

## UP FROM THE MONTREUX: SUBMARINES FOR GEORGIA, AND NATO'S FUTURE IN THE BLACK SEA

Kirk GUSTA

*Graduate student, Department of Political Science,  
Dalhousie University, Halifax  
(Nova Scotia, Canada)*

Lasha TCHANTOURIDZE

*Ph.D., Research Associate and Adjunct Professor,  
Center for Defense and Security Studies,  
University of Manitoba  
(Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada)*

### *I n t r o d u c t i o n*

In October 2006, Russia's Black Sea fleet conducted live fire maneuvers off Georgia's Black Sea coast. According to Georgian officials, Russian ships were as close as 16 miles from the Georgia's coastline.<sup>1</sup> The live fire exer-

cise disrupted civilian shipping in the area, as the Russian military vessels blocked the Georgian ports Poti, Supsa, and Batumi. The Russian government intended this exercise as a hostile act, as they declined to inform the Georgian counterparts of the movements of their vessels, and deliberately

<sup>1</sup> See: V. Socor, "Tbilisi Claims Russian Navy Holding Exercises off Georgian Coast," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. III, Issue 194, 20 October, 2006, The Jamestown Foundation, available at [[http://www.jamestown.org/publications\\_](http://www.jamestown.org/publications_)

[details.php?volume\\_id=414&issue\\_id=3895&article\\_id=2371563](http://www.jamestown.org/publications_details.php?volume_id=414&issue_id=3895&article_id=2371563)].

*The authors would like to thank Dr Adrian Taylor, Director, Policy and Political Advice, European School of Governance in Berlin, Germany, for his useful comments and constructive criticism of the article.*

misinformed the public of the nature of the exercise. Defense Minister Ivanov labeled it part of Black Sea Harmony (BSH), a joint exercise with Turkey that is supposed to be conducted after advance planning. Ankara, however, rejected this claim, and expressed its surprise at such claims.<sup>2</sup>

The October live fire exercise followed the Tbilisi-Moscow spy row, and signaled sharp deterioration of Russo-Georgian relations. After imposing comprehensive economic embargo on Georgia, and organizing mass deportations of ethnic Georgians from Russia, the Kremlin sharply highlighted vulnerabilities in Georgia's defenses—its Black Sea coast has been virtually undefended from a potential sea invasion since the breakup of the Soviet Union. The small Georgian navy and coast guard cannot do much to deter such hostile acts let alone repel a full-scale invasion.

The Black Sea remains a sensitive area not only for the Russian Federation, and Georgia, but for the other riparian states as well. Russia would like to remain the only dominant naval power in the area as Moscow desperately tries to halt the

extension of NATO's naval Operation Active Endeavor (OAE) from the Mediterranean into the Black Sea. The Russians see the Black Sea as their sea, and would like to keep this perception alive. For that end the Kremlin has applied considerable pressure on both Georgia and Ukraine. For the latter it has been the question of Crimea, and the rights to the naval base in Sevastopol, which is due to expire in 2017.<sup>3</sup> Abkhazia remains the sword of Damocles for the former.

Georgia should assert its sovereignty and independence by establishing a noticeable military presence in the Black Sea. It needs a deterrent for potential invasion and intimidation by a hostile power. With the Black Sea coast exposed, Georgian territorial waters poorly defended, and its exclusive economic zone poorly monitored, Tbilisi's chances of re-uniting the country and establishing itself as a viable political entity remain small. Even if the country's current problems could be solved, without a strong naval presence Georgia would remain very vulnerable for future encroachments on its sovereignty.

<sup>2</sup> See: V. Socor, "Tbilisi Claims Russian Navy Holding Exercises off Georgian Coast," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. III, Issue 194, 20 October, 2006, The Jamestown Foundation, available at [[http://www.jamestown.org/publications\\_details.php?volume\\_id=414&issue\\_id=3895&article\\_id=2371563](http://www.jamestown.org/publications_details.php?volume_id=414&issue_id=3895&article_id=2371563)].

