

Geopolitical analysis of Turkey's Black Sea policy

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Abstract

The aim of the article is to analyze the geopolitics of Turkey, emphasizing Turkey's ambitions and vulnerabilities in the Black Sea region. It argues that the loss of the Black Sea region would leave Turkey susceptible to Russian advances, endangering its position as a regional power.

Relevance. The Turkey's decline as an empire followed the Kyuchuk-Kaynardzha peace treaty of 1774, with the territorial loss of Crimea and the Pontic steppe (Ukraine). The annexation of Crimea has expanded Russia's influence over Turkey, extending beyond economic considerations and showcasing its naval dominance. The war in Ukraine further underscored the significance of the Black Sea region.

Results. This article underscores the complex geopolitical landscape in the Black Sea region, where Turkey finds itself at a critical juncture. It highlights the importance of Turkey's role in the region and the implications of Russia's advances in the region for its standing as a regional center of power. To counterbalance Russia's growing dominance, Turkey has adopted a cautious approach, as reflected in its military and energy strategies in the Black Sea. There is the indication of the role of Turkey as a mediator in brokering a Grain Deal during the conflict that demonstrates its potential to assert itself as a regional power.

Conclusions. It is proven that the Russian invasion in Ukraine presents an opportunity for Turkey to solidify its position not only as a mediator but also as a significant player in the Black Sea region, potentially mending its strained relations with the West. However, maintaining a delicate balance in its relationship with Russia is crucial for Turkey. Despite Turkey's reliance on Russia for energy, tourism, and trade, this delicate equilibrium becomes increasingly challenging to sustain as the war in Ukraine escalates and spreads to other areas in the Black Sea region. Meanwhile, allowing the war in Ukraine to conclude in a compromise favorable to Russia would deal a severe blow to Turkey's standing as a regional power and result in surrendering its decisive role in the Black Sea region.

Keywords: Black Sea region, Black Sea strategy, the Pontic steppe, Crimea, Montreux Convention, war in Ukraine, energy policy, military policy

Геополітичний аналіз чорноморської політики Туреччини

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Анотація

Мета статті – проаналізувати геополітику Туреччини, роблячи акцент на амбіціях та вразливостях Туреччини у Чорноморському регіоні. Стверджується, що втрата регіону Чорного моря зробить Туреччину вразливою для російських наступів, що поставить під загрозу її становище як регіональну державу.

Актуальність. Занепад Туреччини як імперії був за Кючук-Кайнарджинським мирним договором 1774 року з територіальною втратою Криму та Понтійським степом (Україна). Анексія Криму розширила вплив Росії на Туреччину, вийшовши за межі економічних міркувань і продемонструвавши її військово-морську перевагу. Війна в Україні ще більше підкреслила значення регіону Чорного моря.

Отримані результати. У цій статті наголошується на складному геополітичному ландшафті регіону Чорного моря, де Туреччина опинилася в критичному становищі. Підкреслюється важливість ролі Туреччини в регіоні та наслідки прогресу Росії в даному регіоні для її становища як регіонального центру сили. Щоб урівноважити зростаюче домінування Росії, Туреччина зайняла обережний підхід, що знайшло відображення у її військовій та енергетичній стратегії у Чорному морі. Вказується роль Туреччини як посередника в укладанні зернової угоди під час конфлікту, що демонструє її потенціал для утвердження себе як регіональної держави.

Висновки. Доведено, що російське вторгнення в Україну дає Туреччині можливість зміцнити свої позиції не лише як посередника, а й як значущого гравця у Чорноморському регіоні, потенційно виправляючи свої натягнуті відносини із Заходом. Однак підтримка тонкого балансу у відносинах з Росією має вирішальне значення для Туреччини. Незважаючи на залежність Туреччини від Росії у сфері енергетики, туризму та торгівлі, підтримувати цю рівновагу стає все важче, оскільки війна в Україні загострюється та поширюється на інші райони Чорноморського регіону. Тим часом доведення війни в Україні до компромісу, вигідного для Росії, завдало б серйозного удару по репутації Туреччини як регіональної держави і призвело б до відмови від своєї вирішальної ролі в Чорноморському регіоні.

Ключові слова: Чорноморський регіон, Чорноморська стратегія, Понтійський степ, Крим, конвенція Монтре, війна в Україні, енергетична політика, військова політика

Introduction.

The relevance of the research is emphasized by the role that Black Sea has historically played as a nexus for communication and trade for Turkey; it has also acted as a natural boundary between empires, shaping the region's geopolitical dynamics. In the present context, it stands as the sole open space where major powers from the East and the West, including the United States (via NATO), the European Union, Turkey, and Russia, intersect – a significant frontline in what can be seen as a new cold war. Given this backdrop, Turkey's Black Sea policy is currently experiencing a pivotal moment in its history. The ongoing war in Ukraine has thrust the Black Sea back into the center of Turkey's geopolitical chessboard, with Russia's aggression in Ukraine further underscoring the importance of the region. Turkey is in charge of maintaining the more than 80-year-old Montreux Convention and is the ultimate status quo power. Turkish diplomats are acutely aware that if this position is lost, it might have catastrophic effects for the future of the country, which puts Turkey in a precarious balance.

