UA: UKRAINE ANALYTICA

Issue 1 (19), 2020

- **BLACK SEA SECURITY**
- **REGIONAL POLICIES**
- **COOPERATION VS CONFRONTATION**

UA: UKRAINE ANALYTICA

Issue 1 (19), 2020

The Black Sea

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Publisher:
Published by NGO "Promotion of Intercultural Cooperation" (Ukraine), Centre of International Studies (Ukraine), with the financial support of the Representation of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Ukraine, the Black Sea Trust.

UA: Ukraine Analytica is the first Ukrainian analytical journal in English on International Relations, Politics and Economics. The journal is aimed for experts, diplomats, academics, students interested in the international relations and Ukraine in particular.

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ISSN 2518-7481

500 copies

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WARGAMING OF THE BLACK SEA SECURITY: EXPLORATORY STUDY INTO THE STRATEGIES FOR THE REGION

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The Black Sea is of strategic importance not only to regional but also increasingly to the global security. Despite the increasing importance of the region, the strategies enumerated by key state players remain unchanged, with patrolling, posturing, and exercises being the main pillars of security. NATO based its strategy on forward presence and readiness, presented as means for deterrence against threats. The annexation of Crimea has proven Russian strategy of territorial pursuit as more successful than Euro-Atlantic partnership programmes. This gap could be addressed with strategy generation in hypothetical scenarios, leading to more representative discussion over security in the Black Sea. To provide the testbed for strategies, a wargaming concept is proposed, which can simulate the dynamic environment and key players.

Introduction

Since the times of Demosthenes, the Black Sea has been viewed as a competitive region, spinning in a constellation of traders, states, and values[1]. Ciociltan referred to the Black Sea as the "crossroads and bypass of Eurasian commerce"[2]. Despite being the world's largest inland sea, the Black Sea holds key to interests of both border states (Ukraine, Romania, Russia, Georgia, Turkey, and Bulgaria) as well as international players (NATO, US). Not only the history but also the present places the Black Sea as a focal point for strategic developments, such as energy policy, migration routes, and escalation of conflicts that were previously deemed as frozen ones.

The Black Sea currently lies at the intersection of security alliances, with NATO members (Turkey, Romania, and Bulgaria) on one side, and the Russian Federation on the other. Georgia and Ukraine both applied for membership in NATO and remain in complicated relations with Russia, making this intersection an active region of competition. Sergiy Glebov compared the Black Sea to a "Water Curtain" that replaced the Iron Curtain of the previous bipolar world[3]. The "Water Curtain" symbolises the competition between Euro-Atlanticist and Eurasianist

1 Demosthenes, *Selected Speeches, see: Against Lactritus,* [in:] Oxford World's Classics, Oxford University Press: Oxford 2014.

2 V. Ciociltan, *The Mongols and the Black Sea Trade in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries,* Koninklijke Brill: Leiden 2012, p. 281.

3 S. Glebov, *From "Europe of the Regions" to "the Regions of Europe": Does Fragmentation in the Black Sea Region Make the EU Safer?,* "Ukraine Analytica" 2(16), 2019, p. 27.

visions for the future[4]. As recognised by Demosthenes, the traders, states, and values continue to both cross paths and create tension. Those tensions lead to constant re-adjustments in the policies of states and organisations. Giray Saynur Bozkurt analysed the situation of the Black Sea, reaching the conclusion of structural "hierarchy within anarchy" and high unpredictability of the system[5]. This unpredictability causes both difficulties to create a lasting strategy as well as the advantage of players with faster decision-making processes.

The security of the Black Sea has been previously wargamed throughout national militaries as well as NATO institutions, with the most prominent example of "Our Sea" matrix game designed by Major Tom Mouat from the British Armed Forces[6]. This form of wargame establishes an argumentation process for possible actions and counteractions played out by six players in the timeframe of one turn representing 2-4 weeks. The purpose of this game is creation of probable narratives, which deepen the understanding of situation. This particular example can serve as a manifestation of the concept, one version of a testbed, which can be compared to other solutions focusing on strategic level.