<sup>3</sup> From its early days, the current Ukrainian administration indicated unwillingness to extend the current term beyond 2017 (see: A. Chernikov, O. Berezintseva, "Naval Retreat: Ukraine Intends to Get Rid of the Black Sea Fleet," *Kommersant* daily, 18 April, 2005, available at [[http://www.kommersant.com/p570863/r\\_1/Naval\\_Retreat/](http://www.kommersant.com/p570863/r_1/Naval_Retreat/)]).

## The Stakes for Georgia

For Georgia, submarines should be considered the primary option for protecting the country from a potential sea invasion, maintaining sovereignty in its territorial waters, monitoring its exclusive economic zone, and deterring intimidating acts by hostile powers. Of the types available, the diesel-electric, preferably with AIP (air independent propulsion), boat should be considered due not only to cost factors, but its suitability. The era of non-nuclear submarines is far from over.<sup>4</sup> Many experts argue that diesel submarines run quieter, some say far quieter, than their nuclear powered counterparts due mainly to the fact that they do not have to run noisy coolant pumps for a nuclear reactor.<sup>5</sup> Diesel-electric subs could also run for a long period on batteries—this makes them very difficult to detect.<sup>6</sup> No comparison between the two need be argued here, for Georgia cannot possibly afford nuclear powered boats, nor are they suitable for her needs.

<sup>4</sup> See: S. Zimmerman, *Submarine Technology for the 21st Century*, Trafford Publishing, 2006, p. 35.

<sup>5</sup> See: N. Friedman, *Submarine Design and Development*, Naval Institute Press, 1984, p. 81.

<sup>6</sup> *The Canadian Submarine Acquisition Project*, A Report of the Standing Committee on National Defense, Issue No. 41, The House of Commons, Ottawa, Canada, August 1988, p. 33.

Diesel submarines could be of immense practical use for Georgia. First, as it was noted above, Russia has been periodically violating Georgian waters in an effort to disrupt commerce, and intimidate Georgia's government. The Kremlin is unlikely to ever change this tactic unless it sees a credible deterrent. Relations between Moscow, and its neighbors and Western powers are likely to deteriorate in the near future as the Russian government tries to restore its imperial vision of and approaches to world politics. As tensions increase, whether multilateral on the world stage or bilateral between Tbilisi and Moscow, so would increase intimidation and blackmail in the Black Sea.

Second, the breakaway Abkhazia has acquired armed warships from Russia, and is claiming control over its "territorial waters." Abkhazia is a major piece in Russia's Black Sea region calculations, as it could serve a number of useful purposes. Small, but well armed and supplied Abkhaz armed forces could be used as a rogue deterrent against Georgia's ambitions to join NATO, and disrupt Tbilisi's efforts to disentangle itself from the web of Russian threat. The Abkhaz forces could also disrupt energy routes in the region not favored by Moscow. Further, Abkhazia could be used by Moscow to re-assert its control over Georgia as this renegade province remains *de jure* part of Georgia, and theoretically the country's re-unification could be initiated from both ends. Control of Georgia is crucial for Russia's new great power game, as Moscow sees energy as the key for its comeback on the world stage, and Georgia remains its chief rival in securing the access to energy resources of the Caucasus and Central Asia from the west.