The aim of the article is to analyze the geopolitics of Turkey, shedding light on Turkey's aspirations, the vulnerabilities it faces in the Black Sea region. To achieve this, a combination of **research methods** is employed. To find out the geopolitical goals of Turkey in regard to the Black Sea region, geographical position of Turkey is analyzed. The study conducts an analysis of relevant literature and examines the historical context to provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. By delving into the historical backdrop of Turkey's decline as an empire following the Kyuchuk-Kaynardzha peace treaty of 1774, which resulted in territorial losses including Crimea and the Pontic steppe (Ukraine), the article seeks to provide valuable insights into the roots of Turkey's current challenges.

To support the analysis, the research draws upon existing **literature** concerning Turkey's geopolitical position in the Black Sea region. Alongside with the basic geographical facts, the monograph of Stratfor on the Turkey's geopolitics is analyzed (The geopolitics of Turkey, 2010). With the aim of the study of the geographical and historical factors of Turkey's foreign policy the works of the proponent of neottomanism Ahmet Davutoglu were analyzed (Davutoğlu, 2008). To research more on the Black Sea strategy, the work of Luke Coffey and Can Kasapoglu (Kasapoğlu, & Coffey, 2023) was studied. To investigate the role of the war in Ukraine on Turkey's position and strategy in the region the works of Sergiy Kivalov (Kivalov, 2023), Selen Baldiran, Dinçer Bayer and Hüseyin Genç (Baldiran, Genç, & Bayer, 2022) were studied. Additionally, the news articles were analyzed to uncover Turkey's current foreign policy stance in the Black Sea region.

Results.

Main geography. Turkey's strategic location at the crossroads of Europe and Asia has shaped its history.

The Anatolian highlands have become the country's core, while the coastal region along the Sea of Marmara promotes trade and political unity. The sea's position reduces droughts and facilitates governance, and its connection to the Aegean and Black Seas has enabled Turkish control of commerce and trade routes.

The Sea of Marmara, separated by the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, excels in commerce. Its narrow sea path deters maritime powers, backed by a strong Turkish army. The battle at Gallipoli attests to this. The sea's accessibility fosters a thriving marine trading culture, surpassing river commerce. This, coupled with Turkey's terrain, protects, and enriches its central areas. The area of the Sea of Marmara is one large commerce route that enabled Ottomans to manage overland trade routes between Europe and Asia.

Turkey's strategic position as a hub for commercial routes from Asia brings both benefits and challenges. While it allows for economic advantages and global trade influence, it also exposes Turkey to potential division by concentrated enemy forces due to its geographic location. This was a key factor in the Turks' conquest of the Byzantine state.

Turkey's most important geopolitical goals, based on its geographic position, include controlling Anatolia, expanding up the Danube to Vienna, integrating conquered peoples into the Turkish nation, having control and military presence in Crimea, and establishing naval bases in the eastern Mediterranean.

Turkey can cut off the region's connections with the rest of the world and close all access to its internal sea, but it will lose all of the sea's economic benefits. Thus, even the geography itself prohibits Turkey's isolationism. If the Turkey chooses the autarky, it will have detrimental consequences not only for the Turkish economy, but also security. Thus, Turks are forced to grow economically, politically and militarily if they do not want to remain at the mercy of their neighbors.

The Sea of Marmara region is rich and focused on foreign trade. But all this does not apply to other Turkish lands, and especially the Anatolian Peninsula. Anatolian regions present challenges for infrastructure and agriculture due to harsh conditions and limited coastal features. The lack of prominent bays hinders the establishment of seaports, while the mountainous terrain limits farming opportunities. With higher and narrower valleys, power consolidation becomes more difficult, making Anatolia a relatively poorer and remote region compared to the coastal areas of the Sea of Marmara. To secure control and block invading armies, the Turks pacified Anatolian tribes and strategically positioned forces in the western end of the peninsula, cutting off a significant portion of Anatolia's length due to the drier and higher terrain to the east, which is less suitable for troop deployment. Moving beyond the 36th meridian would expose Anatolia to greater vulnerability from land invasions.

The strategic advantages of controlling the peninsula are clear. Anatolia, of course, is not very suitable for agriculture, the region is poorly governed, but all this also complicates military operations in this territory. Turkish Anatolia will protect Turkey from any invasion from Asia. The entire peninsula (even if its eastern part is not fully controlled by Turkey) will become a huge buffer zone, thereby allowing the Turks to come to grips with European affairs.

Integration of the conquered peoples.