The following article outlines the parameters that can be used to simulate the security of the Black Sea in light of a particular event and to identify strategies that could be successful for responding to this event by different actors.

This article presents a concept of wargaming the Black Sea security and an exploration of stimulus to the system using three different scenarios. Specific conditions can test the existing strategy as well as stimulating new ones, with relevance to an energy crisis, a migration crisis, and an escalation of conflict in eastern Ukraine. Given these scenarios, the strategies of key players can be formulated in the participatory wargaming iterations, tested in terms of their effects, and compared to other sessions. This exploratory study provides a sample of strategies for the security of the Black Sea with the use of wargaming as a research methodology. The outcomes can be recognised as stimuli to broaden the number of strategies related to the Black Sea security.

Specific conditions can test the existing strategy as well as stimulating new ones, with relevance to an energy crisis, a migration crisis, and an escalation of conflict in eastern Ukraine

Methodology

The Black Sea is undisputedly shaping regional security. Strategies, which are tested in this area, could have global consequences. Due to the impact of events occurring in the Black Sea, this article is attempting to answer the question: How does one generate strategies for the Black Sea security using wargaming? And following this inquiry, which scenarios and players could be included in such experimentation?

4 T. Aybak, *Russia, the Black Sea Region and Security,* [in:] P. Hough, A. Moran, B. Pilbeam, W. Stokes (eds.), *International Security Studies: Theory and Practice,* Routledge: Oxon 2015, p. 356.

5 G. Bozkurt (ed.), *Blue Black Sea: New Dimensions of History, Security, Strategy, Energy and Economy,* Cambridge Scholars Publishing: Newcastle upon Tyne 2013, p. 155.

6 The wargame is available to test at the following link: [https://paxsims.wordpress.com/2016/12/17/our-sea-an-eastern-mediterranean-matrix-game/ access: 10 January 2020].

The following study is conducted according to the concept of wargaming analysis of a strategic security environment, using the relevant parameters: players, board (space), units, and winning conditions. The concept is useful for an experimental study, which tracks the decision-making patterns within the given parameters. To simulate the environment and generate strategies, two more elements are necessary: scenarios, which act as a stimulus to decisions, and mechanics, which support playing those into the given space. The conceptualisation of the wargame as an experimental study is based on principles that ensure scientific validity of the results and its applicability to real-life problems.

Ivanka Barzashka realised that wargaming is increasingly chosen as a method of inquiry employed by both governmental and academic institutions to deepen their understanding of a given problem[7]. A proliferation of the method translated into multiple protocols. The following study is designed with these principles as leading:

1. Simplicity in design: physical fidelity secondary to psychological fidelity[8];

2. Primacy of providing the needed information to make the decision, focusing not on the knowledge reception but on creation;

3. Maximum value in terms of recognising the existing strategies as well as ways of increasing their number by adding new dimensions (economic, diplomatic, information, social) to the wargames;

4. Purpose of this wargaming as a proof-of-concept promoting strategy generation;

5. Publication of the concept to enable peer-review[9];

6. Connecting mechanics of the wargame with real-life events and possible projections of strategic choices.

In the light of the first principle, the space of this study needs to reflect a geographical location as well as the states bordering the sea, the main harbours, and potentially other dimensions of the competition: diplomatic relations, social mobilisation level, energy and economic resources, and military forces. Next to the chosen variables, one must also include the context determining what parts comprise the space, as it creates a need to display the political or environmental situation[10]. Those can be used to evaluate the consequences of the strategies chosen by the players when moves are played on the board.

State of Affairs

Board

The base of the board can be produced from the geographical or political view. Depending on the choice, there can be scales representing the dimensions of competitions and winning conditions. This design has to be guided by the question:

7 I. Barzashka, *Wargaming: How to Turn Vogue into Science,* "Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists", 15 March 2019 [https://thebulletin.org/2019/03/wargaming-how-to-turn-vogue-into-science/ access: 17 February 2020].

8 S. Granberg, P. Hulterström, *Ecological Psychology: A Framework for Wargame Design,* [in:] T. Kaneda, H. Kanegae, Y. Toyoda, P. Rizzi (eds.), *Simulation and Gaming in the Network Society,* "Translational Systems Sciences", vol. 9, Springer: Singapore 2016.