Third, Georgia's Black Sea coast is virtually undefended from a sea invasion—currently this can be easily undertaken by Russia, and potentially even by Abkhazia. It is hard to imagine that the General Staff of the Russia's armed forces does not have a plan for a potential full-scale invasion of Georgia. Given its historical legacy (the Soviet army had offensive and defensive plans for almost every contingency), and current tense relations between Moscow and Tbilisi that are not likely to better anytime soon, this would be a very natural assumption. In such a plan, an invasion from the sea would figure as the most prominent option, as the sea side is undefended. Plus, the Russians have both training and military experience of sea invasion of Georgia. The Soviet navy, marines, and the army regularly practiced seaborne invasions in Georgia (and elsewhere).<sup>7</sup> Russians have assailed Georgia's Black Sea coast in combat formations a number of times since the collapse of the U.S.S.R. The Russian Black Sea fleet and army supported the Abkhaz separatists during the 1992-1993 war, and have continued providing military assistance since the end of military conflict. Further, in 1993, combat-ready Russian forces landed in the Poti area to "help" the Georgian government, which was struggling with a pro-Gamsakhurdia uprising in western Georgia.

Georgia's land border with Russia is naturally protected by the Caucasus mountains. In fact, Georgia historically has not experienced a large-scale invasion from the north as hostile parties mostly came from southern and eastern directions. There are only a handful of passable roads that potential northern invaders could use, and even they could be easily blocked or destroyed. In a scenario of Tbilisi asserting its control over the Tskhinvali region, the only thing the Georgian army would have to do to cut Russia's military support routes with the local separatists is to block or disable the Roki Pass. All other roads linking the separatist Tskhinvali region with the Russian Federation will be impassable from late fall to early spring. However, Georgia would still be wide open to retaliation from the sea.

Because of the above, Georgia needs to restore its sovereignty over its territorial waters, deter potential aggression from Russia, and check military ambitions of the Abkhaz. It would be naïve to expect Moscow to just hand over control of Abkhazia to Tbilisi after extending so much effort and resources there. Georgia is the only alternative to Russia for South Caucasian and Central Asian en-

---

<sup>7</sup> Back then Georgia was part of the Soviet Union, and the Soviet army used Georgian sea coast for practice purposes only. One of the authors of this article was part of such exercises in the 1980s.

ergy shipment routes and transportation corridors destined to Western markets. By eliminating this alternative, Moscow would make a major step toward re-establishing itself as a world power, and extending influence over its southern and western neighbors.

Georgia is a small country, and unfortunately, small countries often become victims of trade-offs among great powers. It would be foolish to expect that Western Europeans would physically protect Georgia from Russian encroachment or that their verbal protests would deter the Kremlin. Europeans hesitated even in their verbal condemnation of Russia's cyber attack on a NATO member Estonia in May 2007. Whether this is because of European military impotence, the lack of leadership, their increasing energy dependence on Russia or a combination of these and other factors, is beside the point. The bottom line is that Western Europeans would be more likely to settle for an expensive peace with Russia than a cheap war.

The United States remains the only viable ally in Georgia's efforts to avoid large-scale military conflict with Russia. However, U.S.'s support for Georgia should not be overestimated. It cannot be viewed in the same light, for instance, as Washington's unequivocal support for the State of Israel. The U.S. might walk out of Georgia in foreseeable future or use Georgia as an expensive trading stock with Russia. The United States has many problem issues worldwide, and it would be reasonable to expect that Washington will continue to look after its national interest first of all. Besides, the administrations change in Washington, and so do interests and priorities. Tbilisi should strive to establish such a balance in its relations with the United States so that Georgia is seen both as an expensive trading stock, and a difficult partner to abandon.<sup>8</sup> Right now, Georgia is an expensive chip in great power game between Washington and Moscow, but it could be easily abandoned. Georgia could remedy this imbalance by acquiring a submarine fleet, and substantially increasing its value as an ally.