The Ottoman Empire, like previous empires, sought to preserve its expansion. While unable to conquer Vienna, they controlled vast territories, including the Danube region, which was much larger than the fertile lands near the Sea of Marmara. Capturing the Pannonian Plain would have doubled their territory and created a highly fertile and cultivated region.

The Turks faced a challenge of insufficient population on the Sea of Marmara coast to work on the vast conquered lands. Unlike the Russians, they couldn't rely solely on brute force due to the need for farmers, soldiers, and leaders. Assimilation became necessary to incorporate conquered peoples into the empire. As a result, the world's first multi-ethnic system of government emerged.

Control and military presence in Crimea.

Turkey has no maritime competitors on the Black Sea. The Black Sea is too rough for the regular movement of fleets, most of the coast is indented by bays, and the northern waters freeze in winter. Non-freezing and well-located ports in the region (especially in the Sea of Marmara) are owned only by the Turks, which immediately gives them the palm in any maritime confrontation.

The Danube lands are the only territory that is relatively easy to conquer for the inhabitants of the coast of the Sea of Marmara. After the solution of the Danube issue, the Turks must move on to actively defend the conquered, that is, decide what positions they should take to defend the Sea of Marmara and the Balkans from enemy attacks. In the case of the capture of Vienna, the issue of the Pannonian Plain is resolved. There remain two directions of the strike of a potential enemy: from the Eurasian steppe and the Mediterranean.

The solution of the steppe issue is much easier and cheaper than the solution of the Mediterranean issue. The Eurasian steppe stretches from Bordeaux in France to Tianjin in China. For possession of it for centuries the blood of the Spaniards, French, Germans, Poles, Russians, Mongols, and Chinese was shed; Turkey's small population dooms it to defeat in the war over these territories. The most effective strategy for curbing the influence of this super-region on the Balkans, the Black Sea and Anatolia is to force the ruler of the Eurasian steppe (traditionally Russia) to go into defense. And a prerequisite for such a strategy is control over the Crimean Peninsula.

Crimea (whose territory is approximately equal to the territory of the coast of the Sea of Marmara) is connected to the continent by a narrow isthmus no more than 6.3 kilometers wide. This means that even one fortress on this isthmus will be able to defend the peninsula. Crimea also divides the Black Sea into two parts, which means that the owner of the Crimea will be able to interfere with the military and merchant ships of any power that controls the northern Black Sea coast.

Crimea also provides access to the Don, one of the few large navigable rivers flowing in the Russian sphere of influence. Between the Crimea and the Don delta lies the Sea of Azov, which freezes in winter (as, by the way, does the Don almost along its entire length). Even a limited contingent of Turkish troops stationed in Crimea can destroy any Russian fleet crossing the Don. Until recently, the shipbuilding season ended with the onset of cold weather, which means that the Russians will have only a few months to prepare, while the Turks will be able to move their fleets through the ice-free ports of the Sea of Marmara. And control over the mouth of the Don means that any trade going through this river in the Black Sea will have to obey the rules of the owner of Crimea.

Deployment of naval bases in the eastern Mediterranean.

Unlike the Black Sea, there is no foothold in the Mediterranean to control the entire region, but Turkey aims to replicate their Crimean strategy in the Mediterranean, capturing territories in the eastern Mediterranean to gain control over vital maritime points and expand their influence in regions like the Suez, Nile Valley, Mecca, and Hijaz. Securing naval bases and capturing Cyprus will provide strategic advantages, and further territorial acquisitions will block the enemy's access to the eastern Mediterranean.

Unlike the Danube expansion, the benefits of pursuing a similar strategy in the eastern Mediterranean are not as clear for the Turks. The operation would be more costly compared to the Crimean campaign. Moving along the Danube was a natural progression for the Turks, fortifying conquered territories and gradually expanding their defenses. However, the eastern Mediterranean poses greater challenges, lacking a key region like Crimea. The Aegean Islands are sparsely populated and require external support, while Cyprus lacks fertile land and would lead to occupation rather than integration. Such occupations would likely lead to uprisings, as the Ottoman Empire experienced in the past. Losing control over Cyprus would also result in a loss of naval support and supply routes for provinces like North Africa.

Complete control over each of the islands is necessary for successful Turkish naval operations in the Mediterranean, but even with such control, the empire would heavily rely on sea supply routes, which are faster and more cost-effective than land routes. However, advancing inland in the Middle East would be expensive

and unprofitable due to the desert climate, and sea supply routes would be vulnerable without a firm grip on the region.

