

**BLACK SEA SECURITY: REVIVING  
U.S. POLICY TOWARD THE REGION**

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**HEARING**

BEFORE THE

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON EUROPE AND  
REGIONAL SECURITY COOPERATION**

OF THE

**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS  
UNITED STATES SENATE**

**ONE HUNDRED SEVENTEENTH CONGRESS**

**FIRST SESSION**

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## **BLACK SEA SECURITY: REVIVING U.S. POLICY TOWARD THE REGION**

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**WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 27, 2021**

U.S. SENATE,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON EUROPE AND REGIONAL  
SECURITY COOPERATION,  
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS,  
*Washington, DC.*

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 2:35 p.m., in room SD-G50, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Jeanne Shaheen, chairwoman of the subcommittee presiding.

Present: Senators Shaheen [presiding], Murphy, Van Hollen, Johnson, Romney, and Barrasso.

### **OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JEANNE SHAHEEN, U.S. SENATOR FROM NEW HAMPSHIRE**

Senator SHAHEEN. Good afternoon. This meeting of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee's European Affairs Subcommittee will now come to order, and as I explained to our witnesses, we are going to be having two votes in the middle of this hearing.

We will take turns. We expect the first one to come at about 2:45. We will just try and take turns going to vote and, hopefully, that way we do not have to stop the hearing.

Let me begin by saying how much I appreciate working with Ranking Member Johnson on this hearing. This is a very important topic and very timely, "Black Sea Security: Reviving U.S. Policy Toward the Region," and very much appreciate the three very expert witnesses we have this afternoon.

The Black Sea is a hot spot for the competition between Russia and the West over expansion of the transatlantic community. Six countries—Russia, Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Georgia, and Turkey—hold varying sizes of coastline in the region, but only one country treats the Black Sea as if it is its own sea, and that is Russia.

This hearing provides us an opportunity to step back and to take a more holistic look at the Black Sea region and the patterns of encroachment by Russia. We can also investigate how the U.S. and NATO can each enhance and strengthen their approach to the Black Sea region.

I am encouraged by recent signaling from the NATO Secretary General that NATO will develop an overarching plan for defense of the region.

I am also pleased to see that Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin visited Georgia, Ukraine, and Romania last week. I think this is a

welcome shift in the approach to counter Russia's increased attempts to control the Black Sea.

Russia has a history of waging war and deploying illegal and aggressive tactics to advance its control in the region and to prevent NATO from encroaching upon its southern border.

In 2008, Russia waged war against Georgia and illegally seized the territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In 2014, Russia annexed Crimea and fueled a separatist insurgency in the Donbas region of Ukraine, which is a conflict that continues to claim the innocent lives of Ukrainians every day.

This annexation also empowered Russia to establish a Mediterranean naval task force, significantly enhancing its Black Sea fleet. Collectively, these brazen acts made it painfully clear that Russia was and is prepared to exert economic, military, and political power to thwart NATO expansion and expand its control in the Black Sea.

Russia's malign intentions were on clear display earlier this summer when Senators Portman, Murphy, and I visited Ukraine and Georgia in June. We went to the border with South Ossetia where we witnessed Russia's ongoing borderization and hostile actions against Georgia.

What appeared to be minor territorial aggression from Russia, such as continuing to move the fence further away from the boundary line with South Ossetia, is part of a larger pattern of Russia's bellicose behavior that must continue to be condemned, and I very much appreciate the continued work of the EU monitoring mission who keep watch over those boundaries.

The transatlantic alliance that has maintained our world order for more than 70 years has played an important role in responding to Russia's belligerent behavior. After the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, NATO successfully shored up support for our Eastern European allies.

Sea Breeze, which is an annual exercise involving participation of NATO allies and partners, has also sent an important message of solidarity to our Black Sea allies. However, the NATO response to the Black Sea demands more coordination and political unity like we have seen in the Baltic Assurance Initiative where our Baltic allies helped their cause by standing united against Russian aggression. The inconsistent perspectives for NATO's role among Black Sea nations has also exacerbated this disconnect in our approach.

Although Romania has called for greater NATO presence in the region, Turkey has made it clear they do not want an increased NATO presence. Again, this hinders a coordinated effort.

While robust transatlantic relations are key to combating Russian aggression, the greatest defense against Russia is strong democratic institutions in the Black Sea region. Countries like Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia must continue to rebuff Russia's malign activity by forging ahead on necessary democratic reforms to reflect the will of the people and to move them closer to the transatlantic community.

Confirming ambassadors who will be seated in each of these countries is another key piece of the puzzle to support democracy in the region and to strengthen bilateral ties with the West.

President Biden should swiftly nominate an ambassador to Ukraine to reflect the priority and commitment we place on our bilateral relationship there, but most critical, partisan politics waged by certain members of this committee are obstructing the body from fulfilling its obligation to confirm experienced qualified diplomats in the most important parts of the world, including the Black Sea region, and we have seen that with the appointment of Kent Logsdon to Moldova and Julie Smith to NATO.

These are only 2 of 50 nominees that are being held up for political purposes. We need a fully operational diplomatic corps to ensure our national security structures are staffed and supported.

With that, let me turn to Ranking Member Johnson.

**STATEMENT OF HON. RON JOHNSON,  
U.S. SENATOR FROM WISCONSIN**

Senator JOHNSON. Thank you, Madam Chair. I also want to welcome our witnesses. Thank you for your detailed testimonies and I am looking forward to hearing your oral testimonies and your answers to our questions.

I also want to thank Madam Chair for holding this hearing. I will just ask that my opening statement be entered in the record.

Senator SHAHEEN. Without objection.

[The prepared statement of Senator Johnson follows:]

**Prepared Statement of Senator Ron Johnson**

Thank you Senator Shaheen. Today's hearing focuses on the security of the Black Sea and nearby states, a region of strategic significance to U.S. interests and Europe's peace and stability. Russia's invasion and illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its ongoing destabilization of Eastern Ukraine highlight Russia's malign intent and the continued necessity of an increasingly robust, coordinated response from the United States and our NATO allies. Russia's Black Sea aggression has unsettled NATO's Black Sea member states and threatens the alliance's southeastern flank. Thus far, the United States and NATO have failed to respond adequately to Russia's provocations. Our purpose here today is to explore options for remedying this inattention.

On November 25, 2018, Russian naval forces attacked and seized three Ukrainian naval vessels and their crews as they transited the Kerch Strait between the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov. In response, I joined 66 Senators in sponsoring a resolution calling for the immediate release of the Ukrainian ships and crew, and for the U.S. to lead a multinational freedom of navigation operation to assert the inviolability of internationally recognized borders and safe passage through the Kerch Strait and Sea of Azov. I have also joined Senate colleagues in calling for robust freedom of navigation operations in the Black Sea and a stronger NATO response to Russia's aggression. Russia has continued its efforts to turn the Sea of Azov into a Russian lake, strangling the Ukrainian ports of Berdyansk and Mariupol in the process. Emboldened by NATO's weak response, Russia has expanded its horizons and is now pressing Russian claims in the Black Sea itself. During the summer, Russia harassed the warships of U.S. allies operating in international waters. Putin responds to strength. We need to change the current Russian dominated narrative in the Black Sea sooner rather than later.

An effective U.S. strategy in the Black Sea will have to address the new reality of Russia's illegal occupation and military build-up in Crimea. It will also have to assess Russian intentions, capabilities, and priorities and adopt appropriate responses. Energy exploration and competing interests of regional allies will also come into play. Russia continues to destabilize democracies in an attempt to preserve a buffer zone and to prevent countries like Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova's incorporation into Western institutions. NATO, for its part, has and must continue to emphasize that our doors remain open to countries wishing to join, and we will help them with the reforms necessary to meet the requirements of membership. Let me be clear, Russia's insecurities do not give it a veto over the security arrangements or future of its neighbors. We must work with our NATO partners to address Russian

aggression with strength and resolve and to ensure that the cost of continuing its malign activities is higher than it can afford. A comprehensive integrated strategy backed by significant U.S. political will is required.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today about the elements of such a strategy.

Senator JOHNSON. An awful lot will be repetitive of what you just said, which I think should send a very strong signal. I think maybe that is the most important part of this hearing is the signal it sends to the region how strong the bipartisan support is for this region and for these nations that are really trying to struggle under the constant assault, both physical as well as just mental disinformation assault, from Russia.

I hope people in the region understand that. I think it is a good sign. I hate to bring up kind of the 800-pound gorilla in the room, though, because as I read the testimonies, as I listened to Senator Shaheen's opening statement, I think an awful lot of what is going to be suggested here is going to be talking about American leadership.

Of course, you can only lead if you are strong, and right now in the first 10 months of this Administration strength is not exactly what has been projected. I do not think I have to go into detail, but not to steal the thunder from Mr. Townsend's opening statement, his final line is it does not have to be the U.S. that shoulders the burden alone, but it does fall to the U.S. to lead the way, and I think that is crucially true. In order to lead, we must be strong. We need to project strength and, unfortunately, that does not appear to be the path that this nation is on right now.

Anyway, appreciate the hearing. I think the strong bipartisan support is probably a wonderful outcome for it. Thank you.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you very much, Senator Johnson. We will submit your opening statement for the record.

I will also point out that I have received written statements from a number of embassies representing Black Sea countries, which outline their respective initiatives in the region and include recommendations for enhancing U.S. policy.

Without objection, I will submit these also for the record.

[EDITOR'S NOTE.—The information referred to above can be found in the "Additional Material Submitted for the Record" section at the end of this hearing.]

Senator SHAHEEN. As I said earlier, we have three real experts on the Black Sea region who are here to share their thoughts with us today.

Let me begin by thanking our first witness, Jim Townsend. He is currently the Adjunct Senior Fellow in the Transatlantic Security Program at the Center for A New American Security.

After 8 years as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for European and NATO Policy in the Obama administration, Jim Townsend completed more than two decades of work on European and NATO policies in the Pentagon at NATO and at the Atlantic Council.

Our second witness is Dr. Alina Polyakova. She is President and CEO of the Center for European Policy Analysis. She is a recognized expert on transatlantic relations with over a decade of deep



expertise on European politics, Russian foreign policy, and digital technologies.

Our final witness this afternoon is Ian Brzezinski. He currently serves as a Senior Fellow at the Atlantic Council supporting its Brent Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security and its Europe Center.

He served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Europe and NATO policy from 2001 to 2005 during which his responsibilities, like Mr. Townsend's, included NATO expansion, Alliance force planning, and transformation, and NATO operations in the Balkans, the Mediterranean, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

We have much more extensive biographies on each of our witnesses that are available for members of the committee.

With those introductions, let me ask each of our witnesses if they could try and keep their opening remarks to 5 minutes. We will submit the full testimony for the record and we will ask you to go in the order in which I introduced you.

Mr. Townsend, you will be first. Thank you.

**STATEMENT OF JIM TOWNSEND, ADJUNCT SENIOR FELLOW,  
CENTER FOR A NEW AMERICAN SECURITY, WASHINGTON, DC**

Mr. TOWNSEND. Chairman Shaheen, Ranking Member Johnson, and members of the Subcommittee on Europe, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss Black Sea security.

The U.S. faces a threat from Russia along the frontier, beginning in Alaska and ending in southern Europe at the Black Sea, the anchor of NATO's southern flank. Along this line, almost daily Russian forces test the defenses of NATO allies and partners. Russia also employs gray area tactics such as cyber-attacks, disinformation, or aggressive military exercises to bully or intimidate these nations.

For the Russians, a critical part of this frontier is the Black Sea region, not just because it is home to Russia's Black Sea fleet and an important trade route for Russian exports, but, more importantly, as a defensive buffer and bastion that protects Russia from threats emanating from the south and from which Russia can project power outwards into the Mediterranean and the region surrounding the Black Sea.

The restoration of Russian military capability in the Black Sea is well documented since the invasion of Georgia in 2008. Russian-occupied Crimea now encompasses significant ground forces, combat aircraft, and new naval vessels, all protected by advanced sensors and missile systems.

Included in this Russian modernization are six new Kilo-class submarines equipped with Kalibr-class cruise missiles which can strike deep into Europe. This geopolitical balance in the Black Sea was not always this way.

In 2007, the Black Sea was ringed by nations who were either NATO allies or partners on the road to membership. Today, that political geography has changed dramatically, with Russian forces partially occupying the two NATO partners, Ukraine and Georgia, to keep them out of the Alliance, and a NATO ally, Turkey, whose

bilateral relationship is stronger with NATO's adversary Russia than with most NATO allies.

This geostrategic shift has not been lost on the U.S. or NATO, but actions taken to strengthen deterrence in the region has been slow and comprised of half measures.

Unlike in the Baltics, no NATO battle groups have been deployed to the region or NATO command structure put in place to rebuild deterrence. Instead, NATO provided a Tailored Forward Presence based on Romanian efforts to establish a headquarters unit and a multinational brigade that could be offered to NATO in the event conflict erupted.

The U.S. has been more proactive, periodically sending guided missile cruisers into the Black Sea, rotating forces and air assets into Romania, and investing millions to improve training areas and air bases in Romania and Bulgaria.

As Secretary of Defense Austin's recent trip to the region demonstrates, the Biden administration recognizes its importance. However, what long-term priority will be given U.S. force presence in the Black Sea region is still unclear.

Unlike the Nordic Baltic region, the complex politics and history of the Black Sea region make it difficult to develop either a regional or a NATO approach to strengthen deterrence.

NATO initiatives to establish a presence in the Black Sea usually run afoul of Turkey, which considers itself the guardian of the Black Sea. To minimize ally presence in its backyard, Turkey blocks NATO Black Sea initiatives by reassuring allies that the Turkish navy has the Black Sea well in hand and that NATO should avoid initiatives that unsettle the Russians in the Black Sea.

Such a seemingly low priority given the Black Sea has likely not escaped the attention of Moscow. It has not escaped the attention of Beijing either, where the Chinese are taking advantage of the underdeveloped areas of southern Europe to build infrastructure, ports, and railroads with strings attached.

It would be dangerous to continue giving the growing Russian dominance in the Black Sea region a low priority. The longer we in NATO wait before we make a serious investment in Black Sea deterrence, both militarily and economically, the harder it will be to do so as conflict nears or impossible to do so as conflict erupts.

To counter and deter Russian activity in the Black Sea region, the U.S. and its allies at NATO need to develop a strategy that encompasses not just military actions but economic, political, and developmental assistance to address the underdeveloped areas in the region.

What I provide below are six suggestions for the military component of such a strategy.

Number one, keep a focus on Europe and the threat from Russia even as we turn to the Indo-Pacific. As the Administration drafts its Global Posture Review, U.S. military posture in Europe should reflect a high priority to strengthen deterrence in the Black Sea region.

Number two, rebalance NATO force structure in Europe. NATO command and force structure needs to be rebalanced with a focus on NATO's southern flank. The rebalancing should include NATO

making the Black Sea regional plan a high priority for accelerated completion as well as upgrading its Tailored Forward Presence with a NATO battle group. Additionally, the Romanian-run Headquarters Multinational Corps South-East should become a standing NATO regional command.

Number three, increase presence of NATO and U.S. forces in the Black Sea region. The rhythm and number of NATO and allied deployments and exercises can still be increased so that there is almost a permanent presence of NATO forces in the region with allied navies taking part in rotations to the Black Sea to provide a constant naval presence.

Number four, improve maritime domain awareness and intelligence collection and analysis in the Black Sea region. Romania could host a Black Sea Intelligence Fusion Center to develop a common operating picture of Russian activity in the Black Sea, analyzing intelligence collected from periodic rotations to Romania of NATO, partner, or allied assets such as drones or P-8 maritime patrol aircraft.

Number five, repair relations with Turkey. The United States and Turkey need to repair their formerly close relationship. To do this, we must help the Turks find a way out of the corner they have painted themselves into by buying the S-400 and being expelled from the F-35 program.

We must also find a way to meet the Turks halfway in their tech transfer desires in a Patriot air defense system purchase.

Finally, we should accelerate the time when we can wind down honorably the U.S. military relationship with the Syrian Kurds in the fight with ISIS.

Finally, last point, security assistance. Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine, and Georgia can take on an even greater role in Black Sea security if provided a tailored, targeted, multi-year security assistance funding package that helps them acquire capabilities such as reconnaissance drones, anti-submarine warfare platforms, mining, and anti-ship missile systems.

These are six suggestions to improve NATO deterrence in the Black Sea region, but what is especially important is the development of a strategy that can weave military and economic and financial initiatives together to reduce the vulnerability of this region to intimidation and exploitation.

It is not too late to develop such an integrated strategy and to bring allies, partners, NATO, and the European Union along to help implement it, but such a strategy will not work without U.S. leadership.

It does not have to be the United States that shoulders this burden alone, but it does fall to the U.S. to lead the way.

Thank you very much, and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Townsend follows:]

#### **Prepared Statement of James J. Townsend**

Chairman Shaheen, Ranking Member Johnson, and Members of the Subcommittee on Europe, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss Black Sea Security: Reviving U.S. policy toward the region.

The U.S. faces a threat from Russia along a frontier, beginning in Alaska and ending in Southern Europe at the Black Sea—the anchor of NATO's southern flank. Along this line, almost daily Russian forces test the defenses of NATO Allies and

Partners. Russia also employs hybrid, or “grey area” tactics such as cyber-attacks, disinformation or aggressive military exercises to bully or intimidate these nations. Just last week Russian combat aircraft were intercepted close to the Alaskan border probing our defenses.

For the Russians, a critical part of this frontier is the Black Sea region; not just because it is home to Russia’s Black Sea fleet and an important trade route for Russian exports, but more importantly as a defensive buffer and bastion that protects Russia from threats emanating from the south and from which Russia can project power outwards into the Mediterranean and the region surrounding the Black Sea.

The restoration of Russian military capability in the Black Sea is well documented since the invasion of Georgia in 2008. Russian-occupied Crimea now encompasses significant ground forces, combat aircraft, and new naval vessels, all protected by advanced sensors and missile systems. Included in this Russian modernization are six new KIL0-class submarines equipped with Kalibr-class cruise missiles which can strike deep into Europe. This deep strike capability was famously demonstrated in 2015 when Russian Kalibr cruise missiles were fired 900 miles over Iran and Iraq and into Syria from Russian ships in the Caspian Sea. From this protected bastion, the Russians have been able to reestablish its naval presence in the Mediterranean which is felt as far away as Libya.

This geopolitical balance in the Black Sea wasn’t always this way. In 2007, the Black Sea was ringed by nations who were either NATO Allies or Partners on the road to membership. Today, that political geography has changed dramatically with Russian forces partially occupying the two NATO Partners, Ukraine and Georgia, to keep them out of the Alliance, and a NATO ally, Turkey, whose bilateral relationship is stronger with NATO’s adversary Russia than with most NATO Allies.

This geostrategic shift has not been lost on the U.S. or NATO, but action taken to strengthen deterrence in the region has been slow and composed of half-measures. Unlike in the Baltics immediately after the invasion of Ukraine, no NATO battlegroups have been deployed to the region or NATO command structure put in place to rebuild deterrence. Instead, NATO provided a “tailored forward presence” based on Romanian efforts to establish a Headquarters unit and a multinational brigade that could be offered to NATO in the event conflict erupted.

The U.S. was more proactive, periodically sending guided missile cruisers into the Black Sea to establish presence. The U.S. also began to conduct air and ground exercises with regional allies, rotate forces and air assets into Romania and invested millions to improve training areas in Romania and Bulgaria and upgrade Romanian air bases, especially the large Mihail Kogalniceanu (MK) airbase used as a hub for U.S. force deployments. As Secretary of Defense Austin’s recent trip to the region demonstrates, the Biden administration recognizes its importance; however, what long term priority the Administration will give U.S. force presence in the Black Sea region is still unclear.

Unlike the Nordic/Baltic region, the complex politics and history of the Black Sea region make it difficult to develop either a regional or a NATO approach to strengthen deterrence. NATO initiatives to establish a presence in the Black Sea usually run afoul of Turkey, which considers itself the guardian of the Black Sea. To minimize Allied presence in its backyard, Turkey blocks NATO Black Sea initiatives by reassuring Allies that the Turkish Navy has the Black Sea well in hand. Recently, the Turks have cited not wanting to unsettle the Russians as their reason for blocking NATO efforts. Romania presents a bright spot by taking responsibility for its own defense, dramatically increasing defense spending to purchase the Patriot missile system, the HIMARS artillery system and F-16s. Bulgaria, too, is slowly rebuilding its military capability but is hampered by a history of low defense spending and political unease with appearing anti-Russian.