## Why Submarines?

Navies are of paramount importance for maritime powers. Effective navies provide for active defenses, they influence foreign policy, enhance their prestige, and bolster diplomacy. Only in the latter area of foreign activity "Naval diplomacy in its various guises can reassure, strengthen, symbolize a growing relationship or commitment, establish rights and interests in near or distant regions, impress onlookers with the country's technical competence or diplomatic skill, restrain allies or adversaries, bolster the strength and confidence of allies and associates or third parties, encourage independent-mindedness of third parties, encourage or dissuade states in relation to particular policies, signal intentions or expectations, create uncertainty when necessary, neutralize the naval diplomacy of adversaries, complicate the problems and planning of adversaries and their associates, deter inimical actions, foreclose the options of competing states, reduce the confidence of selected targets, cause losses of faith in the associates of one's adversaries, discourage opponents, create a different politico-military environment and set of expectations, increase the level of profitable interaction with near or distant countries, gain access to new countries, maintain or improve the access with existing associates, and create a degree of dependency and so the possibility for manipulation."<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> For comparison, Israel is both a high stakes chip and a difficult ally to abandon, if the U.S. were to consider trading it. Washington will not abandon Israel for not only ideological, but also for very pragmatic reasons—the Arabs, if they were to attack Israel left without U.S. support, would sustain so much damage from powerful Israeli armed forces that the U.S. would not gain anything from this potential trade. A full scale and long war in the Middle East would produce high costs and serious consequences for any U.S. Administration, both domestically and internationally. On the other hand, if Washington were to abandon Georgia, it could gain much from such a potential trade with Russia, and as Georgia would not be able to put up a substantial resistance to Russia, in such a scenario the costs of abandoning an ally will be minimal.

<sup>9</sup> K. Booth, *Navies and Foreign Policy*, Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., New York, 1979, p. 47.

The power of the submarine in this equation cannot be overstated. A submarine is a true stealth platform, one is usually not aware of its presence until catastrophe has befallen them (provided the boat and crew are of reasonable quality). The stealth factor of the submarine acts as a strong deterrent, as one does not know where it may be at any given time, other than it is not at its berth. The submarine's primary weapon, the torpedo, is also fantastically effective, sinking an adversary more often than not. Whereas a ship may survive a missile or bomb attack (as did, for instance, the USS *Cole*), the recipient of a torpedo is rarely so fortunate. This is due to the fact that in water the explosive force is more effective than in air.<sup>10</sup>

According to Canadian Commodore Denis Rouleau, submarines are "a phenomenon tool for collecting intelligence."<sup>11</sup> Modern submarines are fitted with newest intelligence collecting capabilities that allow them to collect a variety of information about the surface vessels. A submarine can "sit" very quietly, and collect intelligence, complete with imagery, etc., without being detected by the opposition. For any surface vessel and/or fleet commanding officer "to know that there's a sub somewhere, but not to know where it is exactly, is the scariest thing out there."<sup>12</sup>

Geography also plays a key role for the submarine. Georgia is surrounded by a shield of mountains making an overland attack difficult to say the least. At present, the easiest and surest way into Georgia is by sea. However, had Georgia even a small fleet of submarines, such a venture would prove terribly costly for an invader—boats carry at a minimum 12 torpedoes each (most carry more, and some may carry missiles in addition to torpedoes). Any enemy considering invasion would be certain to reckon the submarine while performing a cost/benefit analysis. Most modern diesel-electric (and AIP) submarines have an endurance of weeks.<sup>13</sup>

Submarines could also deploy in an event of intimidating acts from a hostile government, such as a live fire exercise by their warships. Even two modern diesel-electric submarines could eliminate intimidation as a factor. Navy commanders would not normally knowingly expose their vessels to potential troubles, even if they are only needlessly subjected to intelligence gathering by a potential adversary. The live fire exercise the Russians held in October 2006 at the Georgian coast, would not have taken place had Georgians had a couple of submarines on duty.

Separatist claims over Abkhaz land and coastal areas are not likely to go away soon. The Sukhumi regime is being further armed by Russia with surface vessels, and used as an aggressive buffer against Georgia. A fleet of submarines will undermine separatist claims over Georgia's territorial waters and also will hugely diminish their coastal defenses. Subs could effectively block any further delivery of military equipment and munitions to the separatists by sea. The Russians would be less likely to get engaged in active military support of separatists groups in Georgia, if they know that there would be costly consequences for them and for the stability of the Black Sea region. In the end, the stable Black Sea is more advantageous for the Russians than the one mired in hostile relations among riparian powers.