Thus, to Turkey the Black Sea region is more suitable for spreading its ambitions. Crimea was initially used to block Russian trade routes and raids on the coast, but as soon as the Turks in the middle of the 17th century decided to gain a foothold on the coast instead of raids, the Russians, with their huge population and army, took advantage of this mistake. It costed Turkey a lot of blood and eventually became one of the reasons for the fall of the Ottoman Empire. The Kyuchuk-Kaynardzha peace treaty of 1774 marked the exact point at which Crimea was formally transferred from the Ottoman Empire to Russia and allowed access to warm waters. It was considered a watershed, marking the beginning of the predominant decline of the Ottoman Empire. Then Turkey reminded a valuable geopolitical lesson about the importance of the Pontic steppe (now territorially Ukraine) for its security.

At the beginning of the last century, Turkey renounced its Ottoman past and secured the status of a nation-state for the Republic of Turkey. It was the policy of isolationism. During the Cold War, the issue of cultural identity was formal. However, the geopolitical changes brought about by the end of the Cold War have put this issue on the agenda. Turkey's Ottoman legacy places a burden of geopolitical responsibility on it. Returning to the historical heritage was to open new horizons and opportunities for the country and make Turkey's foreign policy more constructive.

Proponents of neoottomanism (Ismayil Cem, Turgut Ozal) defended the beneficial aspects of Ottoman heritage and chastised Turkey's foreign policy (mostly kemalists) for ignoring the Ottoman Empire footprint. Ahmet Davutoglu, who was appointed as the Minister of Foreign Affairs in May 2009 portrayed Turkey as a future great power in his book *Strategic Depth* that must first act as a mediator or peacemaker by utilizing its unique geography and history, consolidating former Osman empire territories under its wing.

In an interview from 2008, Davutoglu makes the case that Turkey should not be viewed as a "bridge country, which only connects two points, nor a frontier country, nor even as an ordinary country, that sits at the edge of the Muslim world or the West," but rather as a "central" country (Davutoğlu, 2008).

In general, Turkey's JDP government is forging a distinctive identity that is more shaped by the Ottoman Empire than earlier. According to the Stratfor prediction, by 2050, Turkey's zone of influence would have greatly expanded, including a portion of Russian territory. Analysts predict that the Donbass Republics of the DPR and LPR, the Crimea, the Krasnodar and Stavropol Territories, the Rostov and Astrakhan Territories, Kalmykia, and other southern Russian regions would come under Turkish control. Erdogan has regularly expressed a desire to collect the remnants of the ancient Ottoman Empire under

his aegis. Ankara is simultaneously attempting to exert "soft power" over the nations bordering Turkey through commerce, the economy, science, technology, culture, and other factors.

Black Sea strategy.

Pierre Gilles, the French Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire stated in 1561 that Istanbul holds an absolute dominion over the Black Sea and by one door only, namely by the Bosphorus, it shuts up its communication with any other part of the world; for no ship can pass this sea, if the port thinks it fit to dispute its passage. As he put it, for this reason all foreign nations, if they want to entitle themselves to any prosperity in the immense wealth of the Black Sea, and all seaport and island towns, are obliged to court the friendship of this city (Koru, 2017). His statement still holds true today as Turkey protects its interests in the Black Sea region.

The most recent defense white paper on Turkey's Black Sea strategy was published as long ago as 2000. Like most such policy documents from European countries at that time, it emphasizes cooperation with and within NATO, the EU, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and other multilateral frameworks for security and economic cooperation as the basis of security in Europe. In the Black Sea region, it identifies economic cooperation, confidence- and security-building measures and naval cooperation as the way to make the Black Sea a sea of peace, stability and prosperity (Turkey: Defense white, 2000).

After 2000 Turkey's defense policy must be assessed based on statements by Turkey's political and military leadership, in particular the president, and on actions by the Turkish armed forces. "Our main goal is that the Black Sea continues to be a sea of peace, tranquility and cooperation," Recep Tayyip Erdogan said at a joint news conference with his Ukrainian counterpart Vladimir Zelensky in April 2021 (Turkey desires, 2021).

For Turkey, Black Sea region security question remains high on political agenda. With a lengthy Black Water coastline and a sizable exclusive economic zone (EEZ) claim, Turkey controls the accessibility of others to the Black Sea by sea according to Montreux Convention 1936. Its Black Sea coastline makes 1700 kilometers. In 1986 Turkey unilaterally established an EEZ in the Black Sea. The EEZ in principle extends to a distance of 200 miles from the baselines from which the breadth of the territorial sea is measured. This move was in accordance with the provisions of UNCLOS, which Turkey though has never signed or ratified (United Nations, 1982). Its 12 nautical miles of territorial seas border Georgia and Bulgaria. The EEZs of Romania, Russia, and Ukraine through Crimea all border the Turkish EEZ.

The Black Sea is significant for Turkey geopolitically, as a great leverage as far as it gives the control of the entrance and exit to the sea via the Turkish Straits, a link between Mediterranean and Black seas. The Turkish Straits consist of three key waterways: the Dardanelles

Strait, the Sea of Marmara, and the Bosphorus. These straits hold great significance not only in terms of military and geopolitical considerations for the coastal nations but also play a crucial role in facilitating international transportation and trade (Ülke, & Arslan, 2021).

