

# THE BLACK SEA SECURITY DIMENSION AND CONTEMPORARY MILITARY THREATS

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**Abstract:** The paper „The Security Dimension of the Black Sea Basin and Modern Military Threats“ discusses the military, military-political and economic interests of regional and non-regional actors, which have a significant impact on the security environment and stability of the Black Sea Basin countries. The region in question, due to its geographical location, provides opportunities for the implementation of large-scale economic projects, as well as the projection of forces in various directions, creating additional challenges in the context of possible negative impacts on the above-mentioned domains.

The topic clearly outlines all the needs that should contribute to peaceful coexistence of the countries of the region and implement a full range of security measures to ensure the maintenance of this status quo. Attention is focused on the turbulent situation in the region (the Russia-Ukraine war, the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace process, conflicts in the Middle East), which is gaining critical importance for the West in terms of the rearrangement of the "middle corridor" of stable and reliable transport and communication lines from Central Asia to Europe, through the Caucasus region, in which Georgia plays an important role and performs the function of a conduit for energy resources and cargo. The paper also discusses the trends in strategic support and capacity growth as a result of the above-mentioned processes, both in terms of political, military, and economic-financial benefits, creating unprecedented security guarantees for specific states of the Black Sea Basin.

At the same time, the paper pays special attention to the interests of the United States and China in the Black Sea Basin, due to its geopolitical location of the region and its economic potential, as well as the associated risks that hinder the implementation of large-scale economic projects and ensure security from those actors (Russia, Iran) that are planned to bypass in the implementation of the future megaprojects. Significant attention is paid to the formation of an unstable environment in the states included in the communication chain by malicious actors, including the conduct of hybrid actions, sabotage acts and cyber attacks, as well as attempts or the acts of disruption of territorial integrity or partial or full occupation of the countries. Significant part of the present paper is devoted to the issues of ensuring the security of megaprojects to be implemented in the countries along the chain and the

necessity for close cooperation between partner countries interested in the implementation of these megaprojects.

This will significantly increase the coordinated activities of the interested parties, forces and means involved in the security sector, for the implementation of prophylactic/preventive measures. The research question of this paper is the following: what impact do asymmetric military challenges have on regional security processes, taking the Black Sea region as an example? The theoretical framework will be selected from the theories of „regional security“ and „securitization“. Key terms: security, Black Sea basin, threats, stability, strategic, geopolitical, economic.

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**Introduction.** In the modern world, the guarantor of the safe coexistence of states is often the convergence of economic interests, which have a significant impact on the economic, political, military and social development of countries. The intersection of the above-mentioned spheres of interest significantly increases the quality of good-neighborly relations between different countries, since, based on their geographical location, interdependencies – such as trade, transit routes, cooperation in the military and security sectors – arise. The interest in the Black Sea basin countries has always existed on the part of the USA and Europe, however, the interests and opportunities have increased after the collapse of the post-Soviet space, where they were given a real chance to play the role of important actors in the countries of strategic interest to them, facing economic collapse. Due to its geopolitical location, the Black Sea basin occupies an important place in the formation of world security, as it connects the basins of the Caspian, Aegean and Mediterranean Seas and represents an important corridor between Europe and Asia. Accordingly, the security dimension of the Black Sea basin includes not only the Caucasus, but also Central and East Asia, the Russian Federation, as well as Western European countries and the USA. (Maisaia & Kiguradze, 2024)

The Black Sea Basin has a significant economic significance, which implies replacing the „Northern Corridor“ through the South Caucasus with an alternative „Middle Corridor“, which is significantly shorter than the „Northern Corridor“. The search for this alternative by the West was not driven by a shortness of the route but by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which presented Russia as an unstable and dangerous partner. On the one hand, the existence of an alternative route certainly creates favorable conditions for the economic development of certain countries, but on the other hand, it interferes with the economic interests of the dominant actors in the region, who have more than enough resources to prevent the implementation of alternative projects, which calls into question the security issues associated with the projects to be implemented. All of the above demonstrates that the interests of the world's most industrialized and developed countries are directed towards maintaining and developing a growing economy, which requires protection of investments in the implementation of expensive megaprojects and facilitating their safe operation for a long time, as well as prevention or elimination of the possible existing or future threats. An important factor is the stability of the countries participating in the projects, having the capacity, and ensuring their high level of security, in order to avoid possible asymmetric threats or even direct military aggression from unfriendly actors in the region. (Marshall Center, 2024)

## **1. The Importance of the Black Sea Basin and Analysis of the Geopolitical Location of Georgia**

The importance of the Black Sea Basin is determined by its geo-strategic location, which connects the countries of Europe, the Middle East, Central Asia and East Asia. This region is interesting for a number of economic initiatives, which are expressed in terms of access to resources, favorable trade conditions, fast and short trade routes. The Black Sea Basin acquired special importance after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when certain spaces, closed during the Soviet period, were opened and actually became available for pursuing the political and economic interests of the West.