As mentioned, the stealth feature makes the submarine a menace as one does not know where it may strike at any given time—if the conflict is prolonged, this will have a psychological effect upon the enemy, as he must constantly be on guard. Its offensive capabilities make it a platform to be truly feared. For years, smaller navies, such as those of Canada, and the Netherlands participating in navy war-games with the United States have repeatedly bestowed a thrashing upon American carrier groups, often slipping away unscathed. There are numerous instances of these successes since 1981, beginning with the NATO exercise Ocean Venture. During this exercise the U.S. NAVY was embarrassed by a pair of Canadian Oberon Class diesel submarines (1960s vintage). In this exercise the Canadian

<sup>10</sup> See: N. Friedman, op. cit., p. 158.

<sup>11</sup> Commodore D. Rouleau, *Keynote Speech to the 23rd Annual Political Studies Students' Conference*, The University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, 31 January, 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Commodore Rouleau, Winnipeg, MB, 31 January, 2007.

<sup>13</sup> See: S. Zimmerman, op. cit., p. 3.

subs managed to elude the carrier screen, and each sub accounted for the “sinking” of an American aircraft carrier, one claimed the USS *America*, the other the USS *Forrestal*.<sup>14</sup> Eight years later, in another NATO exercise, Northern Star, the USS *America* again was “sank,” this time by the Dutch submarine *Zwaardvis*. War games conducted in the 1990s continued this trend. In RIMPAC 1996, the Chilean sub Simpson “sunk” the American Carrier USS *Independence*. The 1999 exercise JTFEX/TMDI99 saw the Dutch submarine *Walrus* “sink” not only the USS *Theodore Roosevelt*, but the Command ship of the fleet, a cruiser, several destroyers and frigates as well as the escorting fast attack submarine, the improved Los Angeles Class USS *Boise*. The trend continued into the 21st century with the Australians and Chileans accounting for kills against nuclear powered attack submarines, aircraft carriers, and other surface vessels.<sup>15</sup>

Diesel-electric submarines proved themselves successful in the most recent real combat engagement between two navies. During the 1982 Falkland (Malvinas) war, after a British Royal Navy nuclear submarine sank the Argentine cruiser *General Belgrano*, the British subs successfully confined Argentina’s remaining surface fleet to their territorial waters. However, the British Royal Navy, at that time the best in the world in the anti-submarine warfare, was unable to locate and destroy a single Argentine diesel powered submarine *San Luis* for more than two months.<sup>16</sup>

For Georgia’s current needs, of the available options available, the best option from available new subs would be an AIP powered submarine. These are, as the name suggests, submarines which may operate for prolonged periods without the need to surface for air. There are different types, but the best example thus far seems to be the German-built type 212a submarine, which uses hydrogen cells in addition to a diesel-electric drive. Incredibly quiet, these boats may travel or stay submerged for at least two weeks without having to surface. The type 214 is the export model of the 212a and should be worthy of consideration by Georgia—not only do the Germans build excellent submarines, but they would undoubtedly provide top quality training as well. Unit cost is estimated to be somewhere between 300-350 million dollars. The greatest asset of the German built 214 submarine, in comparing it with other AIP systems, is the fact that its hydrogen cells have no moving parts whatsoever, which means no noise to potentially give it away. Since it is not using a form of combustion to generate its energy it also does not have to vent any gasses into the surrounding sea water. Essentially, this type of fuel cell combines oxygen and hydrogen to produce heat, water, and electricity. In addition to these advantages, it is also a very efficient system. At the same time, its detractors make a very good point that storing hydrogen as a high pressure gas or liquid has its potential serious dangers;<sup>17</sup> however, such concerns are likely to diminish with advances in relevant technologies.