A fast change in the security situation is seen in the larger Black Sea area that is rather precarious because of the mix of the lengthy wars with a substantial conventional military build-up. The security paradigm shift became evident following the events of 2014, including Russia's annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of the war in Ukraine.

Turkey had the chance to take the lead in ensuring the security of the Black Sea after the Cold War ended, but its efforts failed after Georgia crisis of 2008. Additionally, Turkey's security strategies often place greater emphasis on concerns in other areas, such as the Aegean Sea, the Middle East, and internally with its Kurdish community.

In reference to the Georgia crisis of 2008 Erdogan noted that even though the United States is the closest ally, and Russia is a nation with whom we have a considerable amount of commerce, mostly in energy, Turkey cannot be completely pushed to one side or the other. Thus, as required by Turkey's national interests, Turkey will act (PM Erdogan says, 2008). By historic analogy, Turkey should have allied with its Western allies to counterbalance Russia. Such Erdogan's maneuvering is explained by the attempt to avail itself of its geographic location as an energy transit nation by purchasing more than half of its natural gas from Russia. With NATO allies being actually noncommittal in Georgia crisis, Turkey stayed neutral for Georgia crisis too.

But with the annexation of Crimea, Russia's influence over Turkey has expanded beyond just economic considerations. The Russian Black Sea navy has upgraded its cruisers, destroyers, and new submarines from the Soviet period. Some of these ships are equipped with caliber land-attack missiles, which Russia has employed against targets in Syria. Updates have also been made to Russian ground facilities along the Black Sea coast in the last years. Thus, Russian S-400s may prevent NATO aircraft from flying over the Black Sea region, the Baltic Sea, Turkey, or Poland. Moreover, after Crimea annexation, Russia encircles Turkey from the north and south, because it occupies the ports in Syria as well as in Crime. Regardless of Russia's advancements, Turkey just made declarative statements, and that it is as far as it went.

Prior to the annexation of Crimea, Ankara enjoyed the status quo, having geostrategic assets: the best naval forces; possession of narrow passages (Turkish Straits) and possession of most of the Black Sea coast. Russia controlled only a tiny piece of the Black Sea coast, and even then, any maritime transit for trade outside the Black Sea had to pass through the Bosphorus, an extremely strategic bottleneck that is completely under Turkish control.

In September 2016 chief of general staff of the Russian armed forces, at the conclusion of military exercises conducted in southern Russia general Valeriy Gerasimov claimed mastery over Turkey in the Black Sea: "Several years ago the competence of the Russian fleet was severely contrasted, in particular, with the Turkish navy, when it was declared that Turkey is practically the master of the Black Sea. Everything has changed now" (Kucera, 2016). In this way he asserted that the country's Black Sea fleet is now stronger than Turkey's navy and stressed that Russia is now readily capable of hitting the Bosphorus straits. "For [destroying a potential enemy] the Black Sea Fleet today has everything: reconnaissance assets, which locate targets at a distance of 500 kilometers, strike assets. One Bastion complex has a range of 350 kilometers, including to the Bosphorus," he said (Kucera, 2016). Such statements should have served as a clear push for Turkey to get closer to NATO and Atlantic structures.

Turkey, which has been the only country in the alliance to face Russia in many theaters of war from Idlib (in Syria) to Nagorno-Karabakh (in the Caucasus), could use its position as the only power capable of competing with Russia in the Black Sea to strengthen ties with NATO.

And already in 2016 Erdogan administration started a massive purge of all state institutions, including military notably those of the F-16s destined for the potential confrontation with Russia. Turkey's stance on Black Sea security likewise appeared to be well-defined. The absence of a NATO force in the Black Sea was bemoaned by President Erdogan in early May 2016, at the Balkan Countries Chiefs of Defense Conference, "The Black Sea has virtually become a Russian lake" and that "History will not forgive us if we [NATO] don't take action" (President Erdoğan addresses, 2016). He backed a Romanian plan to form a trilateral navy in the Black Sea with Bulgaria, Romania, and Turkey, but this failed after Bulgaria rejected the plan in early 2017.

The conflict in 2020 known as the Second Karabakh war witnessed Ankara and Moscow aligning themselves on different sides of the conflict. And already the war between Ukraine and Russia, has shown that Turkey does not firmly consider itself as belonging to Moscow's camp, but will instead compete or work together where it sees opportunities to increase its relative influence.

War in Ukraine 2022.

With Putin's onslaught on Ukraine, Turkey took its most crucial action. On the 27th of February, the Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu characterized Putin's incursion as a full-scale war. This significant declaration paved the way for the implementation of Article 19 of the Montreux Convention, which authorized the closure of the Turkish Straits to Russian warships. As a result, in late February, Turkey officially labeled the Russian invasion of Ukraine as a state of war and invoked Article 19 of the 1936 Convention Regarding the Regime of the Straits. This article prohibits belligerent nations from

utilizing the Turkish Straits for naval access to and from the Black Sea (Baldiran, Gençer, & Bayer, 2022).