NATO Allies individually are helping to strengthen NATO presence in the Black Sea. Along with the U.S. Navy, the UK, the Dutch and France periodically send warships to “show the flag,” most famously the HMS *Defender* and the Dutch ship *Evertsen* which were the subject of harassment by Russian air and naval units. Just last week, two B-1 bombers were intercepted over the Black Sea by Russian combat aircraft as Secretary of Defense Austin was visiting the region.

Given the threat posed by this growing Russian buildup, the NATO and U.S. responses have been comparatively light when compared to the response in the Baltic Sea which included NATO battlegroup deployments along with major air and sea exercises. Such a seemingly lower priority given the Black Sea has likely not escaped the attention of Moscow.

It has not escaped the attention of Beijing either. While much of my testimony today has focused on the Russian military buildup, China has entered the region as well, not as a military power but as a financial and economic one, taking advantage of the underdeveloped areas of Southern Europe to build infrastructure, ports

and railroads with strings attached. China's Belt and Road Initiative has permeated the Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean regions, from Turkey and Greece, into Italy, Egypt and the Balkans, where Chinese trade and financial deals have bought them political leverage influencing decisions even in the EU.

It would be dangerous to continue giving the growing Russian dominance in the Black Sea region a low priority. This Russian perception emboldened Russian naval forces to act with impunity in 2018 when they fired on and captured Ukrainian naval vessels in the Sea of Azov without fear of retribution, confident that Russia had a free hand in the Black Sea. The longer we and NATO wait before we make a serious investment in Black Sea deterrence, both militarily and economically, the harder it will be to do so as conflict nears ... or impossible to do so as conflict erupts.

To counter and deter Russian activity in the Black Sea region the U.S. and its Allies at NATO need to develop a strategy that encompasses not just military actions but economic, political, and developmental assistance, such as the infrastructure-focused "Three Seas Initiative," to reduce the areas of economic and developmental weakness in the region that Putin and Chinese President Xi exploit. What I provide below are six suggestions for the military component of such a strategy:

- **Keep a focus on Europe and the threat from Russia even as we turn to the Indo-Pacific:**
  - As pressing as the challenge is in the Indo-Pacific, the U.S. should not lose focus on the Russia threat in Europe. As the Administration drafts its Global Posture Review, U.S. military posture in Europe should reflect a high priority to strengthening deterrence in the Black Sea region.
- *Rebalance NATO force posture in Europe*
  - Since 2014, NATO command and force structure has focused on the Northern flank; this now needs to be rebalanced with a focus on strengthening NATO's southern flank. The rebalancing should include NATO making the Black Sea regional plan a high priority for accelerated completion as well as upgrading its "Tailored Forward Presence" in Romania by replacing the Romanian multinational brigade with a NATO Battlegroup. Additionally, the Romanian-run Headquarters Multinational Corps South-East should become a standing NATO regional command to lead the expansion of NATO activities in the region to help strengthen its southern flank.
- *Increased presence of NATO and U.S. forces in the Black Sea region*
  - While NATO and the U.S. and its Allies have recently increased deployments to the Black Sea region, the rhythm and number of NATO and Allied deployments and exercises can still be increased so that there is almost a permanent presence of NATO forces in the region. The sophistication of NATO and U.S.-led exercises can be increased as well, particularly scaling up the annual SEA BREEZE exercise to a larger and more complex one like the Russian Kavkaz exercise. All Allies with navies, including the Standing NATO Maritime Groups, should rotate deployments to the Black Sea to provide a constant naval presence, thereby demonstrating NATO unity while also sharing the burden of the deployments.
- *Improve maritime domain awareness and intelligence collection and analysis in the Black Sea region*
  - NATO still has an incomplete picture of Russian military activity in the region. Romania could host a Black Sea intelligence fusion center to develop a common operating picture of Russian activity in the Black Sea, analyzing intelligence collected from NATO, Partner or Allied assets such as drones or P-8s periodically deployed to Romania, so that NATO better understands Russian operations.
- *Repair Relations with Turkey*
  - As difficult and frustrating as current relations are with President Erdogan, the U.S. and Turkey need to repair their formerly close relationship. This will take time, but Turkey is the key to control of the Black Sea; Turkey's return to the Western fold would be a blow to Putin. To do this, we must help the Turks find a way out of the corner they've painted themselves in by buying the S-400 and being expelled from the F-35 program. We must also find a way to meet the Turks halfway in their tech transfers desires as part of their potential purchase of the Patriot air defense system. Finally, we should accelerate the time when we can wind down honorably

the U.S. military relationship with the Syrian Kurds (the YPG) in the fight against ISIS. The U.S. training and equipping of the Syrian Kurds is the biggest obstacle in repairing relations with Turkey.

- *Security Assistance*

- Romania and to a lesser extent Bulgaria are the core of NATO's deterrent force posture in the Black Sea. Partners Georgia and Ukraine, even while partially occupied by Russian forces, can still play an important role in Black Sea security. However, despite improvements in defense spending, these four Black Sea nations need financial assistance to acquire assets that could greatly improve their ability to strengthen deterrence. The Administration should consider sending to the Congress a tailored, targeted, multi-year security assistance funding package that helps these four Black Sea Allies and Partners to acquire capabilities such as reconnaissance drones, ASW platforms, mining and anti-ship missile systems that will significantly increase their ability to complicate Russian Black Sea fleet operations.

I have provided six suggestions to improve NATO deterrence in the Black Sea region. But what is especially important is the development of a strategy that involves our European allies and the EU that can weave military and economic/financial initiatives together to help this region develop and overcome political and economic weaknesses that Russia and China exploit. It is not too late to develop such an integrated strategy and bring Allies, Partners, NATO and the EU along to help implement it. But such a strategy will not work without U.S. leadership. It does not have to be the U.S. that shoulders this burden alone, but it does fall to the U.S. to lead the way.

I look forward to your questions.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you very much, Mr. Townsend.  
Dr. Polyakova.

**STATEMENT OF DR. ALINA POLYAKOVA, PRESIDENT AND CEO,  
CENTER FOR EUROPEAN POLICY AND ANALYSIS, WASHINGTON, DC**

Dr. POLYAKOVA. Chairwoman Shaheen, Ranking Member Johnson, distinguished members of the subcommittee, it is an honor and privilege to address you today on this critical issue for United States national security. Thank you for inviting me to speak.

Since our founding, CEPA, the organization I head, has worked to raise awareness on the strategic importance of the Black Sea region for the United States and our allies, but with the caveat that the views I discuss here today do not represent those of the organization, which takes no institutional position.

The Black Sea region is strategically critical to broader transatlantic stability. It is where Russia, Europe, the Middle East, the Balkans, and the Caucasus come together, and it is also the locus of the Kremlin's tests against Alliance credibility and resolve, which have escalated over the last two decades in the conventional and nonconventional domain.

Russia sees the Black Sea region as a core area where it can achieve its foreign policy objectives, the first one being a desire to undermine NATO by pressuring Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova at the same time, countries that Russia sees as its sphere of influence and where it has incited so-called frozen conflicts, or gray zones.

Crimea, which Russia seized illegally in 2014, is key for these efforts. Today, the Russian efforts to militarize Crimea have turned the peninsula into an unsinkable aircraft carrier, allowing the Kremlin to build capabilities and project power far, far beyond the Black Sea region.

Russia also retains leverage over Ukraine by blocking access to key ports and undermining the freedom of navigation. It is important to note that just this week some 20 warships and auxiliary Russian vessels were involved in the latest Russian exercises to intimidate NATO partners and allies.

The Black Sea is, of course, a testing ground for Russia's full spectrum warfare, most notably in the cyber and information domain, and we have to understand that Russia's military aggression always occurs in concert with asymmetric tactics.

Disinformation in particular accompanies Russian military aggression, as we just saw this summer with the incident with HMS Defender. Such campaigns produce a fog of war environment where the risk of direct conflict is increasingly likely, and we are ill prepared to deal with this kind of hybrid warfare.

It must be said that while Russia has established itself as the dominant power in the region, the Kremlin's capabilities are limited and we still have time and must turn back the tide with strategic U.S. leadership and commitment to ensure that the Black Sea does not become a permanent security black hole.

We must respond to Russian hybrid threats while simultaneously building long-term stability and security in the region. To do so, I elaborate quite a few recommendations in my written testimony. I will highlight just three buckets here.

First, such a strategy for U.S. leadership in the Black Sea must see resilience both in terms of economic and democratic resilience, and invest with a long view towards the region.

What we can do in that regard is support independent media, investigative journalist groups, and media literacy education across the entire Black Sea region. These kinds of groups, the independent media sphere in particular, is the best bulwark to protect against Russian disinformation.

To that end, with our limited resources—and we have to admit that we have a bandwidth issue in the United States and a priority issue—but we can get the most bang out of our buck if we prioritize Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia, the non-NATO, non-EU member states that require the most support and have the fewest access to those resources.

We must encourage economic investment as a tool for broader regional cooperation and cohesion by, first, delivering on the U.S. commitment to the Three Seas Initiative, which was proposed under the last Administration—the \$1 billion commitment—and we must provide alternatives to Chinese investment, which is actively playing a role to undermine regional cohesion, and particularly in the telecom and broader IT infrastructure. For that, the 2021 Transatlantic Telecommunications Security Act is key.

Number two, we have to work with regional allies to establish a dialogue around a shared understanding of Black Sea security. The 6+1 Dialogue, including Bulgaria, Georgia, and Moldova, has to be a part of it as well. Romania, Turkey, and Ukraine and the United States can align on a shared vision for the region and engage Turkey.

While Turkey has been a very challenging ally, in the Black Sea is an area where Turkey is at odds with Russia and we should use

that to continue to engage Turkey and move beyond our quarrels over S-400 and F-35.

Lastly, we have to emphasize a strategy that includes responding to nonconventional threats in the cyber and information domains. In this regard, we should consider opening an operational hub in the region.

Romania is the most natural partner and ally for this to coordinate NATO and EU efforts in the hybrid domain, particularly in cyber operations and Russian disinformation efforts. Undoubtedly, limited U.S. resources and bandwidth will mean a greater role for U.S. allies in the region, particularly NATO and the European Union.

The U.S. will have to do more with less, but the Black Sea is where relatively limited resources can make a profound difference for long-term allied resilience and U.S. global leadership.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Dr. Polyakova follows:]

#### **Prepared Statement of Dr. Alina Polyakova**

Chairwoman Shaheen, Ranking Member Johnson, Distinguished Members of the Subcommittee: It is an honor and privilege to address you today on this critical issue for United States national security. Thank you for inviting me to speak.

I am the President and CEO of the Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA), a nonprofit, nonpartisan, independent foreign policy think-tank focused on the transatlantic alliance. My views are my own and do not represent those of the organization, which takes no institutional position. Since our founding, CEPA has worked to raise awareness on the strategic importance of the Black Sea region for the United States and our allies. My views as presented here are informed by my CEPA colleagues and experts, most notably Lieutenant General (retired) Ben Hodges, Admiral (retired) James Foggo, Lauren Speranza, and Carsten Schmiedl, who provided invaluable feedback and have written extensively on these issues.

#### **WHY THE BLACK SEA REGION MATTERS TO THE UNITED STATES**

*“Security and stability of the Black Sea are in the U.S. national interest and are critical to the security of NATO’s Eastern Flank ... Russia’s destabilizing activities in and around the Black Sea reflect its ambitions to regain a dominant position in the region and to prevent the realization of a Europe that is whole, free, and at peace.”*—U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin<sup>1</sup>

As Secretary of Defense Austin said on his recent trip to Romania, Georgia, and Ukraine, stability in the Black Sea region (BSR) is in the national security interest of the United States. The U.S. cannot afford to neglect key regional security environments in Europe, such as the BSR, even as it pivots to the Indo-Pacific. The transatlantic alliance remains a bedrock of U.S. global leadership—a Europe that is whole, free, and at peace is an asset to the United States. But the European continent is still riddled with contested security zones and is where the transatlantic alliance is continuously tested. The BSR is vital to U.S. strategic interests of deterring Russian aggression against allies, ensuring European stability, and protecting freedom of navigation. Insufficient resources and attention have undermined the U.S. and allies’ ability to effectively pursue these objectives at the same time as Russia has stepped up its aggression and China is increasing its foothold in the region.

The BSR is where Russia, Europe, the Middle East, the Balkans, and the Caucasus come together—and where the forces of democracy to the west, Russian military aggression to the north, Chinese economic influence to the east, and instability in the Middle East to the south converge. The U.S.-friendly countries of the BSR (Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova, Romania, Turkey, Ukraine) also present a complex alliance structure with both NATO and European Union members and partners and a shared border—by way of the Black Sea—with Russia, the main competitive rival and military aggressor in the region.

The BSR is the locus of the Kremlin’s tests against alliance credibility and resolve, which have escalated over the last two decades in the conventional and non-conventional domain: from the invasion of Georgia in 2008, to the 2014 illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea and invasion of eastern Ukraine, to cyber attacks



and information influence operations. Russian acts of aggression occur regularly in the land, maritime, and so-called hybrid domains. To do so, the Kremlin has militarized Ukraine's Crimea, which is now a massive Russian military outpost that serves as an anchor for Moscow's aggression against Ukraine by land and sea, intimidation of NATO allies, and testing ground of U.S. commitment.

The Kremlin has de facto pulled a new Iron Curtain over Europe in the Black Sea. And it benefits from the complexity of alliances that has created a web of interconnected interests across states and institutions but without a single entity developing or taking ownership of a comprehensive regional strategy.

The Secretary of Defense's visit earlier this month to the region is a welcome and positive sign that the BSR is gaining significance for the United States. While timely and important, the visit should not stand alone as the sum of U.S. engagement. Rather, the Biden administration and the U.S. Congress should use the visit as an opportunity to build momentum across the alliance for a comprehensive regional strategy. An effective strategy for regional security in the Black Sea should:

- View regional security through a broader lens of resilience, which goes beyond the military domain to encompass economic and democratic resilience;
- Emphasize and craft responses to nonconventional threats in the cyber and information domains, which are a core part of Russian influence operations in the region;
- Work with key regional allies to establish a cross-cutting regional dialogue around a shared understanding of Black Sea security.

Undoubtedly, limited U.S. resources and bandwidth will mean a greater role for U.S. allies in the region, particularly NATO and the EU. The U.S. will also have to do more with less, but recent history has shown that when the U.S. disengages, its adversaries step in to fill the power vacuums that are left behind. In the BSR, Russia has already established itself as the dominant power, but the Kremlin's capabilities are limited. Strategic U.S. leadership and commitment is instrumental to ensuring that the Black Sea does not become a permanent security black hole. There is no substitute for U.S. strategic presence in the Black Sea, operating in consort with Black Sea allies and partners.

#### UNDERSTANDING REGIONAL SECURITY IN TERMS OF RESILIENCE

Stability in the BSR will not be achieved through military means alone. Therefore, U.S. engagement in the region should occur through a broader lens of security as resilience rooted in three domains: military, economic, and democratic. U.S. strategy should seek to balance across these domains based on available resources and priorities. A longer-term lens and strategy is particularly important as military signals—such as the U.S. decision to send the USS Fort McHenry in response to Russian aggression in the Sea of Azov—tend to be ephemeral if they are not backed by a broader holistic approach.

#### *The Challenge of Complex Alliances*

The BSR is shaped by a complex regional security environment comprised of a mix of NATO partners and allies. The BSR's NATO allies and partners unite around a common border with Russia, by way of the Black Sea itself, as well as the broadly shared view that Russia presents the most immediate and greatest regional threat. But, partly due to varying relationships with NATO and the EU, each regional partner has a unique view of the region as well as wide-ranging capabilities.

In terms of NATO, Bulgaria, Romania, and Turkey are members, Georgia and Ukraine retain Enhanced Opportunity Partner (EOP) status in the alliance, while Moldova is constitutionally neutral with respect to NATO and the CTSO. In terms of the EU, Romania and Bulgaria are members, Moldova is part of its European Neighborhood Policy, Turkey is a candidate country, Georgia is preparing its application for membership by 2024, and Ukraine is a priority partner through the Ukraine-European Union Association Agreement and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA).

Romania views the Black Sea as a strategic priority and is the alliance's regional center of gravity owing to its proximity to other allies, significant capability modernization efforts, and mobility infrastructure. It sets an example for alliance commitment on burden-sharing, exceeding 2 percent of GDP on defense spending and over 20 percent of that amount on defense modernization. As well as contributing forces to Afghanistan, Romania hosts around 1,000 U.S. rotational forces at Mihail Kogălniceanu (MK) Air Base, is at the terminus of the Danube, and has a key regional port at Constanța.<sup>2</sup> It has also undertaken several notable efforts to enhance regional resilience, including the new European Cybersecurity Competence Centre

and the Euro-Atlantic Centre for Resilience. Diplomatically, Romania's good relationship with Turkey is an asset for cooperation in the region.

Bulgaria, the only other member besides Romania of both the EU and NATO as well as the Three Seas Initiative (3SI), has demonstrated commitment to enhancing capabilities and improving regional security through alliance exercises and multinational military cooperation. It has benefitted from an increasingly close security relationship with the U.S., led by the U.S.-Bulgarian Defense Cooperation Agreement, which has provided more than \$160 million in security assistance over the last 5 years.<sup>3</sup> However, Bulgaria needs more urgency to modernize outdated conventional capabilities, many of which are obsolete and vestiges of the Soviet era. A positive sign is Bulgaria's adoption of Program 2032, which outlines a capability development strategy and indicates that Bulgaria will reach 2 percent spending of GDP on defense by 2024.<sup>4</sup> Bulgaria also developed a National Cyber Security Strategy in 2020 but needs a more comprehensive effort to enhance national and regional resilience against broader hybrid threats, perhaps by building on Romania's efforts.

Georgia maintains close relations with the alliance and is one of its closest partners. The alliance assists in modernizing Georgia's capabilities through the Joint Training and Evaluation Center and the Substantial NATO-Georgia Package. Georgia's participation in multinational exercises has increased. Tbilisi will also benefit from a new security pact with the U.S. following Secretary Austin's visit to the BSR.<sup>5</sup>

Ukraine faces the most urgent and direct threat in the region with the ongoing war that has witnessed over 14,000 casualties, more than 1.5 million displaced persons,<sup>6</sup> the loss of over 75 percent of Ukraine's naval capabilities, access to naval ports, and associated freedom of navigation, and the loss of Ukrainian territory. For Ukraine, building cooperation with the transatlantic alliance, particularly in the maritime domain, is critical to Ukraine's ability to defend itself against further Russian aggression and ensure economic stability.

While constitutionally neutral, Moldova is key to regional security dynamics. In Transnistria, Russia has backed around 1,500 separatist forces, as well as 500 so-called Russian peacekeepers, and conducts regular military exercises.<sup>7</sup> Long viewed as aligned more with Russia than the West, there are signs—particularly after the election of pro-EU candidate Maia Sandu—that Moldova is shifting more towards the alliance. Moldova continues to cooperate with the alliance to modernize its defense and security structures and institutions and is a contributor to the NATO-led peacekeeping mission in Kosovo, while NATO supported the establishment of a Cyber Incident Response Capability for the Moldovan Armed Forces in January 2021.<sup>8</sup>

Turkey is NATO's military heavyweight in the region and holds sovereignty over the Bosphorus Straits. But it can be a challenging and demanding Ally: Ankara's purchase of the Russian S-400 missile defense systems has been a sore spot in the U.S.-Turkey relationship, leading to the U.S. blocking the sale of F-35s to Turkey. At the end of the day, NATO needs Turkey and Turkey needs NATO, especially in the BSR. Moving past the S-400 debate and the cancelled F-35 deal with Turkey to build greater Alliance solidarity, while not abandoning the "carrot and stick" approach, will be key for broader regional stability.

Unlike other areas where Turkey and Russia see eye-to-eye, the BSR is an area of discord for the two. Turkey disapproves of the Russian occupation of Crimea, which has a Muslim Tatar minority population with ties to the Tatars in Turkey. Ankara sees Crimea as an unwelcome expansion of Russia's footprint in the region. But Ankara is reluctant to challenge Moscow or disrupt the regional status quo as it has a long history of losing wars provoked by Russia.<sup>9</sup> Thus, Turkey plays a delicate balance with Russia—seeing other BSR countries as allies in helping it balance against Moscow. Indeed, the Kremlin holds leverage over and applies pressure to Turkey through its positions in Syria, where it can provoke a refugee influx to Turkey.<sup>10</sup> Russia also wields economic leverage over Turkey through the tourist industry (Russian tourists make up the largest tourist group to Turkey, accounting for 20 percent of foreign visitors in April 2021 and 6 million tourists the year before the pandemic<sup>11</sup>) and imports (Russia is Turkey's 10th largest export market with main products being citrus, vehicle parts, and pitted fruits<sup>12</sup>).