Another option for Georgia would be the Swedish T-96 submarine, which uses a Stirling engine—runs on diesel oil and liquid oxygen—to charge its batteries under water. Unit cost for this sub is rumored to be a somewhere around 100 million dollars.<sup>18</sup> Though the Stirling system is termed an “engine,” it is important to note that unlike a conventional diesel drive, it does not produce noisy explosions during combustion.<sup>19</sup> Undoubtedly a quality submarine, the T-96 may prove to be the best value of the various subs due to its low initial cost.

The French-Spanish built *Scorpen* class submarine also uses an AIP system, MESMA, in one of its two variants, the other is a conventional vessel. In this case a liquid oxygen-ethanol mix is used

<sup>14</sup> See: R.G. Williscroft, “Is the Nuclear Submarine Really Invincible?” available at [[http://www.sftt.org/cgi\\_bin/csNews/csNews.cgi?database=DefenseWatch%202004.db&command=viewone&op=t&id=331&rnd=954.9177124505652](http://www.sftt.org/cgi_bin/csNews/csNews.cgi?database=DefenseWatch%202004.db&command=viewone&op=t&id=331&rnd=954.9177124505652)].

<sup>15</sup> See: *Ibidem*.

<sup>16</sup> See: *The Canadian Submarine Acquisition Project*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>17</sup> See: E.C. Whitman, “AIP Technology Creates a New Undersea Threat,” available at [[http://www.chinfo.navy.mil/navpalib/cno/n87/usw/issue\\_13/propulsion.htm](http://www.chinfo.navy.mil/navpalib/cno/n87/usw/issue_13/propulsion.htm)].

<sup>18</sup> See: D. Walsh, “The AIP Alternative: An Idea Whose Time Has Come?” available at [[http://www.navyleague.org/seapower/aip\\_alternative.htm](http://www.navyleague.org/seapower/aip_alternative.htm)].

<sup>19</sup> See: N. Friedman, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

to produce energy (heat), which in turn creates steam to power a turbo-electric generator which recharges the boat's batteries.<sup>20</sup> The MESMA system's main drawback is its lower efficiency relative to its competitors, especially that of the fuel cell. Unit cost is estimated to be somewhere around 500 million dollars. In addition to these subs, the Netherlands, a country which has traditionally built excellent submarines, is also working on developing an AIP submarine of its own.<sup>21</sup>

While a conventional submarine has several uses, its tremendous surveillance and intelligence gathering ability merely scratches the surface, above all it is a vital component which Georgia is lacking in regard to national security. Without a powerful deterrent at sea, Georgia remains very vulnerable. However, acquiring few submarines, especially for a small country like Georgia, is not a simple undertaking.

## Montreux Controversies, and NATO in the Black Sea

Georgia may encounter a number of significant political and military obstacles if it decided to acquire submarines. Building subs, installing necessary equipment, training crew, building bases for them, etc. will take years. It will also be very costly undertaking for Georgia's budget, but we think that the cost should not be a prohibitive factor. Currently new submarine prices are high, especially of those with AIP technology, but further developments in this area, and proliferation of such submarines are likely to bring costs down.<sup>22</sup> Not every potential problem related to submarine procurement could be envisioned and addressed properly, but some of them should be mentioned here.

It will not be easy for Western governments to sign a submarine deal with Georgia. The United States and the United Kingdom would be the most likely willing partners to sign such a deal, but they do not at this moment develop diesel-electric submarines or their more recent variations. The governments of most other countries mentioned above still find themselves challenged by the Putin phenomenon, and this confusion would likely last beyond the 2008 Russian presidential elections. A country like Germany, for instance, would find itself under immense pressure from Russia if it were to agree develop subs for Georgia, and train their crews. Germany alone would not be able to carry this project to its completion, as it is becoming increasingly dependent on Russia for its energy needs.