This way Turkey reminded the world of Ankara's regional importance by closing the Turkish Straits to the Russian Navy (Kasapoğlu, & Coffey, 2023). In the future, Ankara's capacity to continue controlling access to the Black Sea is probably going to be more important than it has ever been since the Cold War.

Even if Washington still views Ankara as merely a regional power, its involvement in the wars in the Ukraine and Nagorno-Karabakh shows just how crucial it is to regional stability. Turkey's crucial role in making itself a major player in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is evidence that Ankara has increased its leverage over Moscow in the Eurasian theater.

Ankara has always strived to highlight interconnectedness and take use of its unique location at the intersection of two continents, Europe and Asia. Turkey is a crucial transit country for essential resources like oil and food supplies, and the delays to trade and commerce caused by Russia's war in Ukraine have made this corridor even more significant.

Recep Tayyip Erdogan doesn't cleanly ally with either the pro-Western or the pro-Russian camp. But the increased presence of the Russian fleet in the Black Sea only complicates the balancing act that Turkey has been playing since the beginning of the war in Ukraine. Bound to Moscow by a strong energy dependency as well as strong tourist ties, Ankara cannot afford to burn bridges with Moscow.

On the one hand, Turkey supplies Ukraine with a sizable quantity of weapons, including Bayraktar TB2 drones, which have been crucial in assisting Ukrainian forces in attacking Russian positions. Turkey continues military-technical cooperation with Ukraine too - company Baykar, which produces "Bayraktars" attack drones, is currently in the process of building a factory on Ukrainian territory. Although Turkish arms sales to Ukraine are relatively small compared to the military assistance provided by the United States and European countries, they played a crucial role in the early months of the war when Western aid was limited to short-range anti-tank and anti-air missiles. Turkish drones were particularly significant, as they provided targeting information and were involved in the sinking of Russia's flagship vessel Moskva, a guided missile cruiser in the Black Sea, on April 14, 2022.

Turkey has a longstanding defense partnership with Ukraine, characterized by a growing range of military collaborations. These include joint production of Turkey's indigenous MILGEM-class corvettes in Ukrainian shipyards and the utilization of Ukrainian aerial engines in Turkish drone-maker Baykar's Kizilelma, the first turbofan-powered unmanned aircraft. Recognizing and fostering the defense partnership between Turkey and Ukraine should be a geopolitical priority for the United States and other NATO members. In the long run, if

Ukraine were to become a NATO ally, the bilateral defense ties between Turkey and Ukraine could potentially evolve into a military alliance, serving as a natural geopolitical counterbalance to Russian aggression (Kasapoğlu, & Coffey, 2023).

On the other hand, Ankara refrained from joining Western sanctions on Russia in response to the invasion of Ukraine. Erdogan met on August 5, 2022 with Vladimir Putin in Sochi, Russia, where they discussed enhancing Turkish-Russian energy cooperation (Erdogan to meet, 2022). At the same time, The Southern Gas Corridor, which the European Union wants to develop, still uses Turkey as a route for non-Russian energy supplies to Europe. While avoiding joining sanctions, Turkey has generally supported NATO's position on providing security support for Ukraine.

As a mediator between Moscow and Kyiv in the dispute over grain and food supplies, Turkey has perhaps had the most significant impact. Turkey and the UN negotiated a compromise and on July 22, 2022, a breakthrough agreement was reached that included the opening of an Istanbul-based grain coordination center (Fahim, 2022). Turkey assumes the crucial role of being the guarantor and primary facilitator of the Black Sea Grain Initiative, owing to its pivotal geopolitical position for any transit activities to and from the Black Sea (Kivalov, 2023).

Ankara not only fixed food supplies but also raised its diplomatic profile. However, Russia is clearly willing to act against Turkey's interests when it sees fit. For example, Russia threatened the agreement further by attacking port facilities designating these as military targets, as Russian forces did within 24 hours of the agreement's signing. In these ways, Russia tries to undermine Turkey's reputation as a mediator and as a powerful nation (Ukraine says Russia, 2022).

To reach international markets in the Middle East, Africa, and beyond, a significant portion of Russia's and Ukraine's grain and food exports must pass via Turkey's marine waters in the Black Sea and Bosphorus. Turkey was the only NATO member to have cordial working relationships with both Russia and Ukraine.

What the Suez Canal used to represent to trade, the Black Sea represents to the world of food and energy value chains. Nearly 40% of the world's grain and a significant amount of the oil are transported across the Black Sea. Moreover, 898 million gross tons passed through the Black Sea's Dardanelles gateway in 2021, that constitutes 70 percent of Suez's 1.27 billion metric tons (Ergocun, 2022).