The complexity of alliances, divergent views of the region, and varying capabilities produce a challenge for regional cohesion. From a U.S. perspective, working to ensure a shared vision of regional security among BSR partners that focuses on a complementary division of labor across key domains would bring greater cohesion to the region. Spreading liability and responsibility between BSR states would also undermine Russia's points of leverage in each, making the region more resilient to Russia's "divide and conquer" approach to foreign policy.

*Economic Investment is Investment in Security*

The BSR has tremendous economic potential as the crossroads linking Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, the connector of its littoral countries to the rest of the global economy, and with an emerging but latent supply of energy reserves which could shape current and future energy markets. However, owing to spillover effects from regional geopolitical competition and rivalry, as well as the relatively low level of foreign economic investment, much of this economic potential is unrealized.

Many of the regional formats designed to promote growth—including the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), the Black Sea Trade and Development Bank (BSTDB), Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova (GUAM), and the Danube River Commission—have hitherto been unsuccessful.<sup>13</sup> BSEC is particularly problematic as Russia is a member of the organization.

The region includes some success stories but also some of the poorest countries in Europe, which is reflected in several economic indicators. In a ranking of 206 countries by GDP, Turkey was ranked 17, Romania was 45, Ukraine was 54, Bulgaria was 73, Georgia was 119, and Moldova was 138.<sup>14</sup> In terms of GDP per capita, Romania was 51, Bulgaria was 57, Turkey was 62, Moldova was 91, Georgia was 96, and Ukraine was 105.<sup>15</sup> While real GDP growth is showing positive signs so far in 2021,<sup>16</sup> the countries of the region are among those at highest risk of a long and complicated recovery from the economic impact of Covid-19.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to economic challenges, energy is a key issue for regional resilience. Here, Russia also wields significant influence and leverage. The Kremlin-backed Nord Stream 2 pipeline is not just a Ukraine-Germany-U.S. issue, but a regional one indicative of broader dynamics of European energy price volatility, dependence on Russian supply, and regulatory resilience. The Kremlin has attempted to blackmail German and EU officials to grant final regulatory approvals to finish the pipeline, which threaten Europe's regulatory integrity.<sup>18</sup> With the U.S. and Germany reaching a deal earlier this year to allow the completion of Nord Stream 2, these regional dynamics will only continue. Russia's annexation of Crimea also provided the Kremlin an opportunity to illegally and illegitimately seize gas reserves off the Crimean coast which are potentially worth trillions of dollars.<sup>19</sup>

The Kremlin weaponizes BSR energy supplies to strangle Ukraine, to prevent east-west energy corridors which could weaken its grip on regional oil and gas exports, and to undermine the West more broadly. On October 22, 2021, Moldova's parliament declared an energy state-of-emergency after Moldova failed to reach a new contract with the Kremlin-backed Gazprom, which raised prices from \$550 per cubic meter to \$790.<sup>20</sup> The U.S. change in policy from the hardline approach of the Trump administration to the more complacent and diplomatic approach of the Biden term has sowed confusion among BSR allies, who are looking for policy consistency from the U.S.

But across the BSR, untapped energy sources could eventually reduce the Kremlin's leverage. Offshore gas reserves are currently being explored in the BSR, including a gas field discovered last year by Turkey.<sup>21</sup> The littoral Ukrainian shelf could have as much as two trillion cubic meters of gas under the Black Sea, Romania between 150–200 bcm of offshore reserves, and Bulgaria's Khan Asparuh as much as 100 bcm.<sup>22</sup> In Georgia, the Namakhvani hydropower plant could reduce energy dependence on Russia if social and environmental concerns are resolved.<sup>23</sup> In this light, discussions on the Trans-Caspian Pipeline (TCP), which has been dormant for years but could tap gas reserves in Turkmenistan for eventual delivery through Turkey to the EU, should be revived. The BSR countries also have a common interest and shared potential for adopting cleaner energy. This includes hydrogen and renewable forms of power generation; the BSR has some of the highest potential in Europe for offshore wind, and the region's abundant natural gas supply could enable significant hydrogen production capacity.<sup>24</sup>

Greater U.S. investment is needed to develop an integrated energy strategy with the necessary technical expertise and financial resources to help BSR allies take advantage of these energy reserves. The added benefit of increasing the economic value of the region is that its military significance also increases, encouraging the West to better protect its investments by committing more resources and by making the BSR more central in the minds of strategic planners.

*Democratic Governance—The Long-Term Path for Regional Security*

Good governance is the key to long-term regional stability and security. Black Sea states as a whole must do more to improve the resilience of institutions. Unstable democratic institutions and processes within BSR countries expose the region to the Kremlin's influence operations in the information and cyber domains. Stronger and more transparent institutions, particularly rule of law, also reduce uncertainty for foreign investors by producing an appealing business environment. Every Black Sea

state can and should do more on democratic reforms, anti-corruption, and judicial independence.

Several indexes suggest that resilience in the BSR mirrors the military domain in its multiplicity and complexity. According to Transparency International's 2020 Corruption Perceptions Index, which ranks countries according to perceived corruption in the public sector, Georgia is ranked 45 in the world, Romania and Bulgaria are 69, Turkey is 86, Moldova is 115, and Ukraine is 117.<sup>25</sup> The World Bank's 2021 Ease of Doing Business Index, an indicator of economic growth potential, ranks Georgia 7 in the world, Turkey at 33, Moldova at 48, Romania at 55, Bulgaria at 61, and Ukraine at 64.<sup>26</sup> The 2021 World Press Freedom Index, which is an indicator of media independence, ranks Romania at 48, Georgia at 60, Moldova at 89, Ukraine at 97, Bulgaria at 112, and Turkey at 153 out of 180 countries.<sup>27</sup> The figures contrast higher rankings, on average, for the other members of the transatlantic alliance, suggesting lower broader resilience in the BSR.

An independent and vibrant civil society sphere, including an independent media, is core to increasing societal resilience. An independent media sphere is still the best bulwark against disinformation. Civil society watchdog groups also hold governments accountable for incursions on judicial independence and corrupt practices. In Ukraine, the United States and international institutions have made financial loans conditional on progress on reforms. This model has put pressure on the Ukrainian Government to deliver on the reform agenda regardless of which political leader is in power.

Within the region, several countries have taken steps to enhance resilience in the cyber domain. Bucharest was selected by EU members as the location for a new European Cybersecurity Competence Centre to improve the coordination of cybersecurity research and innovation.<sup>28</sup> Romania also hosts the Euro-Atlantic Centre for Resilience. Bulgaria developed a National Cyber Security Strategy in 2020 and updated its National Security Strategy in 2018 to include hybrid threats. NATO and Georgia intend to strengthen cooperation around improving resilience in military exercising, while the NATO-Ukraine Platform on Countering Hybrid Warfare has seen increased cooperation recently on responding to hybrid threats.<sup>29</sup>

The West and the U.S. are generally viewed positively in the BSR. Support is particularly high in Romania, where 81 percent of the population supports strong ties with Western political and military alliances as well as the U.S.<sup>30</sup> In Ukraine, support for joining NATO reached 53 percent in 2019, the highest level since 2014.<sup>31</sup> In Georgia, support has continued to increase for both NATO (82 percent) and the EU (74 percent).<sup>32</sup> Moldova has positive views of relations with Russia as well as the West, although Russia is viewed simultaneously as its most important economic partner—tied with the EU for the most important political partner—and also as the greatest threat. But the next generation of Moldovans overwhelmingly (64 percent) appears to prefer economic convergence with the West over Russia.<sup>33</sup> Bulgaria remains somewhat of an exception with roughly half or fewer of the population having a positive view of NATO.<sup>34</sup> Bulgaria is also one of the only countries in Europe which disagreed that Covid-19 showed a need for closer European cooperation.<sup>35</sup>

In addition, ensuring that Euro-Atlantic integration is a reachable goal for the non-EU, non-NATO BSR countries is key to long-term regional stability and security. EU membership and the reforms that the accession process requires have also engendered incredible economic growth in Central Eastern Europe as well as in Romania and Bulgaria. EU integration should be a top priority for the non-EU BSR countries.

#### RUSSIA'S VIEW OF THE BLACK SEA REGION

The Kremlin views the BSR as squarely within its perceived sphere of influence. Although Russia is a country in economic and demographic decline, it is nonetheless a military power with a proven ability and determination to undermine U.S. and more broadly Western interests. It is of course the main military aggressor in the region and fears growing Western and particularly Turkish influence turning the BSR into a "NATO lake." Using conventional capability buildup as well as a new generation of so-called hybrid means—which it refines in the BSR before weaponizing them against the broader West, including the U.S.—to asymmetrically challenge the West where it is weaker, the Kremlin is attempting to draw an "Iron Curtain" across the BSR to exert influence and enable it to operate with impunity.

From the Kremlin's perspective, the BSR is part of a coherent western flank. It perceives NATO's more siloed approach to its eastern flank, where some regions are prioritized over others, as creating weaker defense and deterrence in regions such as the BSR that it can exploit.<sup>36</sup> Increasingly, Russia is signaling its lack of desire for dialogue and cooperation with NATO as evidenced by Russia's recent recall of

its diplomats from the NATO Mission in Brussels and closure of the NATO information bureau in Moscow.

The Kremlin has demonstrated continued willingness to use force in the BSR, particularly against non-NATO members, in an attempt to keep sovereign states in its perceived sphere of influence. The region's "grey zones" or so-called frozen conflicts, which are not actually frozen, are where the Kremlin turns up the heat on a regular basis to intimidate Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova. They are also subject to a slow creep of Russian aggression. Since 1992, the Kremlin has backed and regularly exercises with separatists in Moldova's Transnistria region. Russia has occupied Abkhazia and South Ossetia since invading Georgia in 2008 and continues to shift the physical borders of those regions to slowly annex more and more territory from Georgia.<sup>37</sup> The Kremlin illegally and illegitimately annexed Crimea and invaded eastern Ukraine in 2014, where it continues to wage a low-intensity war. Earlier this year, the mobilization of substantial Russian capabilities along the border with Ukraine and in Crimea caused U.S. European Command to raise its awareness level to "potential imminent crisis."<sup>38</sup> These examples demonstrate that the threat environment continues to evolve.

Map: Grey zones in the Black Sea region



Adapted in 2020 from © Mapbox and © OpenStreetMap.

From the conventional military perspective, Russia uses the BSR to build capabilities and then project power into the Caucasus, the Balkans, the Middle East, and beyond—in particular, growing maritime capabilities in the Eastern Mediterranean and into Syria and Libya. Russia's Black Sea Fleet retains numerical control in the BSR, and despite Turkey's sovereignty over Turkish Straits, the Kremlin is becoming increasingly bold with reports of repeated violations of the Montreux Convention by a Kilo-class submarine transiting to the Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>39</sup>

Russia also blockaded the Sea of Azov, seized three Ukrainian vessels,<sup>40</sup> reportedly falsified the location of two NATO warships near Odesa to a more provocative position off the coast of Sevastopol,<sup>41</sup> and announced that it is closing the Kerch Straits, which divides the Black Sea from the Sea of Azov, to vessels from Ukraine and other countries until at least the end of October this year.<sup>42</sup> This is part of Moscow's strategy to use the Black Sea to squeeze Ukraine economically by blocking access to key ports, such as Sevastopol, and by harassing ships.

Since 2014, the Kremlin has increasingly turned the peninsula into an "unsinkable aircraft carrier" by upgrading the peninsula's military infrastructure. This includes emplacing the Murmansk-BN long-range communications jamming system, anti-drone warfare capabilities, electronic warfare (EW), the Yakhroma

early-warning missile-defense radar, and S-400 ground-based air defense complexes.<sup>43</sup> As of April 2021, Russia had moved between 15,000–25,000 troops to Crimea for a total of 31,500 soldiers and greater force posture along the internationally recognized border with Ukraine<sup>44</sup> as well as some 680 armored vehicles, 170 artillery pieces, 100 fighter planes, and 40 tanks.<sup>45</sup> Russia's militarization of Crimea also includes enhancing mobility and integration with Russia by constructing the Kerch Bridge and opening a railway station<sup>46</sup> and even promoting militarism among the Crimean youth.<sup>47</sup>

The Kremlin's military provocations occur in concert with asymmetric tactics. In June 2021, two NATO warships operating legally in the Black Sea, the United Kingdom's HMS Defender and the Dutch HNLMS Evertsen, were harassed by Russian patrol boats or overflowed by Russian fighter jets on two separate occasions.<sup>48</sup> The Kremlin used this apparent military confrontation as an opportunity to promote broader false narratives and disinformation throughout the region, including the narrative that the HMS Defender incident was a "provocation" that would elicit a "tough response." The Russian Ministry of Defense also showed falsified video footage in order to claim that the vessel had been "chased out of Crimean waters" by Russian forces.<sup>49</sup> The HMS Defender incident demonstrates the need to respond to the Kremlin's full-spectrum threats in an equally holistic manner.

The Kremlin's hybrid tactics also include information operations and cyberattacks to project power, influence public opinions, and undermine democratic institutions. Ukraine has been the primary target and victim of Russia's full spectrum of warfare tactics. It has been called "Putin's petri dish"<sup>50</sup> for the almost daily and high-profile cyberattacks waged against it, including the NotPetya malware attack in 2017 and two separate occasions where Russian cyber saboteurs turned off the electricity in Ukraine to hundreds of thousands of people.<sup>51</sup> Cyberattacks have also occurred elsewhere in the BSR, including a GRU-backed takedown of more than 2,000 websites in Georgia.<sup>52</sup> Russian information operations in Bulgaria have targeted leftwing political pages and nationalistic accounts advancing pro-Russian versions of Bulgarian history. In Romania, disinformation narratives are less pervasive and have mainly been distributed by overtly pro-Russian websites.<sup>53</sup> Russia's hybrid tactics also include more overt forms of influence: in March 2021, six Bulgarians, five of whom were senior or former defense officials, were arrested on suspicion of spying for Russia.<sup>54</sup>

China has also increased its influence in the BSR although its involvement has remained limited to investments in ports and infrastructure.<sup>55</sup> Through the Belt-and-Road Initiative (BRI), Beijing has attempted to secure new markets for its exports and invest in new infrastructure projects, with a closer economic relationship in particular with Georgia and the early stages of closer Turkish-Chinese cooperation on port development.<sup>56</sup> Sino-Russian cooperation in the region has been limited, with no joint military exercises and both countries avoiding mention of the region in joint communications.<sup>57</sup> The BSR's EU members should work collectively to ensure that Chinese investments do not undermine regional cohesion or unfairly advantage or disadvantage any single member. The West more broadly should build on the 3SI to incentivize greater investment in the region and spur economic development; offering alternatives is the key to countering Chinese economic influence, which should be a global effort and not relegating to the Indo-Pacific region exclusively.

#### THE WEST'S RESPONSE

The West views the BSR as part of the broader eastern flank, but since Crimea, has prioritized bolstering defense and deterrence in the Baltic Sea region rather than the BSR. The 2014 Wales Summit Communiqué, issued 7 months after the invasion of Crimea, aimed to support regional allies and partners rather than develop a comprehensive regional strategy: NATO would "support, as appropriate, regional efforts by the Black Sea littoral states aimed at ensuring security and stability. We will also strengthen our dialogue and cooperation with Georgia and Ukraine in this regard."<sup>58</sup> In 2016, the alliance established enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) in Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia but settled for tailored Forward Presence (tFP) in the Black Sea region, a smaller and less capable force.<sup>59</sup> But as of the 2021 Brussels Summit, even tFP had not been fully implemented: alliance leaders noted NATO's contributions in the land, sea, and air domains and recommitted NATO to tFP's full implementation.<sup>60</sup> NATO members have also enhanced cooperation with Ukraine, providing guidance as it rebuilt its maritime capabilities following Russia's seizure of Sevastopol and 75 percent of Ukraine's fleet.<sup>61</sup> These are positive developments, but in sum, suggest that the West's military commitment and capabilities

are not commensurate with the threat environment and that a cohesive regional approach does not yet exist.

Meanwhile, exercises in the BSR have continued—and in some cases, also increased. Sea Breeze, an annual maritime exercise co-hosted by the U.S. and Ukraine, was the largest in its 20-year history in 2021 with 30 participating countries, more than 5,000 sailors, soldiers, and airmen, over 40 aircraft, and 32 ships.<sup>62</sup> The U.S.-led annual Defender 2021 exercise tested military mobility to the BSR this year. Situational awareness and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) are improving as a result of recent NATO air-maritime exercises.<sup>63</sup> The West can create a more robust exercise regime that includes partners and allies by increasing the scale of Sea Breeze to match Defender and by integrating it with Georgia's Noble Partner and Romania, Hungary, and Bulgaria's Saber Junction exercises. Regular exercises could also be supplemented with direct strategic responses to Russian actions in the region. Having a regular presence in the BSR would enable faster response times while developing a toolkit of symmetric actions.

The West's response to non-conventional threats in the BSR has also seen some progress. When the Kremlin used falsified maritime positioning to claim that the HMS Defender and HNLMS Evertsen provoked Russia's response,<sup>64</sup> Western governments publicly refuted the claim with evidence from live broadcast webcams. NATO officers should also be commended for acting in accordance with internationally recognized boundaries. There is growing evidence that NATO is also taking hybrid threats more seriously,<sup>65</sup> including with the development of NATO's counter-hybrid support teams, but these need to be enhanced, and addressing hybrid threats also needs to be integrated into a comprehensive regional strategy.

#### WHAT THE UNITED STATES SHOULD DO

##### *Work With BSR Countries To Establish a Shared Understanding of Regional Security.*

- *Establish a 6+1 dialogue on Black Sea security.* Stand up a dialogue with BSR allies—Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova, Romania, Turkey, Ukraine—together with the U.S. to align on a shared vision for the region. The dialogues should:
  - Occur at the working level with counterparts from the Department of Defense, Department of State, and relevant agencies such as CISA, and have high level buy-in. The U.S. DoD, building on Secretary Austin's visit to the region, should lead the dialogues at the Deputy Secretary level.
  - Aim to establish a complementary division of labor based on an assessment of capabilities and resources that distributes responsibility and liability across BSR states.
  - Rotate the hosting country for a high-level meeting annually between counterparts at the Deputy Minister/Deputy Secretary level, with the first meeting hosted by the United States.
  - Reengage Turkey to ensure Ankara's perspective is included in negotiations and to that end consider Turkey to host the second annual meeting following the United States.
- *Establish an operational hub in the region.* The United States should continue to see Turkey as the key NATO ally while also developing an operational hub to further build up military and nonconventional capabilities in the region. The operational hub should:
  - Focus on conventional and nonconventional capabilities working with NATO and the EU to align in priorities.
  - Not be a solely bilateral effort between the U.S. and the hub host nation but rather serve as the regional coordination point for all BSR allies. The hub should become the location of a joint, multinational headquarters responsible for coordinating all BSR military activity, enhanced intelligence sharing and cyber capabilities, and a common operating picture for the region.
  - Focus on developing and expanding response to nonconventional threats in the cyber and information domains. This should include better intelligence-sharing among allies and partners around Russian and Chinese hybrid activities, joint efforts to improve attribution, and longer-term analyses of broader Kremlin influence campaigns in the BSR.
  - Be established in a NATO, EU, 3SI member state to increase cooperation across these institutions and initiatives. As such, Romania would be the natural partner to host the hub.

