failure in the Black Sea has enormous effects on the two belligerents. Ukraine firstly, as we have seen, needs the Black Sea for its exports, particularly grain and the establishment of a secure corridor for its exports is a real lifeline for Ukraine. For Russia, the Black Sea is also of vital importance, both for its economy, for grain and hydrocarbons in particular, but also for its geostrategy, Russia's access to "warm seas" has been a real obsession for Russia since the time of the Russian Empire. But the importance of controlling the Black Sea goes further than Russia or Ukraine, a war in this sea and it is the business world that is impacted. Firstly, by the fact that a large part of the world trade in food passes through the Black Sea but also in its role as a crossroads between Asia and Europe. In this sea, the trade flows of the two continents intersect, and whoever controls this sea has a certain influence on the world economy. This explains why the Black Sea is not only a springboard for Russian influence in the world but also a bulwark for NATO to control the power of the Kremlin. Whoever can have control over the

Black Sea, whether NATO or Russia, will have enormous influence, including on the countries bordering the Black Sea, if Ukraine and NATO gain. Countries like Georgia or Moldova will see their efforts to integrate into the Western bloc encouraged, but if Russia wins, the opposite will happen.

If Russia loses in the war in Ukraine, how will this defeat impact Russia on a global scale

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