The countries of the Black Sea Basin are: Turkey, Bulgaria, Georgia, Ukraine, Russia and Romania, of which, in addition to Russia, 5 states are open in terms of international trade. Georgia has an important geographical location in the Black Sea region. If we look at the layout of transit routes, we will understand that, against the background of recent developments, the territory of Georgia is the most favorable compared to the northern land and southern sea transport routes. – The „northern route“ (China-Russia-Europe) has become unreliable for the West since 2022 after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which highlighted the unreliability and instability of Russia's partnership, and therefore the West began to search for an alternative route, known as the „middle corridor“. (NATO Parliamentary Assembly, 2023)

– The „Southern Sea Route“ (Yellow Sea-Strait of Malacca-Indian Ocean-Red Sea-Suez Canal – Mediterranean Sea) is an ocean route that is distinguished by its low price, although its duration is 45-60 days. – The „Middle Corridor“ (China-Kazakhstan-Uzbekistan-Turkmenistan-Azerbaijan-Georgia – Turkey) is an alternative route that is considered as a competitive corridor to the „Northern Route“, as it is 2000 kilometers shorter, much more stable and safer. Based on the above, it can be said that the alternative to the „Middle Corridor“ is an important proposal for connecting the trade routes of Europe and Asia, which is supported by the G7 countries, including China, which is the major supporter of the development of the aforementioned corridor. What is important, is Georgia's participation in the existing chain, which is directly related to the country's economic prosperity and security guarantees. Georgia did not fall into the chain of the mentioned corridor without reason, because if we take into account the armed conflicts between Russia and Ukraine, Armenia and Azerbaijan, the not-so – favorable relations between Azerbaijan and Iran, and the Western sanctions against Iran, we will clearly see the geo-strategic importance of Georgia as a constituent part of the South Caucasus. The following, already implemented projects shall also be mentioned: – The Nabucco gas pipeline (Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey-Bulgaria-Romania-Hungary-Austria – Czech Republic-Germany), which connects Central Asia to Europe, bypassing Russia; – Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, through which crude oil is transported from the Caspian Sea; – Shah Deniz gas pipeline (Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum), which was built in the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan corridor. The existing pipelines indicate Georgia's power transfer capability and reliability. (Kuimova & Wezeman, 2018)

## **2. Overview of the Purpose of the „Middle Corridor“ and the Potential for Ensuring the Security of the Countries, Included in the Corridor Chain**

As we have repeatedly noted above, the Black Sea Basin has a geographical location of geo-strategic importance, which is one of the alternative options for transporting energy resources from Asia to Europe. In order to diversify the transportation of resources, the region is of interest to the world's leading countries, whose goal is to create safe trade routes, where energy resources will be transported continuously and stably.

The Black Sea region, as a corridor capable of transporting energy resources, has acquired particular importance since 2022, when Russia began large-scale hostilities against Ukraine. By doing so, Russia has opposed the entire Western world, which it has been supplying with energy resources for decades through the Northern Corridor, and has used this corridor as a lever of influence on the West, forcing Europe, the USA and China to look for a new alternative energy corridor. Such an alternative corridor, which would be competitive with the Northern Corridor, is known as the The main purpose of the „Middle Corridor“ is to reduce the energy resource transmission route by several thousand kilometers (reducing costs and transportation time) compared to other routes, as well as to remove Russia from the international alliances for supplying Europe with energy resources. One of the most important components of the stable functioning of this corridor is also ensuring the security of the countries with the capacity to transmit energy resources, which is associated with great difficulties against the backdrop of political fluctuations or armed conflicts in the states in the „Middle Corridor“ energy transmission chain, for example, instability in Kyrgyzstan (revolutionary events) in 2020, hostilities in Karabakh in 2020,

local armed conflicts between Azerbaijan and Armenia in 2021-2022, and civil conflict in Kazakhstan in 2022. (Maisaia, 2021)

All of the above significantly hinders the timely implementation of energy projects and calls into question the stable functioning of the corridor. Prevention of such unstable events requires the internal political stability of the states in the chain and collective efforts aimed at security. In this case, Georgia is not distinguished by a stable environment either, since 20% of the country is occupied by Russia, which creates certain tensions in the implementation of such mega-projects.

The states, included in the energy resource transmission chain, for the purpose of the economic well-being and safe development of their countries, should use all the political and economic levers at their disposal in their own states and conduct a balanced foreign policy in order to maintain a safe environment in the neighboring area, for the implementation of such projects in a stable environment. Such approaches will make their geographical location even more attractive for launching new initiatives by foreign investors. Participation of industrialized and world-leading countries in the implementation of such megaprojects itself indicates the influx of huge investments into energy-transmitting states and taking unprecedented security complex measures in these states, where the involvement of the full spectrum of the local security sector is, of course, inevitable. (Maisaia, 2003, 6-12)