- ♦ Romania already hosts around 1,000 rotational U.S. troops at MK Air Base.
- ♦ Romania has good diplomatic relations with Turkey, which, with appropriate engagement, would likely welcome Romania's greater involvement while allowing Ankara to continue to balance against Russian incursions in the BSR (i.e. Romania could engage in ways that Turkey may be reluctant to do).
- ♦ Romania's recently established Euro-Atlantic Centre for Resilience, a public institution under its Ministry of Foreign Affairs, also offers an opportunity for the U.S. to promote whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches to enhance resilience across the BSR.
- ♦ The U.S. should work with Romania on improving capabilities to enhance regional deterrence. The most cost-effective means to achieve this objective is through long-range (600 mile) missiles, and the most effective means is through manned or unmanned survivable missiles carrying submarines to challenge the Black Sea Fleet, which are permissible for Romania to acquire under the Montreux Convention. The U.S. and Romania can also consider building or buying small, diesel-electric missiles carrying submarines to give NATO a new and effective deterrent tool.
- *Engage the EU, NATO and capable non-BSR allies, such as the United Kingdom, to align strategic priorities and enhance capabilities by:*
  - Actively engaging to align strategic priorities with the EU's Strategic Compass and NATO's Strategic Concept, which are currently in early drafting stages.
  - Leading the development of a Graduated Response Plan for the BSR, similar to what has already been created for the Baltic Sea region, as well as a comprehensive maritime strategy which has been slow to materialize but would enable commanders across domains to better anticipate force requirements to counter Russian aggression in support of NATO's Concept for Deterrence and Defense of the Euro-Atlantic Area (DDA).

*Actively Encourage Economic Investment in the Region as a Tool for Broader Regional Cooperation and Cohesion*

- *Deliver on the U.S. commitment to the Three Seas Initiative (3SI).* Consistency and reliability of U.S. policy is key for regional allies. In 2020, the U.S. pledged 1 billion dollars of financing to support 3SI primarily through the International Development Finance Corporation (DFC). The U.S. should deliver on this promise. Failure to make good on this commitment will sow additional seeds of uncertainty on America's commitment to the region.
- *Provide alternatives to Chinese investment, particularly in infrastructure.* The U.S. Congress should work to pass the 2021 Transatlantic Telecommunications Security Act (TTSA), which aims to provide resources to Central East European countries, including several BSR states, to build out telecom infrastructure that is not dependent on Chinese technologies.
- *Open DFC funding to the BSR states.* The United States already possesses a key mechanism to increase economic investment in the BSR—the DFC. Stability in the BSR depends on economic cohesion and growth and the DFC is the appropriate entity to channel U.S. support.

*Invest in Long-Term Democratic Resilience in the BSR Region*

- *Support independent media, investigative journalist groups, and media literacy education.* Across the BSR, civil society is under development. An independent media and a well-educated population that is able to detect Russian propaganda are the best bulwarks for building societal resilience. The U.S. could also build on media support programs and expand programs and agencies to support a sustained, top-level commitment to back free media, including mobilizing individual agencies already active in support of Russian-language free media.<sup>66</sup>
- *Prioritize Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia.* When it comes to prioritizing resources, the U.S. can have the greatest impact in the non-EU, non-NATO states of the BSR. Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia are the primary targets of Russia aggression. As non-EU and non-NATO states, the three countries are most vulnerable to cyber and information influence operations, and as was the case with the 2017 NotPetya attack, the Kremlin's operations against these countries tend to affect the broader region.



- *Do more outside of discussions on the NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP).* The MoU on Georgia Defense and Deterrence Enhancement Initiative (GDDEI), signed during Secretary Austin's visit to Tbilisi, is an important step in increasing U.S. presence in Georgia. In Ukraine, joint exercises such as Rapid Trident and Sea Breeze are key for continued demonstration of U.S. support.
  - ◆ Establish joint EU–NATO Centers of Excellence to focus on hybrid threats across the region to serve as an early warning system for identifying, attributing, and responding to cyber and information threats.
  - ◆ Continue U.S. support for Ukraine and establish BSR support through the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). The U.S. can demonstrate commitment to enhancing regional capabilities by expanding on the NDAA's security assistance earmarked for Ukraine and designating funds for BSR capability development in the next budget year.
- *Encourage private-public partnerships to establish a "tech innovation belt."* Despite lagging economic performance, the three countries boast a well-educated population, particularly in the tech and IT sectors. Rather than perpetuating the narratives of grey zones, the U.S. should encourage U.S. venture capital firms to see the region as a tech innovation belt, where relatively small investments in R&D could yield high results.
- *Work with the EU to broaden and deepen EU cooperation and eventual integration.* EU membership has proven to be the most effective tool for economic and institutional reform. The U.S., as part of a broader strategic partnership with the EU, should elevate the strategic importance of eventual EU integration for Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova, while encouraging deeper economic ties.

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Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you very much.  
Mr. Brzezinski.

**STATEMENT OF IAN BRZEZINSKI, SENIOR FELLOW,  
ATLANTIC COUNCIL, WASHINGTON, DC**

Mr. BRZEZINSKI. Thank you, Chairman Shaheen. Can you hear me?

Thank you. Can you hear me now? Fantastic.

Chairman Shaheen, Ranking Member Johnson, distinguished members of the committee, thank you for conducting this hearing on how to promote peace and stability in the Black Sea region.

For more than a decade and a half, this region has been the zone of Europe's most intense confrontation and violent conflict. It has become the soft underbelly of European security.

We have witnessed, as my colleagues listed, Russia's invasions of Ukraine and Georgia, its occupation of their territories and that of Moldova, its use of Crimea as a hub for an anti-access area denial zone spanning across the Black Sea, its massing of military forces in the region, including last spring, and its harassment of allied aircraft and ships in the Black Sea.

The Black Sea has been transformed into a Russian military lake that President Putin uses to further his disruptive and expansionist objectives in the region and beyond.

Moscow exercises the full spectrum of hybrid warfare across the region, including trade and energy embargoes, cyber-attacks, information warfare, and even sabotage and assassination.

In the absence of a more comprehensive and more assertive strategy, this region will likely experience further Russian aggression, including an increased risk of military conflict.

Allow me to highlight four priorities essential to an effective Black Sea strategy.

First, it must strengthen military deterrence and defense in the region. Last week's NATO defense ministerial underscored the need for our allies to address long-standing capability shortfalls, particularly in the air and missile defense realm, long range fires, reconnaissance platforms, all of which are needed in the Black Sea region.

The Alliance, including the United States, must do more to help Georgia and Ukraine strengthen the lethality of their armed forces, but the Alliance must also increase its footprint in the region. NATO should create a joint training and evaluation center in Ukraine just as it has done to support Georgia.

NATO's Tailored Forward Presence in the Black Sea region consists of only a headquarters element in Romania. It should be reinforced with stationed, land, coastal, and naval combat elements, something more akin to what NATO has deployed to the Baltic Sea region.

I agree with my colleagues that a NATO Intelligence Fusion Center should be established in Romania or Bulgaria to enhance the Alliance's situational awareness across the entire Black Sea region, across all the challenges it faces. This reinforced NATO presence should be complemented by the deployment of a U.S. brigade combat team to the region.

Let me also emphasize an effective deterrence strategy also requires a clear path for Georgia and Ukraine to NATO membership. NATO enlargement is one of the great success stories of post-Cold War Europe.

Where NATO membership has been granted, peace and security has been strengthened. That success is in stark contrast to the Alliance's hesitancy regarding Ukraine and Georgia's request for NATO membership. Two invasions testify to this.

Responding affirmatively and unequivocally to the transatlantic aspirations of Georgia and Ukraine is essential to enduring peace and stability in the Black Sea region.

A second priority of Black Sea strategy is countering the dissemination of false and intentionally divisive information. Washington essentially disarmed itself in 1999 when it closed the doors of the United States Information Agency, USIA. That multi-billion-dollar department was our frontline force in the realm of information warfare.

Congress should reestablish a modernized version of USIA so we can return to the offense in this dynamic and fast-paced dimension of international affairs. Strengthening regional economic prosperity and resilience should be a third priority of a Black Sea strategy.

Toward this end, the United States should robustly support the Three Seas Initiative. This is a Central European launched and led effort to leverage the power of private capital to develop cross-border infrastructure in the region spanning between the Baltic, Black, and Adriatic Seas. It is all about marshalling infrastructural connectivity to generate economic growth, strengthen economic resilience, and complete the vision of undivided Europe.

With bipartisan support, the United States announced it would invest up to \$1 billion into Three Seas energy projects, including a \$300 million equity investment into the Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund. That really injected real momentum into the initiative.

However, a year later, these promises remain unfulfilled and risk becoming a drag on the initiative, especially in the capital markets it seeks to engage.

Allow me to urge Congress to use its authorities to direct the United States Government to execute its pledge to make an equity investment into the Three Seas fund.

Let me also urge Congress to pass the Transatlantic Telecommunications Security Act. TTSA would complement U.S. Government authorities to invest in energy infrastructure in Central Europe with similar authority to assist this region to develop secure telecommunication networks.

Finally, and just briefly, a Black Sea strategy should also seek engagement with Russia where constructive cooperation is possible, and a logical place to start is arms control and confidence-building measures to enhance military stability.

Madame Chairman, much is at stake in the Black Sea region. This includes the security of some of our closest allies and partners as well as the future of the international rules-based order, which today in the Black Sea region is under sustained attack.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Brzezinski follows:]

**Prepared Statement of Ian Brzezinski**

Chairman Shaheen, Ranking Member Johnson, distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for conducting this hearing to highlight the significance of

the Black Sea region and the need for a more effective United States strategy to promote peace and stability in this important and dynamic part of Europe.

For more than a decade and a half, the Black Sea region has been *the* zone of Europe's most intense confrontation and violent conflict. This unfortunate reality has been driven by Moscow's revanchist ambitions, which it has advanced by applying the full spectrum of Russian power, including brute military force.

This was underscored this last Spring when Russian President Putin massed military forces along Ukraine's eastern frontiers and in occupied Ukrainian territories, including Donetsk, Luhansk and Crimea. That offensive posture remains in place today and poses a real threat to Ukraine and the security Black Sea region.

Russia's military build-up, its occupation of Georgian and Ukrainian territories, and other provocative uses of armed force and hybrid warfare has transformed the Black Sea into a Russian military lake that President Putin uses to further his disruptive and expansionist objectives in the region and beyond.

This aggression underscores how the Black Sea region has become the soft underbelly of transatlantic security. Nonetheless, this part of Europe has not received the same degree of priority and focus as its northern counterpart, the Baltic Sea region. In the absence of a comprehensive and more assertive strategy on the part of the United States and its Allies and Partners in NATO and the European Union, the Black Sea region will likely experience a further intensification of Russian aggression. That will not only jeopardize the safety and sovereignty of the region's democracies but will also increase risk of military conflict, including that with dangerous escalatory dynamics.

#### THE BLACK SEA: A REGION OF GEOPOLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Black Sea is a region of geopolitical significance and has been a long-standing zone of contest among great powers. As a crossroads linking Europe, the Middle East, and Asia, it features strategic lines of communication. The Black Sea is traversed each day by hundreds of ships transporting goods and people from its shores and beyond. The sea hosts numerous telecommunications lines and energy pipelines, including those that bring Caspian oil and gas to Europe. This important role as a trade route and the fact that the Black Sea coast features some of Europe's fastest growing economies has also made this region a focus of China. Beijing has attempted to establish footholds in the region via investments through its Belt and Road Initiative and 17+1 format for regional engagement.

The Black Sea is also a major export route for Russia's oil and gas. As the home of Russia's only warm water ports, it serves as Moscow's most important access route to the Mediterranean Sea and the Middle East. It serves as an important element of Russia's main logistics route supporting military and paramilitary operations in Syria, Libya and elsewhere in the Middle East and Africa.

The six countries that surround the Black Sea include three NATO allies—Bulgaria, Romania, and Turkey, two NATO Partners—Ukraine and Georgia, and Russia. Turkey and Romania host two critical elements of NATO's deployed missile defense system that protects both Europe and the United States: an advanced X-band Radar in Kürecik in southeastern Turkey and an Aegis- Ashore facility in Deveselu, Romania which can detect, track, and engage ballistic missiles in flight launched from the Middle East.

The commitment of these NATO Allies and Partners to the Alliance' missions should not be underestimated. It is notable that at one time Turkey, Georgia, Ukraine, Romania, and Bulgaria accounted for one third of the military forces deployed to Afghanistan under NATO's RESOLUTE SUPPORT mission.<sup>1</sup>

The Black Sea's geopolitical significance includes Russia's presence but also the influence the region has on Russia's potential to evolve into a democratic, law-abiding power. Former professor and U.S. National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski (my father) asserted that if Russia is allowed to subordinate Ukraine, Russia will never be able to cease being an empire, and an empire, by definition, cannot be a true democracy. The same logic applies to Russia's relations with the rest of Black Sea region. A stable, peaceful Black Sea region featuring democratic and secure sovereign states is essential to the prospects of a post-imperial Russia.

#### A ZONE OF CONFRONTATION AND CONFLICT

Over the last decade and half, peace and stability have not defined the Black Sea region. Instead, it has been the objective of a sustained effort by Russian President Putin to reestablish Moscow's dominion over states what were once subordinated to the Soviet Union. Toward this end, Putin has exercised the full spectrum of aggression.

Brute military force was used to invade Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014. The Russian military continues to illegally occupy territories of Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has killed well over 13,000 Ukrainian citizens and soldiers<sup>2</sup> and displaced over 1.5 million persons.<sup>3</sup> This continues to be a hot war with more and more Ukrainian lives being lost.

The countries of the Black Sea region have also experienced the direct and indirect impact of Russian trade and energy embargoes. Today, all of Europe is enduring a dramatic escalation of gas prices due to Russia's refusal to sell its gas in response to increased European demand. This apparently intentional decision is intended to force the European Union to lift restrictions on the Nord Stream 2 pipeline and pressure European nations back into long term contracts with Gazprom.

Russia's aggression in the Black Sea region also includes political subversion, cyber-attacks, sabotage, and assassination—tools it has exercised across nearly all of Europe. Moscow has repeatedly assassinated critics in Ukraine.<sup>4</sup> Today, Bulgaria is investigating four explosions at arms depots between 2011 and 2020 that were holding munitions intended for Georgia and Ukraine.<sup>5</sup>

Russia's assertiveness has also been directed against NATO forces operating the Baltic Sea. U.S., Dutch, and British naval and air forces, among others, have been subject to harassment by Russian armed forces while operating in international waters or that of Ukraine.<sup>6</sup>

Moscow's military build-up and assertiveness have transformed the Black Sea into a lake dominated by the Russian military. Over the course of its occupation of Crimea, Moscow has packed some 28,000 troops on to the peninsula. It has deployed sophisticated radars, over 100 combat aircraft—including strategic bombers, S-400 air defense systems, coastal defense batteries armed with sophisticated anti-ship missiles, and Kalibr cruise missiles.<sup>7</sup> Russia has even deployed to the peninsula Iskander tactical ballistic missiles, which can be armed with nuclear warheads.

Crimea extends deep into the Black Sea making it a strategic pivot point within the region. Russia's military deployments on the peninsula have transformed Crimea into the hub of an Anti-Access/Area-Denial (A2/AD) bubble that spans across much of the Black Sea and its coastlines. This provides a Russia a significant means for area surveillance, puts at risk aircraft and vessels operating in and over the surrounding sea, and threatens the populations and territories of NATO allies and partners.

These actions by Russia not only violate the sovereignty of Black Sea states, they constitute a direct attack to the rules based international order that has been the basis of peace, freedom, and prosperity over the last seven decades in Europe and around the world.

#### KEY ELEMENTS OF A COMPREHENSIVE BLACK SEA STRATEGY

Last week, in the run-up to the October 21, 2021 meeting of NATO Defense Ministers, U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin visited Georgia, Ukraine and Romania. The message of U.S. commitment and support he brought to these nations is much needed. And, hopefully, the visit is part of the Biden administration's development of a U.S. strategy to bring greater peace and stability to the Black Sea region.

To be fully effective, a Black Sea security strategy will have to be comprehensive, leveraging the West's diplomatic, military, intelligence, cyber, information, economic and other capacities that span the breadth of geopolitical competition today. It must marshal the full spectrum of efforts necessary to strengthen deterrence and defense in the region, reinforce the economic and political resilience of our Allies and Partners there, and mobilize the capacities and commitment of Allies and Partners from beyond the region as well as key multilateral institutions, including NATO, the European Union, and the OSCE.

The following addresses elements that should stand among the top objectives of such a Black Sea security strategy:

##### *Strengthen Deterrence and Defense*

A key priority must be to strengthen the capacity of NATO to deter and defend against aggression in this region. Toward this end, the United States and NATO should aim to do the following:

*Enhance Regional Situational Awareness:* The United States and the NATO Alliance have been surprised twice by significant Russian offensive actions: the 2008 invasion of Georgia; and, the 2014 invasion of Ukraine. Better fidelity is needed about the region's economic, political, and military developments—to accelerate what LTG Ben Hodges (U.S.A.-ret.) calls the West's "speed of recognition" in the Black Sea region. Russia's recent massing of its military forces in and around Ukraine increased the urgency of this requirement. The Alliance should establish

a Black Sea Intelligence Fusion center akin to the NATO Strategic Direction South Hub in Naples which focuses on threats and developments in the Middle East and Africa. An intelligence fusion center, based in Romania or Bulgaria, should focus on the full spectrum of threats confronting the Black Sea region, with an initial focus on Russian aggression.<sup>8</sup>

*Strengthen Allied and Partner Military Capabilities:* NATO continues to be hampered by military capability shortfalls of its member states, particularly in the realms of air and missile defense, long range fires and intelligence platforms. Russia's offensive build-up in the Black Sea makes these capability gaps more ominous. Romania's acquisition of HIMARs long-range artillery and the PATRIOT air and missile defense system bring needed capabilities to the region. Nonetheless, these systems need to be complemented by and integrated with similar acquisitions by other European NATO allies.

A second capacity-building priority should be to expand efforts to strengthen the armed forces of Georgia and Ukraine. Congress is to be commended for directing more resources to meet this requirement, but both nations still need additional lethal defense systems crucial to deterring further Russian military aggression, including anti-armor weapons, air defense systems, anti-ship missiles and unmanned aerial reconnaissance drones. Greater consideration is needed on how to assist their navies—as well as those of Bulgaria and Romania—to offset the significant naval advantage Russia now exercises in the Black Sea.

*Develop a More Robust Persistent Military Presence:* NATO's Tailored Forward Presence (TFP) in the Black Sea region should be upgraded to an Enhanced Forward Presence, featuring land, coastal and naval elements. TFP's land element, a multinational brigade headquarters, should be expanded to include the deployment of NATO battalions to Romania and Bulgaria—as is the case in the Baltic states. These need to be reinforced by the deployment of Allied air and missile defense systems and anti-ship batteries to Romania and Bulgaria and by further increases in the deployment of Allied air and naval forces to the Black Sea region.

This expanded NATO presence should be complemented by the deployment on a rotational or permanent basis of U.S. brigade combat team (BCT) to Bulgaria and/or Romania, (a decision that would return the number of U.S. BCTs to Europe to levels prior to President's Obama's mistaken reduction of U.S. forces deployed to Europe.)

NATO's presence in Georgia and Ukraine should be increased through additional deployments of Allied air and ground units for exercises and training. The Alliance's Joint Training and Evaluation Center (JTEC) in Georgia should be mirrored in Ukraine to both further assist the development of Ukraine's armed forces and to demonstrate Allied commitment to Ukraine's security.

*Launch a Major NATO Exercise in the Black Sea Region:* Over the last several years, the United States has increased the tempo of military exercises across Europe. USAEUR is to be commended for launching its DEFENDER exercises designed to deploy a division size equivalent of force from the U.S. to Europe. DEFENDER 2022 spanned the Balkans and Black Sea region with distributed exercises that tested the operational and logistical capacities of NATO forces.

With that said, it is time for NATO to increase the magnitude of its exercises in the Black Sea region. NATO's largest exercise series, TRIDENT JUNCTURE was hosted by Portugal and Spain in 2015 and by Norway in 2018. In the latter, the Alliance deployed 50,000 military personnel along with 250 aircraft and 65 ships. The next Iteration of TRIDENT JUNCTURE or a land-centric version of it should take place in an area of immediate concern, such as the Black Sea region.

*Place Georgia and Ukraine on a Clear Path to NATO Membership:* NATO enlargement has been one of the great success stories of post-Cold War Europe. The extension of Alliance membership to the democracies of Central Europe expanded and reinforced the zone of peace and security in Europe and strengthened the Alliance's military capability. The newest members of the Alliance have been among Europe's most stalwart Transatlanticists and most willing to contribute to U.S.-led operations, including those beyond Europe.

That success is in stark contrast to the Alliance's hesitancy to grant the requests of Ukraine and Georgia for membership—even as these countries have courageously contributed to NATO operations around the world. That hesitancy has relegated Georgia and Ukraine to a destabilizing grey zone of insecurity in Europe's strategic landscape.

While Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are clearly frontline states facing military, economic, informational, and other forms of pressure from Russia, their security and the stability of the Baltic region is stronger than that of the Black Sea region. The Russian invasions of Georgia and Ukraine testify to this in stark terms. The failure



of NATO to integrate these two nations as full members has only encouraged President Putin to act on his desire to resubordinate them under Moscow's control.

NATO's reluctance to fully embrace the transatlantic aspirations of Ukraine and Georgia has transformed the Alliance's Open-Door policy into a destabilizing bromide. An effective Black Sea strategy has to provide Ukraine and Georgia a clear and unambiguous path to NATO membership.

*Counter Hybrid-Warfare—The Information Domain*

An increasingly assertive element of Putin's campaign of disruption against the West has been its dissemination abroad of false and divisive information. His objective—and that of other adversaries distorting the truth—is to manipulate public perceptions to foment political tension, if not social and political unrest. Nowhere has this been more intense than in the Black Sea region. While the West has become more aware and better equipped to expose and counter disinformation efforts, the transatlantic community remains very much on the defensive.

The United States essentially unilaterally disarmed itself in the information realm in 1999 when Washington shut down the United States Information Agency. This multi-billion-dollar agency and its staff of over 10,000 professionals was dedicated to the mission of public diplomacy. It was established "to understand, inform, and influence foreign publics in the promotion of the national interest" and to "streamline the U.S. Government's overseas information programs and make them more effective." USIA was our frontline sentinel on the information front during the Cold War and a critical element in our victory in that era. After USIA closed its doors, its founding purpose has only become more important and more complex as evidenced by current events.

Congress should consider recreating a modernized version of USIA so that the United States can return to the offense in this increasingly dynamic and fast paced dimension of international affairs. Succeeding in this realm is critical to reinforcing the resilience of our alliances and partnerships, including those in the Black Sea region. It can and should play an important role in our efforts to shape the internal political dynamics of our adversaries—leveraging the power of public engagement, democratic principles, and truth to undercut the authority of authoritarian regimes and to give hope, motivation and support to those yearning and struggling for freedom.

*Strengthen Regional Economic Resilience—The Three Seas Initiative*

A key element of hybrid warfare is the exercise of economic power, and as previously noted the last two decades are replete with examples of Russian energy and trade embargoes and other forms of economic leverage used to weaken or destabilize U.S. allies and partners, including those in the Black Sea region.

An effective Black Sea security strategy must include initiatives to strengthen the economic resilience of this region, including those that will further integrate the region's economies with that of Western Europe.

The EU member states of Central Europe, including Romania and Bulgaria, fully recognize this requirement and toward that end launched the Three Seas Initiative, an effort to accelerate the development of cross border energy, transport, and digital infrastructure in the region between the Baltic, Black and Adriatic Seas.

This Central European launched and led initiative is all about: leveraging the power of infrastructure to promote economic growth; strengthening the region's economic resilience—including its energy security through diversification of energy supplies; and, completing the vision of undivided Europe through the infrastructural integration of the Three Seas nations, their Central and Eastern European neighbors, and Western Europe.

The institutional core of the Three Seas is the Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund, a new, innovative public-private partnership launched to leverage the power of the market to catalyze regional infrastructure development. Three Seas states have invested their own finances into this commercially managed fund—whose investments are driven by the commercial goal of securing the highest rate of return.

By adhering to purely market principles and by being free from political interference, this fund serves as a spotlight on the economic opportunity present across the region. It serves as a beacon to the trillion dollars of foreign direct investment (FDI) circulating the globe seeking the long term, profitable returns offered by infrastructure.

(I believe this ground-breaking fund creates a model for infrastructure development that can and should be applied to other regions around the world.)

The Obama, Trump, and Biden administrations each robustly endorsed the Three Seas Initiative as has the United States Congress—including members of this Sen-

ate Committee. In February 2020, the United States Government announced that it would invest up to \$1 Billion in Three Seas energy projects.

In October of that year at the Three Seas Summit in Tallinn, Estonia, the USG announced it use \$300 million of that billion to make an equity investment in the Three Seas fund. These announcements, which triggered bipartisan endorsements from Capitol Hill, not surprisingly, generated significant additional momentum to the Three Seas Initiative.

However, the time is long overdue for the USG to deliver on its commitments. They remain unfulfilled a year after the Tallinn Summit and consequently are at risk of becoming a drag on the initiative, one that raises questions in capital market as to why the U.S. is not executing its promised investments.

The Three Seas is an initiative that merits and needs additional Congressional leadership.

First, allow me to urge the U.S. Congress to use its authorities to direct the United States Government to execute its pledge to make an equity investment into the Three Seas Fund.

The execution of that investment commitment would eliminate any doubt of U.S. commitment to the Three Seas. It would encourage other democratic states, such as Germany, France, and the UK, to mirror that investment. Above all, it would significantly boost the Initiative's ability to attract and leverage the power of private capital to drive forward infrastructure development across Central and Eastern Europe—thereby increasing the region's prosperity and strengthening its security.

Second, Congress should expand the authorities of the USG to invest in the Three Seas. In 2019, Congress provided the United States Government the ability to invest in Three Seas energy projects through the enactment of the European Energy Security and Diversification Act—legislation that was introduced by members of this committee to provide for the first time the ability for the USG to help finance strategic energy projects in Europe.

Congress should complement that important legislation with a digital counterpart, the Transatlantic Telecommunications Security Act, which has been introduced to provide similar authorities to the USG to invest and catalyze the development of modern secure telecommunications infrastructure in Central and Eastern Europe, including the Black Sea region.

Secure and robust telecommunications networks are a significant driver of economic growth and are essential to economic resilience. The United States has a significant security and economic interest in having our allies and partners in the Black Sea region linked into trusted telecommunications networks.

Finally, an effective Black Sea security strategy must feature efforts not only to deter Russian aggression but also to engage Russia where constructive cooperation is possible. One area of need and mutual benefit to pursue is arms control and confidence building measures that would enhance the military stability not just in the Black Sea but also across the entirety of NATO's geographic engagement with Russia.

To be effective, a U.S. strategy to enhance Black Sea security must be comprehensive, integrating the full spectrum of geopolitical competition that defines today's world—including, among others, their military, informational, economic and diplomatic dimensions. It will have greatest prospects of success when it is able to marshal the engagement of European allies and partners from beyond the Black Sea, as well as NATO and the European Union.

Requirements for success include: deeper awareness of the region's dynamics and developments; political initiative and commitment; skillful diplomacy—not just among allies and partners, but also toward Russia; and, real economic and military investment.

Much is at stake in the Black Sea region: the security of Allies and Partners whose soldiers have stood shoulder to shoulder with U.S. soldiers around the world; how the region will shape Russia's prospects for a post-imperial transformation; and, the future of the international rules based order—which today in the Black Sea region is under sustained attack.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Coffey, Luke. "The Black Sea should be a US and NATO Priority." Middle East Institute. 6 February 2020. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/black-sea-should-be-us-and-nato-priority>

<sup>2</sup> "Death Toll Up to 13,000 in Ukraine Conflict, Says UN Rights Office," *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, 26 February 2019. <https://www.rferl.org/a/death-toll-up-to-13-000-in-ukraine-conflict-says-un-rights-office/29791647.html>

<sup>3</sup> *Global Conflict Tracker*, Council on Foreign Relations, Updated 22 October 2021. <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/conflict-ukraine>

<sup>4</sup>Schwartz, Michael, "Russia Ordered a Killing That Made No Sense Then the Assassin Started Talking," *The New York Times*, 31 March 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/31/world/europe/russian-assassinations-putin-ukraine.html>

<sup>5</sup>"How GRU Sabotage and Assassination Operations in Czechia and Bulgaria Sought to Undermine Ukraine," *Bellingcat*, 26 April 2021. <https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2021/04/26/how-gru-sabotage-and-assassination-operations-in-czechia-and-bulgaria-sought-to-undermine-ukraine/> and Dzhambazova, Boryana and Schwartz, Michael "Russian Spy Unit Investigated for Links to Bulgarian Explosions" *The New York Times*, 31 March 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/31/world/europe/russian-assassinations-putin-ukraine.html>

<sup>6</sup>Amiel, Sandrine, "What is behind recent confrontations between Russia and the West in the Black Sea?" *Euronews*, 7 July 2021. <https://www.euronews.com/2021/07/07/what-is-behind-recent-confrontations-between-russia-and-the-west-in-the-black-sea>

<sup>7</sup>For an excellent overview of the naval balance of power in the Black Sea has shifted to Russia's favor, see Petersen, Michael, "The Naval Power Shift in the Black Sea," *War on the Rocks*, 9 January 2019. <https://warontherocks.com/2019/01/the-naval-power-shift-in-the-black-sea/>

<sup>8</sup>Such a center could build upon or complement Bulgaria's Maritime Coordination Center in Varna and Romania's Euro-Atlantic Center for Resilience, both of which are linked to the Alliance.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you very much to each of you. I think Senator Johnson will go vote and when he returns, I will then go vote.

Let me begin with a question to each of you, actually, because I was interested that none of you really talked very much about the differences between the Black Sea countries themselves over how they view their future.

How much of the challenges that we are facing now is a function of lack of unity among those Black Sea countries? Obviously, Turkey is one exception because you mentioned Turkey. How much is it a failing policy among NATO and Western allies? Based on that, do we think Russia is succeeding in the Black Sea region?

I guess I would ask each of you if you would respond to that.

Mr. TOWNSEND. Thank you, Senator.

I think that is a great place to start our discussion, and I will say that it is probably all the above in terms of what you said.

Each of those nations that are around the Black Sea—their culture, their history, their traditions—shape their relations with one another, and as we have tried to put together a regional approach to dealing with Russia we run into those relationships.

Historically, Bulgaria and Turkey have had trouble with one another. Politically, in Sofia, in Bulgaria, the Government has traditionally leaned towards their old relationship with Russia, particularly in the intelligence communities.

So it is a bit more of a tender feeling towards Moscow than you would find next door in Romania. Romania, instead has been one of the first of all the partners when it was a member of PFP and then, as an ally, they were always the first in line to take on NATO initiatives or take on NATO missions.

You have the opposite there. Of course, Georgia and Ukraine, I think my colleagues laid out very well the problems that they have now being partially occupied by the Russians and not knowing what their future looks like, whether it is with the European Union or with NATO.

NATO has had trouble dealing with this. They are used to dealing with Western Europe, with the older allies, or with the Nordic nations where there is more of a collective view on what needs to be done in terms of Europe.

It is easier to work in those regions than in the Black Sea region where you are running into these historic problems, and just trying to get Bulgaria and Romania to work together on a specific initia-

tive such as a naval group, I found that to be very difficult to do because of the different politics.

It is a hard task, because it is as hard as it is I think NATO and maybe the U.S. shies away a bit from it because it is just very difficult to pull off.

Senator SHAHEEN. Dr. Polyakova, do you want to add to that?

Dr. POLYAKOVA. Yes. Is mic on? Okay, there we go.

I agree with everything that Jim just laid out but I would add to that the reality—I will take a step back. There is a huge complexity of alliances in the region. There is no question about that. We know some of the problems involved with different perspectives on the Black Sea, but all the countries to a certain extent are united in their fear of Russian militarization of the region and that includes Turkey and that includes the rest of the allies as well.

I think this is where U.S. leadership really matters. Before we start to think about specific projects or work we want to do across the region, we need to establish a shared vision for what security actually means and an understanding of a division of labor that will spread both responsibility, whether it comes to countering information operations or being the military heavyweight in the region, which, of course, is Turkey, and spreads liability across the region.

I think this is something Turkey might actually welcome because they are often the target of Russian aggression when the relationship between Erdogan and Putin is not going so well.

I think there are many opportunities for us to undermine what Russia sees as its main advantage, which is a divided region, but it is divided because there has not been a single leading voice to try to bring everyone to the same table and I think this is exactly where the United States has to start.

Senator SHAHEEN. Mr. Brzezinski, do you agree with that?

Mr. BRZEZINSKI. I think my colleagues are spot on. The only thing I would add is that there is actually more of an opportunity now to drive forward a coordinated regional response to the challenges of the Black Sea and that is because Russian aggression in Ukraine and the continued use of force there, including, in the sea of Kerch and the Black Sea, Russia's mobilization of a significant amount of offensive capability in the region, has helped to unify Allied perspectives in the Black Sea.

I see this in Bulgaria and Romania. There is greater consistency in the view of Russia and the challenge it poses to Bulgaria, Romania, Georgia, and Ukraine. When you have that kind of consensus in five of the six countries there, it makes it a little bit easier to work with Turkey and to bring Turkey on board a more common approach by the region.

When you have that, you can be more effective in bringing our West European allies and partners into that game.

I recognize the historic difficulties. They are real. They still persist today, but the opportunity for an effective strategy, I think, now is before us and all it needs is some strong American leadership.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

Senator Romney.

Senator ROMNEY. Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.

Mr. Brzezinski, you indicated that you thought there should be a path to NATO membership, potentially, for Ukraine, Georgia. There have been some that have argued that putting such a path in place would give Russia the excuse they want to incur even more aggressively militarily in their territory.

Is that something that you or Mr. Townsend or others are concerned about, that somehow this kind of discussion gives Russia the excuse they want to take further military action?

Mr. BRZEZINSKI. I think it is, Senator Romney. I think it is a concern we should watch, but it is a manageable concern, because if you look at the balance of power between the West and Russia, it is overwhelming in the West's favor, and if the West can be put on a track, a determined track, to bring these two countries aboard as they wish, back it with the political, military, and economic muscle that comes—that NATO brings to the table, I think we are in a position to drive forward that integration while at the same time deterring Russian aggression.

The problem is in the past is that we have communicated a hesitant approach, a divided approach. I am not saying that such an approach has to yield membership immediately. It is going to require a real committed diplomatic effort on the part of the United States to bring our West—particularly, some of our West European allies on board and that will not happen without American leadership, but the capacity is there for this to actually occur and to complete the vision of an undivided Europe.

Senator ROMNEY. Dr. Polyakova or Mr. Townsend, do you agree?

Dr. POLYAKOVA. I agree with everything Ian just said. I would also add that we cannot forget the EU integration piece of this. EU integration and accession for Central Eastern Europe has been the core driver of reforms in the judicial sector, in the civil society sector, and in defense sector in all of these countries.

It is one reason why countries like Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia have these so-called frozen conflicts or gray zones on their borders because Russia wants to prevent them from joining the EU as well as NATO. It is not just about NATO.

To your direct question, I find that we spend a lot of time worrying about what the Kremlin might do, and we do not spend enough time thinking about what we should do. I think it is high time that we take an approach and a strategic view of the region, first, that will serve our national security interests, that will serve the broader regional national security interest, rather than thinking about what might the Russians do to react.

I think it is a manageable problem on the Russia side, as Ian correctly said, but I think this is where we need to just switch how we are thinking about the problem.

Senator ROMNEY. Thank you.

Mr. Townsend.

Mr. TOWNSEND. I would agree with my colleagues as well and, Senator, I would also agree with you too in terms of how delicate and difficult this can be and has been with Russia, but because of that, we allow those fears to hobble our approach in the region. We allow our fears to dictate what we do, as my colleagues have pointed out, and I think a path to membership can be managed in such a way that it does not set off an immediate conflict with Russia.

I think such a path includes just beginning with the Membership Action Plan, which begins to put these two candidates into a process where we begin to look at their capabilities. It is not that we have not done this already, but it is part of this path that I've talked about and I think that would be a logical first step.

It should not be something that would light a fuse. It is something that we can manage and I think we need to seriously consider beginning with a Membership Action Plan.

Senator ROMNEY. Thank you. Very difficult question, I think, for any of us to respond to, but that is trying to understand what is going on or what was going on in Turkey's mind, how it was that they decided to go ahead and buy the S-400, what their plans are as it relates to their relationship with Russia and with NATO.

Did they underestimate the response that would come from NATO, the fact that we have withdrawn production elements from the F-35 as a result of their decision? Did they just miscalculate or do they have a different objective in mind that we have not fully understood?

This is sort of for any one of you to respond to, but I must admit that I find Turkey's actions to be hard to understand and explain.

Mr. BRZEZINSKI. Senator Romney, if I could just add another point on NATO enlargement. If you look at the history of the debate on extension of NATO membership to the Baltics, the same arguments were made that are made today about the risk of Russia launching a military response to a Membership Action Plan for Ukraine. We have been through that debate before.

Regarding Turkey, which is a much more complex question, when I ask myself why is Erdogan doing this—and I emphasize the word President Erdogan. It is really not Turkey. It is one individual. From his point of view—and I am not justifying it—his relationship with the United States has not been ideal.

From his point of view, he has had to endure the consequences of the U.S. invasion in Iraq, and instability—and the consequences and instability of that region—the refugees that were driven in his country by that, by U.S. Syria policy. He associates a nearly successful assassination attempt against him, to Turkish officers that were trained in the United States.

There are many reasons, from his perspective, that relationship with the United States has not been ideal. I am not justifying his perspective. You are asking why is he doing what he is doing.

These and other events broke his trust with the United States and pushed him onto a vector where he is trying to find this middle way between East and West, between the great powers, between Europe and the Middle East, between Russia and the United States.

That is why he continues to sustain NATO's role in—Turkey's role in NATO, serving as the host for NATO headquarters, contributing to NATO missions, but at the same time is dangerously flirting with Putin as a means that keep his independence and perhaps a check on the West, which he no longer trusts as much.

It is a dangerous flirtation, and this S-400 is extremely significant because he is, basically, not just buying a system but he is integrating into the core of the armed forces—the Turkish armed

forces—Russian intelligence, and that is going to take him a long time—it is going to take Turkey a long time to shake out.

That is not a very clear answer to your question, but this is an individual leader who has had personal challenges with the West, trying to find a middle way. Unfortunately, he has turned to an authoritarian bent and is flirting with dangerous adversaries of ours. My sense is it will take a generation for us to get beyond this. We will not be able to normalize our relationship with Turkey until we enter the post-Erdogan era.

Senator ROMNEY. Thank you. I have taken more than my allotted time, but if the chairman would allow the other members to comment if they would like we would appreciate that.

Dr. POLYAKOVA. Thank you. If it is okay to say a couple of words, I think this is the key question for understanding U.S. engagement in the broader region. Turkey is, of course, the key military power that is a NATO ally besides Russia, and in many ways Russia and Turkey split the region as a sort of condominium of—in the military domain.

I think the Turkey-Russia relationship is primarily about Erdogan and Putin. There is a deep personal relationship there, maybe even a friendship—certainly, they project it that way and they present it that way—and I do not think that is a relationship between these two men that we are ever going to break.

I think that being said, Russia has a huge amount of leverage over Turkey. Russia's positions in Syria could turn up another refugee wave, a migrant wave, into Turkey. They are absolutely terrified of that.

Russia consistently uses tourism. Russian tourists make up the largest part of the foreign tourist industry in Turkey, and we have seen elements and time and again where the Turks, or I should say, Erdogan does something and then all of a sudden, Russian tourists cannot go to Turkey anymore. This really hurts and it hurts Erdogan domestically, and I think at the end of the day, this is about domestic politics.

So I think there is a desire from Erdogan to constantly balance against Putin by using the West and aggravating the West by pursuing these kinds of somewhat nonsensical engagements and purchases of these kinds of military capabilities.

I think we should watch very, very closely whether the Turks will actually use the S-400s. I think they are going to remain unused and relatively dormant to preserve the NATO relationship and to not ruin even further the relationship with the United States, but I think Russia has a huge amount of leverage over Turkey and that personal relationship with Erdogan and Putin is not going to go anywhere while Erdogan or Putin are both in power.

Mr. TOWNSEND. Senator, I would only add that I worked deeply with Turkey over the past 10 years or so, and the conclusion I drew with the S-400s is that it really began with the bargaining over the sale of a Patriot missile system to Turkey.

That has been in the works for years. It began to frustrate Erdogan greatly that he was not getting from the United States the price and the technology transfer that he wanted, and he began to throw something new into what has been a routine, although long-

standing negotiation over the sale. He threw into that the point that he has options.

He wanted the United States to know that he has got other options besides the Patriot system. The first example of that was he was going to buy a Chinese system, and for about a year there was this talk coming out of Ankara that there was going to be a Chinese system.

Then he said, well, I am still not happy with where the United States is. I am not going to buy China. I am going to go talk to the Russians. This time, he took it further. Because the DoD was not moving on the various elements that he was unhappy with the Patriot, he went ahead and bought the S-400 system and by doing that he bought into this relationship with Putin.

It is not a relationship that is based on love or friendship or interest. It is really based on these two autocrats using one another to take forward—whether it is regional or vis-à-vis the United States to take forward their own agendas working with one another on this.