Moscow, no doubt, will be very willing to dub such an undertaking a hostile act, a new cold war or something along these lines. Even without energy dependency, most European governments would not want to see their country as the main cause for new arms race in Europe or even worse, an open confrontation with Russia. Even if Europeans cooperate with Georgia, Russia may not sit idly and wait for the delivery of submarines. It may attack Georgia before submarines are delivered or may instigate a coup in Tbilisi. One way or another, it is very likely that Moscow would actively oppose such a sub project.

Georgia cannot possibly surmount all the problems and obstacles that we have identified above only if we assume that things in Europe and Russia will stay as they are. However, things in international politics never stay static for a long time, and as current international developments indicate the Eurasian theater will become an arena of many changes.

---

<sup>20</sup> See: D. Walsh, op. cit.

<sup>21</sup> For more on the newest efforts to improve non-nuclear submarines see Zimmerman's *Submarine Technology for the 21st Century*.

<sup>22</sup> Zimmerman offers extensive discussion of the future of AIP and diesel-electric submarines in his *Submarine Technology for the 21st Century*.

European attitudes toward Russia may change dramatically as early as 2008. As next year's election approaches, the current Russian regime has clearly demonstrated its intention to stay in power, and to achieve this goal they will have to suppress opposition, revoke whatever is left in Russia of democratic rights, and rig transfer of power from Putin to his successor. They might even decide to transform the current imperial looking-government into a *de facto* imperial one—this may sound absurd, but currently very little in Russia stands between the current form of government and a full restoration of the Russian empire.

On the other hand, NATO will not stay idle as far as their activities around the Black Sea basin are concerned. A NATO naval task force has not yet sailed into the Black Sea, but according to one senior NATO military commander, one should expect something like that to happen in the near future.<sup>23</sup> The most obvious candidate for visiting the Black Sea is a Standing NATO Maritime Group (CSNMG) with the Operation Active Endeavor as its most logical cover. When this happens, it would be the first entry into the Black Sea by a non-Black Sea navy since 1936, when the Montreux Convention was signed regulating passage of vessels through the Turkish Straits (the Dardanelles, the Sea of Marmora, and Bosphorus).<sup>24</sup>

The 1936 Montreux Conference in Switzerland was attended by Turkey, Great Britain, the U.S.S.R., Bulgaria, Greece, Germany, Japan, Australia, France, and Yugoslavia. The Convention, which was subsequently ratified by almost all conference participants, regulates the movement of merchant and military vessels in and out of the Black Sea. The Turkish Straits are regarded as international waters, but Turkey has its military control. Although the articles of the convention regulating the passage of military vessels look outdated, the treaty is still in effect, and is being largely respected by both the signatories and non-signatories.<sup>25</sup> To address its outdated nature, it would suffice to mention that Ukraine and Georgia, the two riparian Black Sea states most in need of naval protection, did not exist as independent international entities in 1936. Besides, all navies concerned with the Montreux Convention have far outgrown the displacement limits set by the Convention.<sup>26</sup>

As the United States looks more assertive in the region, the likelihood of Washington acting contrary to Montreux provisions is increasing. In December 2006, the influential Heritage Foundation called the U.S. Administration to re-draw its approach to the Black Sea region and come up with new policies.<sup>27</sup> This analysis is very critical of Russia's conduct toward its smaller neighbors, and calls the U.S. government to step up its support for Western leaning Georgia. The Heritage Foundation report is very skeptical of Russian-Turkish rapprochement, and criticizes their "anti-Western sentiments." The analysts point out recent occasions in which Russia and Turkey acted in concert to counter U.S. interests in the region.<sup>28</sup> Other studies published in the U.S. in 2006 voice similar sentiments. According to Hill and Taspinar, Russia and Turkey have found a common ground, and cooperated against Western interests in the region, because Russia and Turkey see American policies "to spread freedom and democracy around the world not as a bulwark against tyranny and extremism in places like Syria, Iraq, and Iran, but as an expansionist policy that will further damage their [Russian and Turkish] interests."<sup>29</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Interview, 31 January, 2006.