9 I. Barzashka, *Wargaming: How to Turn Vogue into Science,* "Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists", 15 March 2019 [https://thebulletin.org/2019/03/wargaming-how-to-turn-vogue-into-science/ access: 17 February 2020].

10 D. Sanders, *Maritime Power in the Back Sea*, Ashgate: Farnham 2014, p. 16.

how to achieve security and how security is defined in the Black Sea area. An example of such abstraction of regional security can be identified as a mix of given goals, such as states trying to achieve development, security, and high level of support from the population[11].

There is a possibility of a focused wargame, which isolates one element, such as energy policy and therefore limits the available information to actionable points (infrastructure, reserves, ownership, and transactions).

The choice of the information on the board will also be correlated with the security environment – the threat level, active conflicts, number of states in the area, and sources of instability. In the case of the Black Sea, the following risks have to be taken into account:

- internal instability in the states that reinstated independence after the dissolution of the former USSR;
- organised crime, corruption, arms, and nuclear materials' trade;
- increased pollution and environmental threats;
- economic competition triggered by exploitation and transportation of hydrocarbons from the Caspian Sea area;
- an emphasis on ethnic-separatist conflicts and the disintegration and promotion of independent state entities (Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia);
- exportation of instability: non-state groups promoting radical ideologies and religious regimes;
- use of the space as a drug transit area, from Central Asian suppliers to consumers in Europe[12].

Those risks shape the determination of key players, which react to the emerging events and propose strategies for the Black Sea security. The initial sampling of players consists mostly of states and international organisations.

Players

The players in the first two categories are paired with their main points of interest, translatable to objectives in wargames played out in an asymmetrical system (different resources and goals), as presented below:

- The Russian Federation. Main points of interest: Crimea, port of Sevastopol (headquarters of the Russian Black Sea Fleet); position of the dominant power[13];
- Turkey. Main points of interest: Keeping the Black Sea as an "internal" one – minimising influence of other states[14];
- Romania. Main points of interest: Prioritising Black Sea security within NATO and EU; promoting multilateral forums for cooperation;
- Bulgaria. Main points of interest: Cooperating with both NATO and Russia;

11 N. Wojtowicz, *Technical Report: NATO Trilemma, Strategic Direction South,* Civil-Military Cooperation Centre of Excellence, July 2018 [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326328179_Natalia_Wojtowicz_Subject_Matter_Expert_Modelling_and_Simulation_Simulation_NATO_Trilemma_Strategic_Direction_South access: 17 February 2020].

12 S. Ţuţuianu, *A Case Study in Cooperative Security: The Greater Black Sea Area,* [in:] *Towards Global Justice: Sovereignty in an Interdependent World,* T.M.C. Asser Press: The Hague 2013.

13 D. Sanders, *Between Rhetoric and Reality: The Decline of Russian Maritime Power in the Black Sea?,* "Mediterranean Quarterly" 23(4), 2012, pp. 43–68. doi:10.1215/10474552-1895387.

14 I. Joja, *Black Sea Strategic Volatility: Players and Patterns,* Foreign Policy Research Institute: Washington 2019.

- Georgia. Main points of interest: Prioritising relations with NATO and the US;
- Ukraine. Main points of interest: Restoring peace and territorial integrity; further integration into NATO and the EU;
- NATO. Main points of interest: Reassurance to members over cooperative security and collective defence;
- European Union. Main points of interest: strategy based on idealism, drawing on political, economic, social, and environmental issues, with the end goal of sustainable peace and human security[15];
- Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. Main points of interest: conflict prevention, risk reduction, and early warning; observation of military exercises.

This initial sample can be used to generate strategies in a competitive or cooperative setting, depending on the choice of the players to achieve the goals together or separately. NATO and the Russian Federation can be seen as dominant players due to the highest number of forces in the area as well as the number of dependent states[16]. Next to the military dimension and international organisations active in the area, further investigation could be devoted to the identification of key civilian players, such as non-governmental organisations, civil society actors[17], forums for partnerships, and social groups. At the opposite side of the spectrum, groups that employ destabilising tactics could be mapped, including violent groups enumerated in the Risks section.