If you see where the Russians and the Turks are in Libya in terms of the problems there or in Azerbaijan or in other regional issues in the area, usually the Russians are on one side and the Turks are on the other side.

This relationship is one based primarily on those two personalities and how they use one another to signal or to try to get leverage over the United States, particularly. So we have just got to break that vortex because at the end of the day we need to return to that close relationship with Turkey.

We do need them and they need us as well. They do not need Russia to be their friend. It is the United States, and the bulk of the civil service and the diplomatic service and the military, those left after the purges, I think they know that, but they are keeping their heads down and we will have to wait the departure of Erdogan, I think, before we can get a semblance of normalcy between the United States and Turkey.

Senator ROMNEY. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, I think that is you, Chris.

Senator MURPHY. I think it is Senator Johnson. You want me to go?

Thank you, Senator Johnson. Thank you all for being here. You all have done so much to help this committee and, in particular, this subcommittee over the course of the last decade. Grateful to have you both before us. I am going to try to fit in a question for each of you.

Mr. Townsend, I wanted to talk to you about Russia's end goals. One of them is to try to create fissures inside the EU, but another is to try to create fissures between the EU, Europe, and the United States.

I think we have to have our eyes wide open as to the ways in which they use both their official means of communication, but also their surrogates and their propaganda channels, both inside Europe and inside the United States, to try to break us from each other. I think about what is happening in Romania and Bulgaria today, as an example.



Can you just give us an example or two of the ways in which Russia is trying to split the United States from Europe and make sure that this committee is going into some of these questions about the future of U.S.-European cooperation fully cognizant of what Russia's motives are here?

Mr. TOWNSEND. I think one of the top priorities for Moscow as they look at trying to drive a wedge is to portray to the Allies, particularly Central and Eastern European allies, that the United States cannot be trusted, that at the end of the day, they will take problems such as Nord Stream 2 or Kabul, just those two, or our politics over the past number of years and they turn that around and they portray that in Europe and they portray that to those nations that are afraid that the United States that they thought they knew in terms of being a trusted ally that would be there when it counts, to cast doubts on that, to tell the Central and East Europeans that, look, you put so much faith in United States. Look what they have done in Kabul. You cannot trust the Americans.

Or they might go to the French and say, you cannot trust the Americans and NATO. The EU and the Europeans should establish their own military capability. They should go off on their own. NATO's time is in the past. NATO's great champion, the United States, is no longer interested in Europe. France, you should pull together a coalition of European members and set up a European army and you should—it is this kind of thing more than anything else that gets the press in Europe or gets the think tanks in Europe or those that shape opinion, politicians, to begin to feel that they need to hedge against the United States, that they do not know where the United States is going. Therefore, we need to be doing things as Europeans to look out for that time when the United States might be distracted and doing things in the Pacific instead.

That is one of the major tools that they use to drive that wedge is to insert into the European mind that the United States is not what it used to be. The United States cannot be trusted to come. There has got to be other alternatives, and we, Russia, have some great ideas to have a Europe without the United States that would be better than a Europe with the United States.

Senator MURPHY. We need to be positioned in order to counteract that narrative and that is why it is so egregious that we do not have ambassadors and that we have had a log jam here in Congress trying to get our diplomatic team deployed to Europe.

For instance, right now, one of the leaders who is being held up in the Senate is the Assistant Secretary for Europe, the person who would coordinate pushback on this narrative, but another way that we can pushback on this narrative is by funding independent objective media sources.

Ms. Polyakova, you have done a lot of work on this topic. You talk about it in your written testimony. The idea that we are spending the same amount of money on our entire anti-propaganda budget housed at the Global Engagement Center as we do on one single littoral combat ship seems to be a gross misallocation of resources today.

Can you talk a little bit about whether we are allocating enough resources in and around the Black Sea region, in particular, to try

to combat against Russian narratives in ways that we support objective media sources, fact checkers, throughout the region?

Dr. POLYAKOVA. Thank you, Senator, and I know you are very familiar with the region and have visited the region quite often so you know some of these issues quite well. Thank you for your question.

Just a couple of thoughts there. The answer to your question as to whether we are spending enough resources commensurate with the level of the threat, I think the answer is very clear, no, and that has been the case for, unfortunately, a very long time.

I think we need to not think about counter disinformation or counter propaganda efforts separate from supporting independent media. These are one and the same, and we have to understand that this is a long-term game.

We, obviously, have issues around disinformation in our own country. We know this is not easy, but certainly, the countries of the Black Sea, most notably Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova, have been battling this for a long time. I think, unfortunately, what I have seen in the last couple of months—and I was in Ukraine just in September—is what Jim just outlined about Russian messaging about the lack of U.S. reliability, the lack of U.S. leadership, the lack of U.S. just care and involvement in the region, and the lack of our capability to act has been very effective.

These are the pictures from Afghanistan, the chaos that ensued as part of the withdrawal, was all over Russian media. Again, this was propaganda, but these were real photos.

I want to be clear about how well the Russians are using U.S. foreign policy to drive our Central and East European allies away from United States as well as to help mobilize these conversations around strategic autonomy, which are very, very dangerous, in my view, because it serves the Russian interests and the Chinese interests.

To be clear, I think the Global Engagement Center is a good initiative, but it seems like we have done that and then we thought, that is it. We are done. We solved the problem; and we, certainly, have not. If anything it has gotten far, far worse and we need to do a great deal more to invest in the region and to really rethink how we do democracy support, independent media support.

I think our system—it is a different hearing, I think—but our system is—it feels very broken right now in terms of how we invest in some of these independent efforts in the media sphere in these countries.

Senator MURPHY. I thank you for that. I am over my time. I will submit an additional question to the record for you.

[EDITOR'S NOTE.—Senator Murphy chose not to submit the question for the record.]

Mr. Brzezinski, I want to thank you for your support and advocacy for the Three Seas Fund. I know the Administration is reviewing its participation in that program. This is one of the mechanisms by which we build energy independence throughout the region.

I think it is absolutely critical. I am arguing that the Administration double-down on our involvement and I appreciate your work on that topic.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you, Senator Murphy.

Senator Johnson.

Senator JOHNSON. Thank you, Madam Chair. There is without a doubt that Russia uses its propaganda arm, its media outlets, to do as much as possible to destabilize these nations, but as Ms. Polyakova just talked about, the reality is something we need to deal with as well. I just want to ask all three of you, because I am assuming you are talking to players in the region all the time, what is the current perception of the U.S.?

I mean, set Russian propaganda and misinformation aside. What is the perception of what the reality is in terms of American strength, American commitment?

I will start with you, Mr. Townsend.

Mr. TOWNSEND. Thank you, Senator. That is an excellent question. We do talk to them all the time. It is constant. I feel like I am back in my old job in the Pentagon, we see them so often.

I would say that they are nervous about where we are going in terms of a nation. They watch our politics as well. They read the Washington Post. So there is an unease there where they do not quite know where we are going.

They like the tone of the Biden administration. They like a lot of the rhetoric coming out of the Biden administration. From what I hear, they are waiting for some of the detail. They are waiting for some of the programs, what things will look like.

I think not having ambassadors has had quite an impact. We have all been around Washington for many, many years and we know the issue, but I think this time it is a bit different. It has gone on for so long it is adding to this anxiousness that they have, and it is hard for them to—back in their capitals to talk about the United States from their embassies here in Washington through cables and this type of thing and to give their governments a good view of just where the United States is right now, where is Washington right now, if there is not an ambassador and a country team that can supplement that.

It is definitely a problem. It is still early days for them as they are looking at where the United States is going. Finally, just my last point, I think they are also uneasy that it has taken so long for them to develop a picture of where the Administration is. As the team—the Administration's team is still coming into place, the voice that they hear is not as unified as they are used to.

Senator JOHNSON. I am all for appointing ambassadors. I think in your answer you are overlooking what is the impact of capitulation on Nord Stream 2? What is the impact of the embarrassing, I would argue, dangerous surrender in Afghanistan?

What is the impact of not funding the Defense Department so that we maintain a strength where America's percentage of GDP spent on defense just continues to decline? What is the impact of that?

I will go to you, Ms. Polyakova.

Dr. POLYAKOVA. Unfortunately, I think the perception, especially in Europe's East, is that our partners and allies there can no longer rely on the United States for a consistent foreign policy.

I would say this is not just the last months of this Administration. This is a view that has been developing over time, and what our allies are looking for is consistency. We did, basically, a yo-yo on Nord Stream 2 in this country from the last Administration to this one.

It was very confusing and we are seeing some of the effects of that now. Moldova is being held hostage, basically, by the Kremlin and so is most of Europe in terms of gas supplies, and the Russians have gotten very brazen because they know they can just roam now because the deal has been made.

That is the perception, and I do think that what happened with the AUKUS decision and how that was communicated—again, this is not about whether this is the right policy or the wrong policy. Same with Afghanistan. It is about how it was perceived in the region. Again, I think what it is fueling, particularly in Western Europe, is a desire to decouple from the United States. It is an illusion that Europe can do that, of course, but it is fueling that kind of perception. It is fueling that debate, as we speak.

Senator JOHNSON. Mr. Brzezinski, if you could please answer that.

Mr. BRZEZINSKI. I think the Central Europeans, including the region—Central Europeans in the Black Sea region are beginning to question their relationship with the United States.

They embraced Biden's election. They liked his outreach to Europe, but they, as my colleagues have mentioned, had been a little bit stunned by the U.S. decision in Afghanistan, both in terms of the rationale for it and the abandonment of America commitments it had made and, particularly, commitments to human rights, for example, in Afghanistan, commitment to security. They were upset over the lack of consultation and the execution of that decision. That struck a blow at the confidence in United States.

I think they are concerned, and this is something that I hear consistently in discussions with Central European colleagues, that there is a focus in Washington on China that could be distracting the United States away from the challenges posed by Russia.

That is a criticism directed both at the Administration and to Capitol Hill. Nord Stream 2 almost universally across Central Europe was a decision that was not well appreciated. They thought it was a mistake because it is going to increase, particularly, Western Europe's dependence on Russian gas, and they are watching very closely how United States is going to respond with Germany to the Nord Stream 2.

Russia is turning off the taps of gas to Europe today, and Moldova is in a crisis right now because of that cut off. Central Europeans are waiting to see what the United States and Germany are going to do to respond to that as was promised under the NS 2 agreement between Washington and Berlin.

They are all watching very closely for the release of upcoming policy reviews from the Administration, particularly the Global Force Posture Review, the Russia review, and probably, of course,

also whenever there will be the rollout of a Black Sea security strategy. It is not a crisis, but there is growing concern.

Senator JOHNSON. Again, I am all for getting ambassadors in place, but ambassadors will not have enough lipstick to put on all those pigs.

Madam Chair.

Senator SHAHEEN. Senator Van Hollen.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair. I thank all of you for your testimony.

Dr. Polyakova, you say in your written statement that, "Black Sea states as a whole must do more to improve resilience of institutions, that unstable democratic institutions and processes within these states expose the region to the Kremlin's influence operations in the informational cyber demands, and that every Black Sea state can and should do more on democratic reforms, anti-corruption, and judicial independence."

Can you briefly describe where you think the biggest hotspots are in this issue? I agree with your assessment that to the extent you have weaker institutions you have countries that are more vulnerable to pressure from the Kremlin. Where do you see the biggest hotspots to be right now?

Dr. POLYAKOVA. Thank you for that question, Senator. It is such a critical issue for us to be discussing as we think about a longer-term strategy, not a short-term strategy. The hotspots, to my mind, are exactly in the countries that are not part of NATO, that are not part of the EU.

As I mentioned earlier, EU integration and NATO integration have mobilized reforms and have forced countries that would have reformed much, much slower, perhaps not at all, to really establish proper democratic institutions: a independent judiciary, checks and balances, support of independent media, and have a proper parliamentary debate and that can curb and put a check on executive power.

In countries like Ukraine, while, certainly, Ukraine in terms of reforms has done a great deal, and we have to be very patient because these countries are new democracies and Ukraine, of course, has only, you could say, broken free of the yoke of Russia in just 2014 in terms of the Government being not under the thumb of the Kremlin anymore.

Still, progress has been slow, but I think our strategy to tie financial support—not military support, financial support and loans through the IMF and other international institutions to make that conditional, and very specific reforms in judiciary is working. We need to keep up that pressure. We need to be very explicit about that conditionality.

I think Moldova today is a bright spot. I know it is a small country and it is hard to focus on small countries, but we just had a democratic election there and we have a real anti-corruption activist, President Maia Sandu, in charge, and we have to support Moldova and make sure it remains a bright spot.

Georgia, unfortunately, I think, has seen some setbacks in recent months on democracy. Again, to my mind, we are not in a place where we can abandon any ally or any democracy at this point. We have to help them succeed. We have to help them reform.

If I had to choose one specific area for all these countries it is the judiciary. This is the key. It is also often the top line of attack when it comes to anti-democratic efforts to undermine independence and undermine proper democratic process.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. I appreciate that. I do want to press you a little bit on the statement that it is our non-NATO allies that are particularly weak when it comes to these institutions.

I think we see significant erosion of many of these democratic institutions and independent judiciary in certain NATO countries as well.

Let me ask you about Turkey. As you know, President Erdogan just threatened to declare the U.S. Ambassador and others persona non grata because they sent a letter asking for the release of Osman Kavala, who is somebody, as you know, that the Council of Justice in Europe has found unjustly detained.

Erdogan is also talking about dismantling one of the largest political parties in Turkey, the HDP. I would be interested in how you and other panelists sort of judge this clear trend in Turkey under President Erdogan away from independent democratic institutions, threatening to lock up and render illegal these political parties.

Dr. POLYAKOVA. Thank you, Senator. I can start and then ask my colleagues to chime in on this very complex question of Turkey, which we knew we would be talking about extensively during this hearing.

You are absolutely right, the democratic recession is not just a problem in the Black Sea. We see that in EU member states and NATO member states, unfortunately, and we have to think about what tools do we have, carrots and sticks, to push these countries in the right direction.

I think this is a huge question for this Administration and for the United States, more broadly, but in Turkey specifically, certainly, the trends we have seen under President Erdogan have been beyond deeply concerning, and it is hard to see a reversal in Turkey, certainly, not under Erdogan but, hopefully, after Erdogan's time is up, which we do not know when that will be.

I do think that there is, because of the economic situation, a growing discontent among the population. There is a growing discontent among his supporters, and I think at the end of the day a lot of the actions that we see Erdogan take including this threat to expel the U.S. Ambassador—the U.S. Ambassador and others—are much more about domestic populist politics than they are about reality, but I think the reality is also that Erdogan does not seem to care as much about the international community's response in some of these cases, though I will say he did walk back the expulsion threat after some international pressure in that regard.

I think that also tells us that when we work with allies and we coordinate our efforts, they work.

Mr. TOWNSEND. Senator, I stand with my colleague and everything that she said, and I would just add that it is going to take great patience from the United States so that we do not make things worse in terms of picking fights with him or rising to the bait, if you will, with Erdogan. He is very good at that. He is good

at frustrating us and putting us in a position where we do not even want to have to deal with him.

I think that will make things worse. There will come a time when he is going to leave the scene. He is vulnerable. I think, politically, the next few years will probably show that, and I think we need to be patient and keep a strong relationship with that civil service, with the diplomatic service, with the Turkish military, which used to be, of course, very close to the U.S. military.

As I mentioned earlier, they went through a purge. They are going to have to be rebuilt in their own way after Erdogan leaves to come back to have that relationship with us the way it was in the past.

I think we have to be patient and not play into his hands, and be a constant presence and try to deal with the irritants as best we can and wait him out because I do not see us having a changed relationship to something that works better for us until he leaves the scene.

We have just got to help that by being patient and keeping things intact with that relationship with the broader Turkish Government until he leaves.

Senator VAN HOLLEN. Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you very much.

Just to follow up on that a little bit, because I cannot remember which one of you said we needed to help President Erdogan find an out for his decision to bring in the S-400 and to compromise the F-35 program, having talked to a number of Turkish officials it is not at all clear to me that they want that out.

So I guess I am a little curious about what you think the options might be to engage Turkey in those areas and whether, in fact—I mean, the definite sense I had was that they really did not think the United States was going to follow through on our concerns about their using the S-400 and then withdrawing or kicking Turkey out, I guess, is the best way to put it, from the F-35 program.

Given that, it is not clear to me that there is a lot we can do in those areas. I do not know who would like to take that.

Mr. TOWNSEND. Senator, I said that in my testimony so I guess it is up to me to defend it.

So much of this problem was based on miscalculation on both sides. It was something caught up, again, in the negotiations over the Patriot missile system and it just got out of control.

So the reason I said that we need to help get Erdogan out of the corner within which he has painted himself is that he went for the S-400 not because he wanted it or the Turkish military wanted it.

It was a message to the United States that, look, I do not need the Patriot. I can buy the S-400, too. The Patriot missile system is something that, in fact, the military does want and so does much of the Turkish Government.

The Patriot has been what has been deployed for years to Turkey when they have come under pressure from Syria or from Iraq or other kinds of crises in the Middle East in the past.

It has been NATO deploying missile defense to Turkey and, of course, the U.S. Patriot system. So they want the Patriot system. They do want that. They particularly want the F-35.

The U.S. has had for decades now a very deep relationship between Turkish aerospace and the U.S. aerospace and U.S. aircraft, particularly the F-16, and I have talked to the Turkish military over the past couple of months and they told me very quietly they still want to keep going with the American platforms because so much of their industry as well as their logistics and infrastructure is based around that F-16.

If the question becomes, well, how can we deal with this S-400 that you already own and make sure it does not become a problem if you are then led into the F-35 program, and I will give you a suggestion.

One was that it almost could be something on the lines of taking that S-400 and keeping it in its crates instead of deploying it and putting it in a warehouse locked up where it has been inspected once a year to make sure that it does not come out and there is not Russian technicians. Mr. Brzezinski pointed out, it is not integrated into the Turkish air defense system, but it is there as a white elephant and that we can be assured of that.

If the Air Force feels confident that, yes, it is not going to be a threat to the F-35, then I think we should put them back into the F-35 program. They were supposed to make parts for the F-35. I think—

Senator SHAHEEN. Well, in fact, they did.

Mr. TOWNSEND. Excuse me?

Senator SHAHEEN. In fact, they did make parts for the F-35.

Mr. TOWNSEND. Yes, absolutely. Absolutely. I think if we can come up with a measure to deal with that S-400 and come up with a way also to make the Patriot air defense purchased by the Turks—if we get halfway to what they want, which is a whole another story—they want a lower price, they want to be able to manufacture parts of it—and we went into quite a bit of negotiations between Raytheon and the Turks on how to do that, if we can at least take care of that Patriot purchase, neutralize the S-400 and bring them back into the F-35, I think that—they are all connected, and if we can come up with a way to do that, that will go a long way to bringing at least on the military and the civil service side in Ankara get us back into a place where we used to be.

Until we can come up with something like that, we are going to be at a standoff.

Senator SHAHEEN. I have no doubt about that. What I am questioning is Turkey's real interest, either on the part of President Erdogan and the people who are in charge, in making those changes that they would need to make in order to make that happen, and based on conversations that I have had it is not clear to me that, in fact, they want to do that.

I want to move to NATO expansion. Dr. Polyakova, this is probably for you. I, certainly, support Georgia and Ukraine's aspirations for MAP for NATO. I think it would be very helpful. Obviously, they have some reforms that they need to make in order to be able to do that, but I worry if we continue to hold that out and we are not able to make that happen because, obviously, there are a number of NATO countries who seem to have reservations about that, that that undermines our efforts in both of those countries.



Can you or any of you talk about what options we might have and should we think about a different construct for NATO that might provide opportunities for countries like Ukraine and Georgia that really want to be members or be on a trajectory for membership and yet still have challenges within their own countries?

Dr. POLYAKOVA. Well, thank you so much, Senator. It is an important question and I am sure my colleagues will have a lot to say about that.

Like you, I also believe that MAP for Georgia and Ukraine is the right path forward. Unfortunately, I think this conversation about Ukraine security and also Georgian security has become too embroiled and too focused on MAP.

I think the reality is that, given what you just described in terms of some NATO member states not supporting that process and the reality that Ukraine and, I think, Ukrainians realize that, they are far away from NATO membership, a long ways away because of their own reforms in the defense and military sector and, of course, questions about Russian occupation of Crimea and the continued low conflict—low-level conflict in the Donbas.