No wonder that Turkey tries to resume the role of the controller of these chains, as far as it once lost its grip in the region and the Russian aggression towards Ukraine emphasized it. Russia uses an artificially created global food crisis as leverage to force all the world to concede. According to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), "Russia and Ukraine provide at least 30% of the

imported wheat that almost fifty nations require. For 26 of these countries, this ratio even approaches 50% "ries" (Impact of the, 2022). Mostly, the wheat crisis is terrible blow for African and Muslim worlds, the last one being the part of Osman heritage and the geopolitical vector of Turkey's policy.

Turkey's band wagoning with Russia already had resulted into Turkey fail to control the Black Sea. Additionally, Russia has placed nuclear-capable weapons near the Black Sea, and it appears to be developing a network of A2/AD (anti-access, area denial) capabilities against NATO in the Black Sea region. Vladimir Putin, the President of the aggressor country, approved a new Maritime Doctrine, in which he refers to the Black Sea as a zone of national interest and also calls NATO a threat. The order was signed on July 31 in St. Petersburg during Navy Day festivities, and it takes effect right away (On Navy Day, 2022). He stated that in the nearest few months the Russian navy will acquire the hypersonic missile Zircon. The frigate "Admiral Gorshkov" will be the first to take up combat duty with a hypersonic complex. According to the head of the aggressor state, the location of the vessel will be chosen based on the interests of ensuring Russia's security. The Zircon missile would have a limited link to the combat in Ukraine as it is essentially an anti-ship missile. Its function would be to prevent any American or NATO naval deployment to the Black Sea. However, due to its fast speed, the Zircon may be utilized to conduct similar targeted strikes to get past Ukrainian air defenses.

As of now there are 14 bases in total for the Turkish Navy, including 3 on the Sea of Marmara and 4 on the Black Sea. The central Fleet Command is in charge of the major ships and planes. Additionally, it has two regional headquarters: the Southern Sea Area Command, which oversees the Aegean and Mediterranean seas, and the Northern Sea Area Command, which oversees the Black Sea and the Turkish Straits. These area commands don't technically have big troops attached to them; instead, they focus more on logistics and have the ability to take over Fleet Command units as necessary. There is no evidence that the military's focus has recently changed to the Black Sea. Russia's network of A2/AD should make Turkey consider changing and reforming these naval bases.

Military-technical aspects of Turkey's Black Sea strategy.

Turkey is working towards the goal of domestic defense production for self-sufficiency especially navy. The most outstanding project in this regard, the MİLGEM project, from the Turkish words Milli Gemi (National Ship), is a Turkish national warship program, the purpose of which is to build a modern littoral combat warship with indigenous anti-submarine warfare and high-seas patrol capabilities. A Turkish team that included Prof. Dr. Ismail Demir, the head of the Turkish defense industry, and Özgür Güleriyüz, the general manager of STM, paid a visit to the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense

back in December 2020. Following a similar agreement with Pakistan, a contract was struck during the visit for the shipment of ADA Class Corvettes to Ukraine. The agreement in question included the purchase of two MLGEM ADA class corvettes. In August 2022 the first MLGEM ADA class corvette was given the name Hetman Ivan Mazepa by Volodymyr Zelensky (Çetiner, 2022). Such advances are the evidence of Turkey's effort to defy Russia's dominance in Black Sea.

The Turkey's naval capabilities have become more significant in modern Turkish thought since more than 87 percent of the country's trade is performed via marine ports of entry and a number of transnational pipelines run through Turkish territorial waters, including Black Sea. Turkey developed a powerful military naval doctrine, aiming to protect all of its maritime rights and political interests in the country's three seas, which is called the Blue Homeland. Between February 27 and March 8, 2019, the Turkish Navy conducted the Blue Homeland exercise for the first time in the country's history with the simultaneous participation of 103 vessels in each of the three seas that surround it. This was the first time the Blue Homeland doctrine had really been used. Between April 11 and 21, 2022 the Blue Homeland exercise took conducted in the Black Sea, the Marmara, the Aegean and the eastern Mediterranean, with 122 vessels participating. 72 ships visited ports in the waters surrounding Turkey during the exercise's last phase, which took place between April 18 and 21 (Savvidis, 2022).

Turkey takes an active participation in NATO exercises in Black Sea as well. During the Ukraine War, NATO conducted a naval drill during Exercise Breeze in the Black Sea and Turkey joined it. Breeze is intended to increase collaboration between participant units and their capacity to communicate with one another by allowing them to practice various forms of combat in a complex environment. What is remarkable the practice was held at the Bulgarian port city of Varna, which is close to the Ukrainian city of Odesa that the Russian navy besieged.

By constructing its own navy, conducting its own naval exercises and taking part in NATO exercises, Turkey protects its status quo in the Aegean Sea and strengthens the security of its strategically significant waterways in the Dardanelles and Istanbul.