Although not traditionally included in the wargame formula, commercial entities could also be raised to the level of a player. Within the Black Sea area, that could be identified as tourism and culture sector, education, transport, and energy[18]. The distinction of the categories, which are represented, can guide the determination of units in the wargame – in terms of expendable resources and those that direct their use.

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Units

Following the determination of the players, it is useful to identify units, which they control within the wargame. To achieve the purpose of strategy generation, it is beneficial to experiment with a number of variables representing instruments of power. These variables can be grouped according to pre-existing models, such as DIME (Diplomacy, Intelligence, Military, and Economy) or PMESII (Political,

15 K. Henderson, C. Weaver, *The Black Sea Region and EU Policy: The Challenge of Divergent Agendas,* Ashgate: Farnham 2010, p. 90.

16 D. Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations,* Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press 2009.

17 S. Ţuţuianu, *A Case Study in Cooperative Security: The Greater Black Sea Area,* [in:] *Towards Global Justice: Sovereignty in an Interdependent World,* T.M.C. Asser Press: The Hague 2013.

18 A. Afanasyev, G. Chantzi, S. Hajiyev, S. Kalognomos, L. Sdoukopoulos, *Black Sea Synergy: The Way Forward,* International Centre for Black Sea Studies: Athens 2020.

Military, Economic, Social, Infrastructure, and Information)[19].

Next to the variables and models used to represent the security in the Black Sea region, additional analysis can be drawn to: recording mental models of the designers and experts; providing feedback between "micro" and "macro" representations; and capturing organisational performance, cultures, and institutions, as well as all types of operations and situational awareness of all parties[20]. This de-biasing and specification of reasoning is crucial to represent the realistic units from the area instead of individual focus points.

The mechanical use of units – their movement, function, and power – regulates the ways of winning the wargame. There is a strong dependence on the winning conditions, due to natural motivation to adjust strategy to win. As the purpose is strategy generation, the winning conditions should be broad enough to encourage different approaches.

Strategy Generation

Strategy can be defined as a planning approach, adaptation to conditions, optimisation of resources, or positioning in terms of stakeholders and competition[21]. Security strategies identify the goals, which they serve, and the values ranked as priority to protect[22]. There are a number of strategies previously described within the Black Sea region, among them:

- Russia using the Black Sea as a platform for exerting influence on neighbouring regions, including the Balkans, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean countries[23];
- The United States proposing the "Reset" policy, aiming at rebuilding confidence and constructive relations with Russia[24];
- Turkey choosing to build a bipolar system of allies, with both NATO and Russia[25];
- The European Union fostering cooperation based on "blue economy": aquaculture, coastal tourism, biotechnology, ocean energy, and seabed mining[26];
- NATO's "dual-track approach" based on Enhanced Forward Presence (positioning of forces in the member states) and projecting stability by engaging with partners[27].

Complementary strategies have been proposed around key issues such as energy

19 P. Fellman, Y. Bar-Yam, A. Minai (eds.), *Conflict and Complexity: Countering Terrorism, Insurgency, Ethnic and Regional Violence,* Springer: New York 2015.

20 D.S. Hartley, *Modeling Research,* [in:] *Unconventional Conflict: Understanding Complex Systems,* Springer: Cham 2017.

21 S.P. Mishra, B. Mohanty, *Approaches to Strategy Formulations: A Content Analysis of Definitions of Strategy,* "Journal of Management & Organization", 2020.

22 B. Stackpole, E. Oksendahl, *Security Strategy: From Requirements to Reality,* CRC Press: Boca Raton 2010.

23 G. Kuczynski, *Mare Nostrum Strategy: Russian Military Activity in the Black Sea,* Warsaw Institute: Warsaw 2019.

24 S. Acikmese, D. Triantaphyllou, *The European Union and the Black Sea: The State of Play,* Routledge: New York 2016, p. 84.