That being said, I think there is a lot we can do that is below MAP to build a closer partnership with Ukraine and Georgia. We are already doing some of that. One idea that I elaborate in my written testimony as well is, of course, the joint exercises that we have been doing, such as Rapid Trident and Sea Breeze, which you also mentioned, are incredibly important.

We should do many more of those. I do not think there is any substitute for U.S. operations in concert with our partners to demonstrate U.S. support for the Black Sea, but also for Ukraine and Georgia and also Moldova, more specifically.

I think there is an opportunity to focus on establishing Centers of Excellence, perhaps EU–NATO joint Centers of Excellence—we have a model for that in other countries—in Georgia, in Ukraine, as well as focusing on how these countries can become sort of a network for responding to Russian hybrid threats because they are often the first target of Russian cyber-attacks and disinformation attacks and they can serve as a sort of early warning system if we have a network in place.

I think there is a lot more that we can do on the military side, certainly, in the NDAA—not cutting that support for Ukraine, most notably—that has been so effective and continuing our training exercises with both countries, Georgia and Ukraine, that we have been doing for years. That has professionalized the Ukrainian military in a significant way and that has been very obvious in terms of their ability to defend themselves as well.

There is—that is the beginning of a list as to what else we can do that will take us a little bit below the discussion around MAP.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you. Did you want to add something, Mr. Brzezinski?

Mr. BRZEZINSKI. Yes, Senator Shaheen.

When I think about Ukraine and Georgia and MAP and their aspirations to become full members of the transatlantic community, I just have to come to the conclusion that the current approach is not working.

Russia has invaded Ukraine, continues to occupy Ukrainian territory. It has invaded Georgia, continues to occupy Georgian territory. You saw firsthand the borderization that is going on, which has continued territorial aggression.

We saw a massive buildup in the Black Sea just this last spring, a buildup that has not been withdrawn. That offensive posture is still there. Russia is more poised to do more damage against those two countries and against the region than before.

NATO's open-door policy is really—the open-door phrase has become a destabilizing bromide. It communicates a lack of commitment, a lack of will to really respond affirmatively and decisively to the transatlantic aspirations of these countries, countries which, by the way, to demonstrate have sent their troops into harm's way under the NATO flag.

We do need to change this approach to membership as soon as we can. In addition to putting them on a MAP or another form of clear roadmap to membership, we should be upgrading the Alliance's engagement with that country.

We should have a larger institutional presence, perhaps kind of a training element like we have in Georgia. We should be expanding and increasing the number of exercises we do not just with Ukraine, but in Ukraine.

All of that would complicate Russian planning. We ought to be sharing, providing more lethal military assistance to Ukraine and Georgia. They need to not only have Javelins but the ability to deploy their Javelins to the frontlines, which they are not allowed to do today.

They need to have better counter battery radars against Russian artillery. They need better drones to improve their situational awareness. They need better air defense systems. These are things that would help ensure that Russia does not make a move against Ukraine or Georgia as we begin the process of integrating them into the Alliance.

I think it would be very interesting to look at Ukraine today, because I was a volunteer in Ukraine in 1993 and it is night and day between Ukraine of then and today in terms of rule of law, democratic processes, and procedures and governance.

They have come a remarkable way and they have done it in the face of Russian aggression, which has been trying to trip up their economic reforms, trip up their political reforms from the very first day of Ukrainian independence.

It would be interesting to compare Ukraine today to NATO's newest members and their states of reform back in the 2004 round of NATO enlargement and I would bet you would find Ukraine is ahead of a number of those countries who entered in 2004.

Senator SHAHEEN. Well, thank you very much. You make a very good point.

I am going to turn it over to Senator Barrasso. Try and go vote again. The train seems to be working so, hopefully, it will be quicker. Then turn it over to Senator Johnson.

Senator BARRASSO. Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. As you go to vote, I was just thinking about our meeting with Jens Stoltenberg not too long ago, just in the last month, about NATO

showing additional strength and unity, and in my visit to Ukraine last month having a chance to visit with President Zelensky.

To your question, Madam Chairman, about the efforts with NATO, that was one of the main issues they wanted to talk about, the NATO expansion and the ability of Ukraine to find a way to enter and show solidarity and union and benefit as well as contribute.

The question—I am going to run through this and let each of the three of you respond. When I think about the very successful Baltic air policing mission to safeguard the integrity of the NATO alliance members' airspace that was created by NATO, that mission, I think, could serve as a model to efforts to maintain a robust NATO presence in the Black Sea.

You just mentioned the issues of more involvement in terms of not just assistance but actually people. Can I just ask your views on NATO establishing, say, a Black Sea maritime patrol mission?

What are some of the challenges and the opportunities of a regular and rotational maritime presence by NATO in the Black Sea, and do NATO members have the capacity and a commitment to create this type of mission? I would just be interested in the three of your comments.

Mr. TOWNSEND. Thank you, Senator. I tried to do that when I was the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense. Back in 2016, we tried to—and NATO was working on developing a NATO naval presence in the Black Sea and it was blocked by Turkey. So that is the problem.

We have to figure out—we still need to do that. How do we do this in a way that we will not find ourselves blocked? What I suggested in my testimony, and I have heard others talk about this as well, is not have it be a NATO mission but have it be a national mission—again, not subject to a NATO vote—where allies develop a rotational deployment similar to air policing, if you will, where they would go for 2 weeks to patrol the Black Sea and then return out to Bosphorus and then another one goes in. So you have got allies doing this and flying the flag, partners, too, and I think that is an important demonstration of NATO unity as well.

While it will not be a NATO initiative, it will be made up of NATO nations that are going in there and doing 2-week patrols and then coming out, each taking their turn.

Mr. BRZEZINSKI. If I could answer, Senator Barrasso.

Senator BARRASSO. Yes, please.

Mr. BRZEZINSKI. When I think of moving forward with our NATO presence in that region, I would say, one, let us put an intelligence fusion cell there so it could look at the full spectrum of challenges—informational, cyber, military, economic.

We have such a cell in Naples today looking at Africa and the Middle East. We should have one in the Black Sea. In addition to expanding our maritime naval exercises and operations in the Black Sea, we have got to really upgrade what they call NATO's Tailored Force Presence, which right now is just a headquarters element.

In the Baltic, we have an Enhanced Forward Presence, which is four NATO battalions in Poland and three Baltic States. We need more than just a headquarters element in the Black Sea region.

We need a headquarters element that has also got actually land battalions, combat battalions there, coastal batteries, and a more robust naval presence.

I would reinforce that with a U.S. brigade combat team in Romania and Bulgaria. That is the kind of presence that we need. If we cannot do that because Turkey blocks us, these are initiatives we could do with coalitions of the willing in the Alliance, and sometimes that is the thing you do to get the Alliance into that gear.

Senator BARRASSO. Dr. Polyakova.

Dr. POLYAKOVA. Just a small add to my colleagues just to second the idea of establishing an operational hub, an intelligence cell, whatever we want to call it, to respond to full spectrum warfare and to assess full spectrum warfare across the Black Sea.

I think this is exactly something we have to do. We have to do it, and I do not think it would take a huge amount of resources. As all of us seem to agree, Romania seems to be the most natural place to do so, given the level of Romania's engagement in the region and its investment.

Just very quickly on the Tailored Forward Presence, the TFP, it is just not enough, at the end of the day, and we have to rethink it because it has not even been implemented to—at that lower level that is below the Enhanced Forward Presence that we have in the broader Central Eastern European region.

Senator BARRASSO. It does seem like most of the activity we have is coming out of Sigonella in Sicily to do the observational work with the NATO headquarters there as well as a U.S. base.

Dr. POLYAKOVA. I would agree with that.

Senator BARRASSO. Okay. Thank you. Thank you all very much.

Senator JOHNSON. Thanks, Senator Barrasso. You kind of stole my thunder because I wanted to actually ask about those same Baltic state air patrols. I will take it from a slightly different position.

When I first heard of that, and I never got the specific figures but it sounded to me like the Baltic States, by and large, were paying for it. Maybe it was not a dollar-for-dollar type of situation, but to me, that was a complete win-win situation. They wanted a U.S. or NATO presence there. Obviously, every nation is strapped for financing. Every nation is talking about let us do nation building at home.

Here you had a win-win situation and I would just ask the same thing. Why not replicate that? Senator Shaheen and I just met with the Romanian Ambassador and in my briefing heard something about 1,100 troops kind of on a rotational basis, and as every nation in that region just about always asks us, we want more U.S. presence.

Call it a tripwire, but it provides security. It makes a lot of sense. From my standpoint, I think it is probably worth the U.S. investment just from—again, where we can provide stability it is just so much cheaper to keep a nation or a region stable as opposed to having to deal with a big mess.

If that is not possible, what possibilities are there? I mean, what other opportunities are there to have these countries, whether NATO allies or not, basically, fund the presence of whatever military force they can make the arrangement for?

I will start with Mr. Townsend.

Mr. TOWNSEND. Thank you, Senator. I was very much involved in that Baltic and also in the Black Sea arrangement with these nations to pick up a lot of the tab in terms of logistics and support for U.S. forces when they deploy there.

I will say that in Romania we are seeing quite a bit of investment by the Romanian Government in their MK Base as well as some training areas also so that they are building the infrastructure, the barracks. They are lengthening runways. They are doing things. We are doing the same through the European reassurance or European deterrence initiative that we early on began to fund some of those upgrades that the Romanians are now taking over for us.

We are doing that, but I think there is more that we can do and, particularly, having partners and allies there pick up some of those costs. I know in Bulgaria, for instance, there is a big exercise area that we built there, Novo Selo, and the Bulgarians are paying for a lot of logistics and support for that.

I do believe we can do more. All my colleagues and I have talked about ways that we can have NATO put in a command structure there and have a headquarters where we can have a NATO battle group there or an armored brigade combat team, as Ian has pointed out.

I think we have established the pattern there now and the precedent where if we do that, if we do deploy the forces, like in the Baltics, the Black Sea nations can pay for the training areas, to instrument those, to build barracks, to build those logistic structures and then to provide the support for them so that as we deploy there a lot of that burden is carried by the nation itself.

The pieces are there already. What we need to do is to stitch them together in a bigger way than we have done in the past along the way we have talked about this, and then make it part of a strategy. I hope that as we do the Global Posture Review maybe some of that will be reflected in how the Pentagon is looking at increasing force posture there from the United States and the role that the nations will play in picking up some of the bill.

Senator JOHNSON. We put a lot of time and effort into cajoling our NATO partners to spend 2 percent, and I think we just focus so much on the amount that we do not focus enough on how much it is spent.

To me, and I guess the question is do we have other ongoing, or have there been discussions in the past? Literally—okay, great. You are putting up facilities, but we are still having to pay for the troops.

I mean, literally, have these nations pay for the full deployment as part of their NATO commitment if they are a NATO country? If not, just as somebody who wants some security assurances?

I mean, do we have those discussions or is it always if we have got troops in this, we are going to pay the full price?

Mr. Brzezinski.

Mr. BRZEZINSKI. Senator Johnson, I think it would be hard for a country like Estonia to pay the full cost of an allied presence in their territory.

I will say that they really are making an effort to spend as much as they can to make their territories as attractive to U.S. and allied forces as possible. I mean, I look at Lithuania. They are spending a lot of money on creating facilities that are, basically, serving as the residences and bases for a U.S. deployment there.

Jim was pointing out that the Romanians are spending about a billion dollars to upgrade their MK—their air force base so it will be a more attractive and more effective base for U.S. and NATO operations.

I think the folks that really need to be squeezed are, really, the West European allies, and I am always struck by the fact that United States has what is probably six, seven battalion equivalent deployments in Poland and our West European allies, really, contributing no more than company level detachments to the NATO battalions in the Baltics and Poland.

That is not an appropriate balance of responsibility. I am hoping as part of this Global Posture Review, I am hoping as part of this Black Sea security strategy that the Administration will soon be rolling out, that a big emphasis will be putting more pressure on the Germans, on the French, on the U.K. and the Norwegians and the Italians to put some of their posture out onto NATO's Eastern frontier, which is the line of confrontation.

Senator JOHNSON. I am not on Armed Services so I really do not know, what does it cost to maintain a brigade for a year?

Mr. Townsend, coming from the Defense Department, do you have an estimate of that cost?

Mr. TOWNSEND. Sir, I do not have that number off the top of my head, but I think your point, though, is well taken in terms of talking about how this 2 percent is being spent and broadening that definition to include paying for a battalion, if it comes in, and if they are able to.

I mean, I think what Ian is saying is important in terms of what they are able to do. We have to be more creative in finding things that they can do. Some nations might not have the ready cash, but they can contribute in kind.

So when we provide a battalion, we might have to pick up the cost of that deployment and the care and feeding of those forces, but the host country can pick up the other things—the utilities, the transportation. There is other things that they can do that are in kind and do not necessarily call for a cash layout that a poorer or smaller country might not be able to do. It is thinking creatively.

Senator JOHNSON. I get a sense that we just do not explore those possibilities robustly. Is that an accurate statement?

Mr. TOWNSEND. I think that is an accurate statement, Senator.

Senator JOHNSON. Ms. Polyakova, in your testimony, you talked about how Turkey and Russia are at odds in terms of the Black Sea. Can you give us greater detail on that?

Dr. POLYAKOVA. Just very briefly, it is certainly a big historical issue between Turkey and Russia and it really defines the relationship. The Montreux Convention, of course, allows Turkey control over the Bosphorus Straits, but Turkey also has seen Russia's occupation and invasion of Crimea as Russian overreach in the region and they constantly see the other allies and the other potential partners as a tool for balancing against Russia.

Turkey and Russia are the biggest military powers in the Black Sea and both are trying to use the other countries to balance against the other. Again, as we know, Turkey also fears the leverage and pressure points that Russia wields over it when it comes to economic issues and Turkish exports to Russia, Russian tourism to Turkey as well, the potential influx of migrants from the Syria conflict, which the Russians can control.

Of course, we cannot forget the fact that Crimea had and continues to have a Muslim Tatar population that has been deeply repressed and there is a Tatar minority in Turkey as well, and this has been a huge point of conflict between the two countries because of Russia's takeover of Crimea. These are some of the issues that we see emerge in the Turkish-Russian relationship in the Black Sea.

Senator JOHNSON. Why in the world would Turkey block NATO maritime patrols in the Black Sea? I mean, are they just being surly? Are they just being difficult?

Dr. POLYAKOVA. I think Jim can probably answer that.

Mr. TOWNSEND. What has been interesting is that this idea in Ankara, and it has been there a long time, which is the Black Sea is their preserve and so as allies, the United States included, come up with ideas and go to Ankara and say, what we would like to do is these three initiatives—it does not even have to be a NATO initiative, it could be a coalition—the Turks are uncomfortable with having a lot of other nations in its backyard in the Black Sea area.

It is surprising and I—it is a Turkish view out of Ankara that this is their sphere of influence, if you will, and they would rather—

Senator JOHNSON. Let us face it, Russia rules it.

Mr. TOWNSEND. Russia absolutely does and—

Senator JOHNSON. They refuse to allow a counter to Russian rule of the Black Sea, basically, saying—pretending they control it when Russia really does and they will not cooperate with NATO to at least provide a counter to that.

Mr. TOWNSEND. I think Erdogan sees more payoff by cultivating this relationship with Putin than by doing something at a lower level concerning the balance of power there in the Black Sea.

Erdogan, in a sense, is riding the tiger. He is making these deals with the devil because he sees other things that he is getting from this relationship with Putin politically, and so he is willing to make these deals in order to curry favor even though the cost is his relationships with the United States and with NATO.

Senator JOHNSON. Most unfortunate.

Madam Chair.

Senator SHAHEEN. Well, thank you. I know we are coming to an end of the hearing, but I wanted to follow up a little bit on Senator Johnson's question because I think it was you, Dr. Polyakova, who talked about Turkey being at odds with Russia on the Black Sea was an opportunity for the U.S., and you may have addressed this while I was gone, but what kinds of initiatives do you think that lends itself to?

Dr. POLYAKOVA. Well, I will caveat this to say I am definitely not an expert on Turkey, but I think a lot of the actions and activities that we are questioning here in the United States about S-400 and

others and the blocking of the NATO initiative in the region, I think that really stems from, first and foremost, Erdogan as a person and how he sees his own security domestically.

There is, I think, a perception among those in the elite that are close to him and probably there is a perception that he holds as well that if there is another democratic uprising, if there is another coup attempt, someone has to come to his rescue and that is going to be the Kremlin.

While we do not have any direct evidence for this, there is a lot of suspicion and talk that there was sort of a gentlemen's agreement made that that would be the case from Moscow to support in various ways, whether it be through paramilitary groups and other ways, Erdogan if his position is ever challenged in his own country.

Again, I think this is something to be discussed probably in a different set of hearings than this one. I think in terms of opportunities for the United States. I agree that having a greater NATO presence in the Black Sea has always irked Turkey and we have not seen them support that. If anything, they have blocked it, as Jim has correctly outlined.

I think we have to start from an understanding of what would the Turks accept, and I think at the end of the day, if they are engaged in, let us say, a conversation as to what a NATO intelligence hub, for example, in Romania would look like, what it would do, in some ways it could benefit the Turkish interest for not constantly being the target of Russian attack when it comes to something Erdogan does the Russians do not like.

It would take some liability off of Erdogan, off of Turkey, to be able to disperse the liability across the other states. I think we are far away from really knowing and, again, I think this is something that we need to think through the Global Posture Review or the broader Black Sea strategy what are the specific areas, whether they be in the hybrid domain, the conventional domain, in the maritime domain, that each partner in the region can realistically contribute to broader security and have an agreement on that.

I think we will find that as long as Turkey's interests are part of the process that they will be much more likely to be able to come to the table there, but, again, it is about engagement.

I think right now, as we have seen from Erdogan at the public level there is very little space, but I think there is a huge amount of space at the working level.

Again, I think Jim, who has worked with our Turkish colleagues and friends directly, has spoken to that already.

Mr. BRZEZINSKI. If I could add, I would just say there are a lot of things NATO could do in the Black Sea region that Turkey is blocking, and my solution to that is, okay, if Turkey will block that NATO initiative, why cannot the United States pull together a coalition of the willing and do it "outside of NATO?"

Once that institution is stood up, I can assure you the Turks will want to be part of it, and that is when you have a discussion with them about transferring it over to a—under a NATO flag.

Sometimes that is the way you have to overcome some of these regional differences. They will block you in NATO. Do it on your own with a coalition of willing, stand it up, prove its value, and next thing you know, you will have a country like Turkey knocking



on the door and saying, how can I be part of it, and that is how all of a sudden it becomes a NATO organization or entity.

Senator SHAHEEN. My final question is about Moldova.

Given the election and the potential for Moldova to move increasingly towards the West except that Russia's challenging their energy supply, what should we be doing to address that? Is that something that we should be talking to Europe about responding to? Should we be looking at other alternatives?

Mr. BRZEZINSKI. Senator, if I could suggest, right now is a moment where your question is extremely appropriate and timely.

Moldova is going through an energy crisis right now. It is an energy crisis that was fabricated by Putin's intentional turn off of the gas spigot, and right now is a time for the West to stand up and divert some of its energy supplies to Ukraine.

I am really glad to see that I think the Poles are about to sell or have sold a million whatever the metric is, a BTU, whatever, of—

Senator SHAHEEN. BTUs.

Mr. BRZEZINSKI. —BTUs. To Moldova to relieve that pressure. This is something that we should be swinging in behind. We should be encouraging the EU to swing in behind because this is a clear example where Putin is using energy as a weapon. If we want to kind of lock in Moldova's transatlantic turn or shift, this is the time to do it through such action in response to this energy aggression by Putin.

Senator SHAHEEN. Oh, I could not agree more. It should send a real warning signal to Germany on Nord Stream 2 as well.

Dr. POLYAKOVA. Just to add, if I may, very briefly on that.

You are absolutely right that we have to work with our European allies on the energy crisis in Moldova because it is not just about Moldova. It is about the broader energy crisis that is looming over Europe and, certainly, the Kremlin is driving that in a significant way.

I was happy to see that there are agreements now being reached as Moldova continues to negotiate its gas contract with the Russian energy state giant Gazprom for reverse flows through other European countries and that is a model, of course, that we used in Ukraine to get them off direct imports of gas from Russia, but the reality is that I think this is something where Europe needs to step up. We cannot, as the United States, always step in to solve these regional issues.