Energy policy in Black Sea.

Turkey has played a role in averting a global famine and is now leveraging the upcoming energy crisis in Europe to reshape the international order in its favor. At the same time Putin sees Turkey's oil infrastructure as a way to bypass the economic blockade in Europe and gain an advantage.

Due to its reliance on Russian gas pipelines running across Northern Europe, several European nations now face a severe lack of energy storage, which is a danger to alternate forms of generation like hydroelectric power. The summer's continental drought has only made the situation worse.

Turkey views the energy shortage this winter as a once-in-a-lifetime chance to rewrite the world's current geopolitical landscape and include Turkey as a crucial component of a new order.

After launching TurkStream, the Russia's Trojan Stream under the Black Sea in January 2020, it became clear that it is the geopolitical rather than commercial motivation behind TurkStream.

Turkey's energy dependence is a real Achilles' heel and Turkey's reliance on Russian gas has long been a problem for Ankara, as the country imports its natural gas primarily from Russia, Iran, and Azerbaijan.

But already in August 2020 Turkey announced to discover a large gas reserve in the Black Sea could benefit its economy in six or seven years. This Black Sea discovery came at a time when Ankara's contract with Russian energy giant Gazprom was up for renewal. As Turkey has been paying a high price for Russian gas, Turkish officials hope that the Black Sea discovery will decrease the price of the imported gas.

While Europe worries about the impending winter, Erdogan stated at a gathering in the central province of Corum that Turkey is already working out strategic studies to secure its energy supply security. The Black Sea drilling activities are still being carried out by the ships Yavuz and Kanuni. By March of 2023, according to Turkey's Energy and Natural Resources Minister Fatih Dönmez, the country will be able to utilise the natural gas it discovered in the Black Sea. In light of the widespread energy crisis that is mostly affecting Europe, Dönmez stated that this winter in Turkey, regardless of war in Ukraine, no gas supply problems are anticipated, providing suppliers stick to their shipping schedules.

The greatest natural gas find in Turkish history was made in the Sakarya gas field, which is situated around 150 kilometers (93.2 miles) off the nation's coast in the Black Sea. An onshore gas processing plant is undergoing construction in the port of Filyos in the northern province of Zonguldak.

Moreover, as Erdogan stated, that increasing the capacity of the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC) in 2022 and the current developments in the energy sphere show that these steps are accurate. "Current developments in the international arena also show these steps we had taken were accurate," Erdogan stated (Morrow, 2022) presumably pointing at Russian invasion.

Because Turkey considers the Central Asian republics likely to make heavy use of the Black Sea for foreign trade, the maintenance of open sea-lanes is expected to become more important. Turkey foresees a

greater flow of oil from the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Russia via pipelines to terminals at Iskenderun in the eastern Mediterranean, imposing additional requirements on the navy to ensure the safety of ports and sea-lanes in an increasingly strategic area.

Increasing the capacity of Southern Gas Corridor, setting the start of Abdullhamid Han drillship work in Mediterranean in August 2022 could help Turkey to boost its role as an energy hub play an important role in EU energy security with the time substituting Russia.

Conclusions.

Geopolitically, the Black Sea region holds greater significance for Turkey's ambitions compared to the Mediterranean. Losing control over the Black Sea would render Turkey susceptible and vulnerable, providing Russia with an opportunity for further advances. The historical loss of Crimea and the Pontic steppe through the Kyuchuk-Kaynardzha peace treaty of 1774 marked the beginning of Turkey's decline as an empire. However, the annexation of Crimea has expanded Russia's influence over Turkey beyond economic considerations, with Russia showcasing its naval dominance.

Allowing the war in Ukraine to conclude in a compromise favorable to Russia would deal a final blow to Turkey's standing as a regional power and result in surrendering its decisive role in the Black Sea region to Russia. Recognizing Russia's growing dominance, Turkey has adopted a cautious approach reflected in its military and energy strategies in the Black Sea.

While Turkey has acted as a mediator in brokering a Grain Deal during the conflict, the Russian invasion of Ukraine presents an opportunity for Turkey to assert itself not only as a mediator but also as a significant player in the Black Sea region. This also offers a chance for Turkey to mend its strained relations with the West. However, Turkey must carefully maintain a delicate balance in its relationship with Russia. Despite Turkey's reliance on Russia for energy, tourism, and trade, sustaining this equilibrium becomes increasingly challenging as the war in Ukraine escalates and spreads to other areas in the Black Sea region.

In conclusion, the geopolitical landscape of the Black Sea region places Turkey at a critical juncture. Turkey's role in the region is of utmost importance, and the implications of Russia's advances pose a significant challenge to Turkey's standing as a regional center of power. Balancing its relations with Russia while protecting its own interests in the Black Sea region requires careful navigation in the face of an escalating war.

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