25 G. Kuczynski, *Mare Nostrum Strategy: Russian Military Activity in the Black Sea,* Warsaw Institute: Warsaw 2019.

26 *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions Initiative for the Sustainable Development of the Blue Economy in the Western Mediterranean,* Brussels, 2017.

27 P. Anastasov, *The Black Sea Region: A Critical Intersection,* "NATO Review", May 2018.

infrastructure and defence industry[28]. Maritime power influences the scope of the strategy, which can be linked with an overarching political goal or a limited effect (such as securing access for the fishing industry).[29] Strategies can be further identified as reactionary[30] (announced as a response to a given circumstance), visionary (based on a desired end-state), or periodic (linked to a point in time, such as annual reviews). The evolution of the strategies can follow a step-by-step path or a "big bang option" associated with highest impact scenarios[31].

Conditions determined by the scenario can vary in the level of disruption, impact on security of the region, and ability to return to a previous state. Looking towards 2020, Iulia-Sabina Joja[32] recognised three scenarios that could change the security situation in the Black Sea:

1) Accidental destruction of an offshore gas well operated by a Western company in Romania by a Russian military vessel, with international staff on board, leading to a stand-off over responsibility for the casualties;

2) Failure of a new round of negotiations between the EU and Turkey over the housing for asylum seekers from Syria, leading to a massive migration movement followed by escalation on the borders with European countries;

3) Further Russian aggression in Ukraine, spreading towards one of the key ports – Odessa; repeating the pattern of protests, proclamation of a separatist republic, and eventual annexation.

Those can be recognised as highlighting different aspects of the strategies and stimulating new strategy generation.

Conclusions

Using wargaming as a tool for analysing security can lead from asking representative questions, through socialisation of the results, to turning insights into models of reality. The introduction of human players supplies a significant part of the logic in the decision-making process[33]. In the case of the Black Sea security, the generation of strategies can be induced by wargaming through different combinations of players, objectives, and units controlled by humans.

There are certain limitations that need to be accounted for to separate the mental model of the wargame designers and the reality of the situation. As a counterpoint, the suspension of disbelief and the experimental environment can foster innovative ways of thinking, which would not arise without hypothetical scenarios. For example, there is a tendency to act against instead of acting for, due to the absence of a security umbrella for the region and competitive policies of dominant powers, which created

28 J. Peterson, R. Dannreuther, *Security Strategy and Transatlantic Relations,* Routledge: London 2006.

29 D. Sanders, *Between Rhetoric and Reality: The Decline of Russian Maritime Power in the Black Sea?,* "Mediterranean Quarterly" 23(4), 2012, pp. 43–68. doi:10.1215/10474552-1895387.

30 E. Weber, *Pluralism by the Rules: Conflict and Cooperation in Environmental Regulation,* Georgetown University Press: Washington, D.C. 1998, p. 57.

31 S. Ţuţuianu, *A Case Study in Cooperative Security: The Greater Black Sea Area,* [in:] *Towards Global Justice: Sovereignty in an Interdependent World,* T.M.C. Asser Press: The Hague 2013.

32 I-S. Joja, *Three Conflict Scenarios for the Black Sea in 2020,* Foreign Policy Research Institute, January 2020 [https://www.fpri.org/article/2020/01/three-conflict-scenarios-for-the-black-sea-in-2020/ access: 01 February 2020].

33 D.S. Hartley, *Modeling Research,* [in:] *Unconventional Conflict. Understanding Complex Systems,* Springer: Cham 2017.

unfavourable conditions for development of cooperative structures[34]. The constellation of traders, states, and values observed by Demosthenes is in constant movement and revolves around the Black Sea, which could be better understood with a broader view.

The concept of the experimental study of the Black Sea security provides an overview of parameters and examples representative of the current environment. This exploration marks the initial steps towards wargaming of this topic in an iteration-based study, leading to generation of new strategies as well as testing the old ones against scenarios challenging the Black Sea security.

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34 P. Manoli, *The Dynamics of Black Sea Subregionalism,* Routledge: London 2019, p. 21.

Issue 1 (19), 2020
ISSN 2518-7481