It is a huge problem, and I hope it will be a wakeup call, I really do, to the rest of Western Europeans as Russia continues to pressure European policymakers to turn on the Nord Stream 2 spigot or they are continuing to hold out more gas imports to Europe—gas exports to Europe as Europe faces a huge energy crisis across the border or across the season during the winter.

I absolutely think this is something that Europe needs to lean in on and I think our role as the United States should be to make that very clear why this is important and why it should be something that the EU takes up and speaks very publicly about, going forward.

Mr. TOWNSEND. What makes this particularly critical now and your question timely is that this is the Russians testing us. This

is the first test of what could happen this winter, and if we do not come in hard on this and united, U.S. and Europe, including European Union—if we do not do that then we are going to see a lot of this in the winter to come. So I hope we tackle it that way.

From what I can tell, the EU is taking this seriously, but it is going to call for some very clear-eyed and tough messages to Moscow in this very first test, and if we fail this first test it is going to be a very cold winter.

Mr. BRZEZINSKI. If I could add, this is the first test of the U.S.-German MOU on Nord Stream 2, and I am watching very carefully to see how the United States and Germany are going to respond to this crisis in Moldova under this agreement, because that agreement specifically said that they would stand up together and take action—punitive action—if Russia uses energy as a geopolitical weapon. We are seeing that right now and I am, unfortunately, not seeing much evidence of that MOU being activated.

Senator SHAHEEN. Wow. A very important point. Thank you all very much. Did you have anything, Senator?

Senator JOHNSON. Yes. I would like to follow up on this because this is—this has always puzzled me. I have seen the pipeline maps. I have not traced them all through to figure out exactly what the exact supply situation is.

I, certainly, understand opening up the Nord Stream 2 makes Ukraine and anybody supplied through those Ukrainian pipelines vulnerable to Russian extortion, but at the same time, you are opening up a new supply line and to a certain extent that reduces Russia's ability to—I mean, you got more supply. Okay.

Can somebody explain to me exactly how they are able to extort so many different countries? I mean, is it strictly the pipeline through Ukraine and which countries that pipeline is—I mean, in other words, how did they shut off Moldova? Is that pipeline coming through under the Black Sea or what? Did you understand the question?

Mr. BRZEZINSKI. The situation is that the Gazprom's storage facility is in Europe, and Central Europe and Western Europe have been allowed to go down to levels that are altering now the market price for gas, and they have the capacity to fill those tanks up and, therefore, also to push the price back down.

They are consciously not doing that, and every analyst I read says Russia has the production capacity to do that, which leads me and many others to conclude that this is a geopolitical move in response to Nord Stream 2 and is an attempt to kind of force European—Central European and West European gas buyers back into long-term contracts that Russia wants and that we have been trying and pushing.

Senator JOHNSON. There are other sources of gas and oil. Or is Russia that dominant?

Mr. BRZEZINSKI. They are that dominant because a gas pipeline—it is just much easier and can carry that much more capacity than LNG tankers that come from United States, from Qatar, or Australia for that matter.

Dr. POLYAKOVA. If I may. We are very far away from being able to have, for example, U.S. LNG exports fill a significant part of Eu-

ropean energy demands. Russia is the main exporter of energy to Europe, broadly speaking, still and it dominates the market.

Senator JOHNSON. Russia always has had that capability. How does adding Nord Stream really increase their ability to do this?

Dr. POLYAKOVA. That is the crux of the issue because, of course, we are talking about Nord Stream 2 but there is already a Nord Stream 1, which Nord Stream 2 just mirrors the path of Nord Stream 1.

Honestly, if we look at every single assessment, the Nord Stream 2 project is completely irrelevant economically because the most direct route to deliver Russian gas to Europe is through Ukraine—the existing pipeline in Ukraine—which can deliver as much demand as Europe needs.

That is why Nord Stream 2 has been this massive geopolitical project because it avoids the most direct route so it gives Russia capability to not deliver Europe's full energy needs in the gas sector without ever passing through Ukraine as soon as Nord Stream 2 comes online fully.

There have been many, many discussions of other potential pipeline projects that could diversify reserves that would not pass through these countries. There is the Trans-Caspian pipeline that would actually develop some of the potential gas reserves in Turkmenistan, and deliver it to Turkey and then to Europe, but this project has not been off the ground. There is a lot of problems with it. These pipelines take a very long time to build, and I think, unfortunately, the reality today and probably for the foreseeable future is that this is exactly what Russia is going to be doing in Europe against Moldova, against Ukraine, and every single European country.

Senator JOHNSON. Again, I definitely see how Nord Stream 2 puts at risk Ukraine and anybody serviced through that Ukrainian pipeline, but other than that, I do not see how it increases their ability.

I mean, they are kind of slitting their own throat long term because the less reliable supplier they are, the more people are going to be incentivized to set up those LNG pipelines and terminals, that type of thing as well.

Anyway, it still remains confusing to me. Thank you.

Senator SHAHEEN. Well, thank you very much, Senator Johnson. Thank you to each of our witnesses today.

Sorry about the votes and the sort of in and out of myself and other senators, but, as you all know, I am sure, that is the way the Senate operates.

Thank you all very much for your insights and we look forward to seeing the Black Sea strategy from the Administration sometime very soon.

Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 4:28 p.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

# ADDITIONAL MATERIAL SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

WRITTEN STATEMENTS FROM EMBASSIES REPRESENTING BLACK SEA COUNTRIES,  
OUTLINING INITIATIVES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENHANCING U.S. POLICY, EN-  
TERED INTO THE RECORD BY SENATOR JEANNE SHAHEEN



EMBASSY OF ROMANIA  
to the United States of America

1607 23<sup>rd</sup> Street NW  
Washington, DC 20008  
Phone: +1 (202) 986 6973  
Fax: +1 (202) 232 4748  
E-mail: [washington@mae.ro](mailto:washington@mae.ro)  
<http://washington.mae.ro>  
[facebook.com/romanian.embassy.us](https://facebook.com/romanian.embassy.us)

The Honorable Senator Jeanne Shaheen  
Chairwoman, Subcommittee on Europe and  
Regional Security Cooperation  
U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Senator Ron Johnson  
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Europe and  
Regional Security Cooperation  
U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations  
Washington, D.C. 20510

RE: Black Sea Security Hearing

26 October 2021

Dear Chairwoman Shaheen and Dear Ranking Member Johnson,

I am delighted to present you with this letter in advance of the Senate Subcommittee on Europe and Regional Security Cooperation hearing on Black Sea security. I express my gratitude to you for your leadership in bringing this issue to the forefront of foreign policy planning in Washington, and to all the distinguished Subcommittee Members for their interest to examine options for further U.S. engagement in this critically important region for U.S. and European security.

As you know, Romania makes it a top priority and a high strategic interest to invest in, and contribute to the development of a secure and prosperous Black Sea region, an integral part of a Europe whole, free, and at peace. Romania's leadership in NATO, its key position on the Eastern Flank, and solid strategic partnership with the United States have contributed significantly to elevating the transatlantic sense of the challenges that undermine regional stability, security, democratic and economic progress. In alignment with the NATO principles and consistent with our national security interests, Romania's National Defense Strategy (2020-2024) outlines our approach to these challenges.

Against this background, please allow me to present for your consideration a brief outline of the security environment, a few considerations on Romania's efforts to strengthen regional security, and potential options for increasing security and prosperity in the Black Sea region.

The Black Sea has become a test case for the most pressing challenges we face today such as violations of international norms (from respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of states to freedom of navigation), weaponization of energy, cyber-attacks, and gross disinformation.

The Black Sea region strategic situation is dominated by the Russian Federation's aggressive and revisionist behavior, its actions to militarize further the Black Sea region, thus challenging the freedom of navigation. At the same time, hybrid actions carried out with the purpose of maintaining a tense climate and increasing insecurity in the proximity of our country and to consolidate Moscow's interference represent a constant of the Russian course of action. Such aggressive conduct in the Black Sea region, contrary to the fundamental principles of international law, has a well-known track record: Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008 and its continued occupation of Georgian territory, the Russian illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, its ongoing destabilization of Eastern Ukraine, and fueling protracted conflicts within and around the region (Southern Caucasus, Transnistria, Donbas, Nagorno Karabagh).

Russian arsenal of tools includes also: major militarization of Crimea and the region, non-transparent massive military exercises, such as ZAPAD, and military build-ups designed to intimidate neighbors, anti-access/area denial systems and dual capable capabilities, restrictions on navigation, widespread disinformation campaigns, or malicious cyber activities.

The continuous erosion of the arms control architecture generated by Russia's material breach of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty and non-compliance with the Treaty on Open Skies (OST), its unilateral decision to completely halt the participation in the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE), coupled with the modernization of Russian nuclear and conventional arsenals and their means of delivery and the introduction of destabilizing technologies pose a significant security risk for NATO, especially the Black Sea region.

At the same time, Russia uses the Black Sea region to project power towards neighboring regions, the Balkans, the Mediterranean, and the Middle East and its aggressive conduct has wider implications in direct contradiction to the international rules-based order.

Romania's efforts to strengthen Black Sea security are premised on a comprehensive approach based on enhanced strategic resilience – reducing excessive dependencies on actors that do not share our values and interests, while prioritizing cooperation with like-minded partners. This approach includes, in addition to the military dimension, relevant aspects related to the economy, transportation, energy, environment, and society resilience.

It is to be noted that the Black Sea has become the interplay of interactions with other powers, besides Russia. China's policy of engagement in the region, underpinned by the Belt and Road Initiative, reflects its growing ambitions. Romania subscribes to the transatlantic consensus that China's growing influence can present challenges, and that China is at the same time an interlocutor on global issues, a competitor and a strategic rival. As a result, Romania is undergoing active political and diplomatic efforts aimed at enhancing security and prosperity in the Black Sea region through sustained engagement among the countries in the region and other stakeholders, primarily the United States, NATO, and the European Union, through projects and standards firmly anchored in democratic institutions, transparency and the rules-based international order.

Through leadership in the Bucharest Format (B9) Romania has been urging and promoting unity and coherence in NATO's approach of its Eastern Flank since 2014. Our flank posture is still unbalanced today, leaving the Black Sea area more vulnerable and susceptible to Russian actions. I note with satisfaction that Romania hosted President Biden's virtual participation to the B9 Summit in May this year, the first U.S. presidential engagement with the B9 format, which brought forward an important strategic message of U.S. commitment to regional security. I also welcome the visit to Romania on 20 October by Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin III, which underscored the US commitment to working with Romania to help ensure deterrence and security along NATO's Eastern Flank.

Furthermore, Romania is one of most active countries of the Three Seas Initiative (3SI) and a leader in promoting a complementary economic approach to the region's security. 3SI is designed to advance the development of cross-border energy, transport and digital infrastructure, which have strategic impact on the region's connectivity. Romania's priority to invest in and support projects such as Rail2Sea and Via Carpathia fully reflects the 3SI vision to effectively transform the connectivity dynamics across Central and South-Eastern Europe through north-south rail and road corridors that improve access and mobility between the Baltic and the Black Seas. The 3SI aims to achieve these results in a manner that consolidates EU cohesion and enriches the transatlantic ties.

Romania's security trilateral format with Poland and Turkey remains a powerful vehicle to coordinate on regional security matters. Representatives from Ukraine and Georgia were invited to the most recent trilateral ministerial meeting hosted by Romania in May 2021 and my country continues to advocate firmly within the

European Union for increased EU security and economic cooperation with our Eastern partners (Republic of Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine), including through strategies to reduce the impact of the existing protracted conflicts.

On the military side, Romania has faithfully followed through to its commitment to observe the Wales pledge for burden sharing. Since 2015, an agreement between all Romanian political forces is in place, under President Iohannis' leadership, to support the allocation of at least 2% of GDP for defense. A major part of these resources is committed to investing in major defense capabilities procurement aimed at increasing Romanian force readiness, defense capacity, and inter-operability with the U.S. and other allied forces. Priority has been given to systems that are best adapted to Romania's specific security challenges, as a country at the border of NATO and the European Union. The prioritization of battle-tested and modern, fit for purpose equipment led to enhanced defense cooperation with the United States, including through investments in significant programs such as Patriot, HIMARS, Naval Strike Missiles and F-16.

In addition, Romania has embarked upon an important process of modernization and expansion of military infrastructure and bases, specifically targeting those bases which support and sustain cooperation with U.S. forces. As part of that process, the Mihail Kogălniceanu (MK) Airbase near the Black Sea will see a 9 times expansion supported by a \$3 billion investment, with the aim to create optimal conditions to host more persistent U.S. and allied forces. An additional \$400 million investment is planned for the Câmpia Turzii Airbase.

In May 2021, Romania established a Euro-Atlantic Resilience Center (E-ARC) aimed to consolidating societal resilience through a whole-of-government and whole-of-society cooperative approach.

An agenda for security, prosperity and values for the Black Sea region – looking ahead

Recognizing important interests to anchor the Black Sea region firmly in the European space and values, to deter Russian aggression and to advance security and prosperity, Romania supports a range of further actions which should be considered bilaterally with the U.S. and in concert with NATO, EU and other partners:

- Creating a comprehensive strategy for the Black Sea region, adequately resourced and implemented through concrete programs and projects, to use all instruments of government – diplomacy, information, military, economic engagement –, to spur more coordination amongst allies and partners in the region, and to leverage other already established formats of cooperation.
- Increasing U.S. military presence in Romania on all domains – land, air, and sea –, including a U.S. command and control structure, making use of existing and expanding military infrastructure such as the Mihail Kogălniceanu (MK) Airbase in Romania, which can become a hub in the region. Prepositioning military equipment and deploying persistent forces in Romania can play a major role in the consolidation of the deterrence and defense posture on NATO's Eastern Flank. Further military exercises will contribute to readiness, inter-operability and defense capacity building of allies and partners. Credible deterrence can be ensured only through solid presence.
- Securing the NATO Eastern Flank in a unitary and coherent manner from the Baltic to the Black Sea, by implementing a single Forward Presence along the entire Flank that ensures stronger defense and reduces current vulnerabilities caused by the undeniable deterrence gap for the Black Sea region.
- Maintaining the Open Door policy of NATO, consistent with the 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit commitment to supporting membership for Georgia and Ukraine. At the same time, look to consolidate the current cooperation with other partners in the region.
- Advancing strategic projects including with US financial involvement, such as Rail2Sea and Via Carpathia, designed to better connect countries from the Baltic to the Black Seas and to support military mobility

and economic progress. Also, transatlantic cooperation and investments in strategic sectors such as digital and energy remain essential and should be prioritized.

- Maintaining a values-based approach and investing in societal resilience across the region through U.S.-sponsored exchange programs that can leverage local expertise.

I am hopeful that this letter will provide an informative contribution for the Subcommittee Leadership and its Members as they conduct this important hearing. I once again applaud your interest to examine developments in this critical region for transatlantic security and wish to reassure you of Romania's relentless efforts to help build stability and prosperity in the Black Sea region.

I remain grateful for your consideration to this letter and I look forward to continuing our excellent dialogue and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Andrei Muraru

Ambassador of Romania

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andrei Muraru', followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.



October 29, 2021

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen  
Chair, Subcommittee on Europe and  
Regional Security Cooperation  
Committee on Foreign Relations  
United States Senate

The Honorable Ron Johnson  
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on  
Europe and Regional Security Cooperation  
Committee on Foreign Relations  
United States Senate

The Honorable Chair Shaheen,  
The Honorable Ranking Member Johnson,

Ukraine highly appreciates strong attention of the U.S. Congress to the crucial issue of security in the Black Sea region.

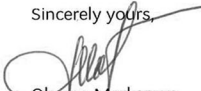
The recent hearings on the Black Sea security at the Subcommittee on Europe and Regional Security Cooperation have shown the need of further consolidation of the US, NATO and democratic countries of the region to counter the malign activities of the Russian Federation in the Black Sea.

Ukraine as a strategic partner of the U.S. in the Black Sea region is ready to make its contribution to our joint efforts in this regard.

We are grateful for your duly taking into account the proposals of Ukraine on strengthening the Black Sea security laid out in the attached non-paper during the recent hearings at the Subcommittee, and would appreciate it if you include this non-paper into the Congressional Record.

I look forward to continuing working with you on the crucial issue of the Black Sea security and other important issues of U.S.-Ukraine strategic partnership.

Sincerely yours,



Oksana Markarova

Enclosure as stated.



## ON THE SECURITY IN THE WIDER BLACK SEA REGION

## 1. Key security challenges:

- **Russia's occupation of Crimea in 2014 has entirely altered the security balance in the Black Sea.** In fact, Russia has established the large anti-access/area-denial (A2AD) exclusion zone in it. The NATO's ability to defend its member-states and provide possible assistance to the third countries (Ukraine and Georgia) has been severely undermined;
- **Growing militarization of the Crimean peninsula endangers not only the littoral Black Sea states, but also much wider region** (Caucasus, Eastern Europe, Baltic region, Balkans, Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East). Moscow uses the temporarily occupied Crimea as a military outpost for further expansion of its aggressive foreign policy and dominance in the region. For instance, Russian military facilities in Crimea are used for the operation in the Middle East, in Syria (so called «Syrian Express»);
- **Russia's aggression in the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov is aimed, among others, at erosion of existing legal mechanisms for maintaining international security.** The number of conventional weapons in the occupied Crimea has exceeded the limitations proscribed by the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe. Crimea has been turned into a grey zone inaccessible for verification and inspection activities under the CFE Treaty, Open Skies Treaty, the Vienna Document on Confidence and Security Building Measures and other arms control regimes;
- **Russian military activities in the occupied Crimea jeopardize global non-proliferation regime.** Russia has already deployed potential carriers of nuclear weapons, such as warships, missile systems and combat aircrafts, and takes actions to prepare Crimean military infrastructure, including refurbishment of the infrastructure of Soviet-era nuclear warheads storage facilities;
- **Russia-imposed restrictions to the freedom of navigation, illegal construction of the Kerch Bridge, arbitrary detention of vessels** in the Kerch Strait, and intimidating behavior towards Ukrainian fishermen in the Sea of Azov caused significant damage to Ukrainian economy, as well as trade and economic activity in the region;

## 2. Ukraine's initiatives:

- **The International Crimea Platform** (development of the common elements of the non-recognition policy; consultations on enhancement of sanctions; ensuring a rapid and coordinated international response to protect human rights and cultural heritage in Crimea; counteraction to destruction by Russia of the security architecture in the wider Black Sea region and coordination of work to support the principle of freedom of navigation; ensuring sustainable development of the regions of Ukraine adjacent to the occupied Crimea, green economy projects, monitoring environment in Crimea and around);
- **The Black Sea Security Conference** (Kyiv, 25–26 February 2022. Ministers of Defence and Ministers of Foreign Affairs from the countries of the Black Sea region, Ukraine's main Partners, as well as representatives of the regional organizations, NATO, the EU, international think tanks and Ukrainian NGOs, foreign and Ukrainian security and defence experts);
- **The draft Memorandum on naval cooperation in the Black Sea** (between Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Ukraine and Turkey, to replace the outdated multilateral agreements which included Russia);

### 3. The U.S. possible contributions:

- To continue and increase naval military assistance to Ukraine, with the aim to strengthen Ukraine's capacity to deter Russia's aggressive actions in the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov;
- To promote within the NATO (including non-Black Sea NATO member-states) the idea on the need to strengthen Alliance's permanent deterrence capabilities on the Southern flank to the level comparable to the Eastern flank in the Baltic region;
- To intensify NATO's rotating naval presence in the Black Sea, to support the freedom of navigation and facilitate trade routes;
- To consider elaboration of the joint response plans by the NATO, Ukraine and Georgia to the possible armed attack undertaken by Russia in the Black Sea or on a wider scale;
- To assume the co-leadership on human rights track of the Crimea Platform;
- To continue supporting Ukraine within the international bodies such as the UN (GA resolutions «Problem of the militarization of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, Ukraine, as well as parts of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov»), the IAEA (attempts by Russia to extend its jurisdiction over the nuclear facilities and material in Crimea), the OSCE (inclusion of Crimea-related issues into the priorities of future OSCE and FSC Chairmanships) etc;
- To provide economic support to Ukraine's coastal regions hurt by Russia's restrictions to the freedom of navigation;
- To ensure high-level participation in the Black Sea Security Conference;
- To promote the draft Memorandum on naval cooperation in the Black Sea among the NATO member-states (Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey);

To support the need of data exchange between Ukraine and the NATO Black Sea member-states, which would allow the online monitoring of developments on the land, the sea surface, sub-surface and air in Crimea, around it, and in the entire Black Sea and the Sea of Azov area (Situational Awareness).