### **3. The Existence of Modern Military Threats, the Possibilities of Combating Them and Their Prevention**

The ongoing political and economic processes in the world and, in particular, in the countries of the Black Sea basin create an unstable environment for the implementation of the above-mentioned economic projects, development of which requires creation of a stable and secure environment. In the course of implementation of all projects, interested parties and opposing parties are identified, because on the one hand, this is a source of economic benefits for certain states, and on the other hand, for subjects distanced from these projects, the implementation of these projects is a cause of economic decline. Accordingly, during such processes, some disagreements and tensions arise in the relations between the interested and opposing parties, which may develop into a more rigid and aggressive form of relations in the future. (Dobrin, 2023). If we consider the political, economic and military goals or intentions of the parties, interested in the Black Sea Basin, we will understand that the Black Sea Basin and its bordering countries are subject of great discussion for powerful states with industrial and imperialist ambitions, where there is a frequent intersection of interests and differences of opinion. All this gives rise to certain confrontations and the involvement of the full spectrum of the security

sectors of the disputing countries in order to protect their own interests. Development is a continuous process, especially in todays world, where technical innovations have reached the highest peaks of development and are still in the process of development.

Accordingly, not specific sectors are developing, but this is the entire chain of development, the results of which are directly reflected in the military sphere, the cyber security and cybercrime space, and the methods of conducting covert and open conflicts. All these innovations and successful theoretical and practical innovations achieved through development of these innovations are used for safe and peaceful coexistence of the countries of the world, and also, as levers of influence on the disputes that arise between them. In this paper, we have repeatedly touched upon the strategic importance of the Black Sea basin and the issue of the „middle corridor“ passing through it, which remains a disputed geo-strategic geographical location of Russia-Iran and the West.

As present situation stands, Russia and Iran remain beyond alternative options of energy communication lines, which causes their irritation and, to some extent, economic isolation, all of which is reflected in the slowdown of their economic development process and large financial losses. The ongoing deadlocked large-scale military conflict between Russia and Ukraine and nuclear arms-related negotiations between Iran and West demonstrate the collective attitude of the West and its towards Iran and Russia. Accordingly, there is a high probability that the projects which are being implemented

bypassing these two countries with enormous resources and military potential, may cause in their gross interference with the aim of hampering the process of implementation of the projects or even questioning their implementation. Such actions may be expressed in the form of asymmetric threats, in particular, through sabotage and terrorist acts, cyber attacks, provoking internal political instability in the countries participating in the projects, or through open military conflicts, which will significantly damage the security and stability of the countries in the chain of megaprojects.

Therefore, as mentioned above, it is necessary to involve the full spectrum of the security sectors of all states participating in the projects in order to timely prevent the emerging threats and to pursue a balanced policy in the neighborhood, which implies avoiding possible future provocations or developing pragmatic approaches to existing problems. In these projects, it is also very important to involve the security sectors of international organizations, which have extensive experience in operating in post-conflict situations and have a great potential for making political decisions at regional level. Of course, processes aimed at security and stability should not be reduced to the individual level or to the elimination of any specific threat; they should include a complex cycle of actions and have a collective character, which will significantly improve the quality of identifying possible problems that may arise in the future and their timely elimination. (Marshall Center, 2024)

**Conclusion.** The facts, discussed in the paper, demonstrate great interest of the worlds leading countries in the Black Sea Basin, which shows the scale of the interest and security dimension. Given the importance of the Black Sea Basin, its security dimension includes the USA, Canada, Europe, Russia, the Middle East, and certain countries of Central and East Asia. There are many geographical points of intersection of interests in this geographical location, such as the Bosphorus Strait, the Crimean Peninsula, the South Caucasus, the European coast, etc. All of these points have their own strategic purpose and represent important local interests of certain states, whether it is access to the Black Sea, control of sea routes, or access to energy corridors. The most important thing is their correct and efficient use, taking into account the interests of all interested actors. However, it is very difficult to take this into account in a real environment, due to the political, economic and military interests of the countries bordering the Black Sea basin and various countries of the world, interested in the geographical location of the basin. Despite the intersection of interests and disagreements on certain issues, the Black Sea basin remains a key point of geo-strategic importance, primarily in terms of energy resource transfer capability, as well as the most important connecting corridor between Asia and Europe. Many mega-projects have already been implemented in this area – and many are planned in the future – through which a huge amount of natural energy resources is exchanged continentally in the shortest possible time, which leads to the rapid development of land, sea and air transit infrastructure. Existing development programs require large financial investments and protection of these investments, which is guaranteed by ensuring the security and stable development of the region. It is undeniable that the Black Sea Basin is a favorable region in terms of trade processes for Asia and in terms of energy diversification for Europe, which necessitates great efforts by interested countries to maintain stability in the region.

It is also important to note the existence of military threats, which may be presented in the form of asymmetric threats, aimed at disrupting and damaging economic projects the prevention of which requires significant investment in the development of the collective and local security sector. The existence of military threats, which may be presented in the form of asymmetric threats for the purpose of hampering and damaging economic projects, as well as presenting the Black Sea Basin as an unstable region, by unfriendly actors in the region is also important; their prevention requires significant investment in the development of the collective and local security sector.

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