<sup>24</sup> See: "Montreux Convention," *Naval Treaty Implementation Program*, available at [[http://www.ntip.navy.mil/montreux\\_convention.shtml](http://www.ntip.navy.mil/montreux_convention.shtml)].

<sup>25</sup> For more comprehensive discussion of the Montreux Convention, and its evolution see an historical review by Professor John Daly, "Oil, Guns, and Empire: Russia, Turkey, Caspian "New Oil" and the Montreux Convention," available at [<http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/usazerb/325.htm>].

<sup>26</sup> See: *ibidem*.

<sup>27</sup> See: A. Cohen, C. Irwin, "U.S. Strategy in the Black Sea Region," *Backgrounder* # 1990, The Heritage Foundation, available at [<http://www.heritage.org/Research/RussiaandEurasia/bg1990.cfm>].

<sup>28</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>29</sup> F. Hill, O. Taspinar, "Turkey and Russia: Axis of the Excluded?" *Survival*, Vol. 48, No. 1, Spring 2006, available at [[http://www.brookings.edu/views/articles/fhill/2006\\_survival.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/views/articles/fhill/2006_survival.pdf)].



In a policy review published by the Hoover Institution, Bruce Jackson points out the destructive nature of Russian conduct toward its smaller neighbors. He notes that one of the Russian political scientists close to the Kremlin, Gleb Pavlovsky, “had publicly suggested that it would be advisable for the Georgian people to simply assassinate their president, Mikheil Saakashvili, to avoid a Russian military attack. (Interestingly and perhaps tellingly, Pavlovsky recommended a single-bullet shot, a reminder of the Chekist assassinations in the South Caucasus in 1920-1921 as Bolshevik forces moved South.)”<sup>30</sup> Jackson further urges geopolitical revisions in the Black Sea region to remove the outdated and oppressive mechanisms that govern commercial and military relations in the region. Among other recommendations, he advises to “overturn the norms that have permitted an unstable and anachronistic militarization to persist into the twenty-first century, such as the 1936 Montreux Convention establishing Turkish military control over the Dardanelles.”<sup>31</sup>

The more criticism of Russian behavior in the Black Sea is voiced, and the more suspicion is born regarding anti-Western sentiments in Turkey and Ankara’s new partnership with Moscow, the more likely it would be for the Americans to sail against the Montreux Convention. It is impossible to predict what event may trigger such an act, but since lots of things are happening in and around the Black Sea, any significant change in policies by a Black Sea nation or its neighbor may convince Washington that a new course is worth charting. Something like Moscow’s declaration of new arms race in Europe in response to the planned U.S. anti-ballistic missile installations in Poland and Czech Republic may be the pivot for such a turn.<sup>32</sup> Ankara’s recent aggressive approach to its Kurdish issue involving Iraq, and further military escalation of this problem may become a turning point as well. U.S. vessels need to stay longer than 21 days in the Black Sea to signal that the Montreux Convention is no longer respected. In August 2001, USS *La Salle* (decommissioned in 2005) stayed there for 17 days.<sup>33</sup> In 2005, the U.S. initiated talks with Rumania and Bulgaria on developing military bases in the Black Sea region. A November 2005 PINR report argued that Bulgaria, Romania and Georgia were “the three most attractive regional territories to redeploy U.S. forces;” however, it also noted that Georgia was more unstable than the other two.<sup>34</sup> Less stable or not, Tbilisi needs to be ready to accommodate U.S. interests, and enhance its own security.

U.S. interests in establishing military bases in the Black Sea have not progressed in 2007, as Washington subsequently decided to throw its support behind the Turkish-initiated Black Sea Harmony rather than extend NATO’s Operation Active Endeavor beyond the Mediterranean. Both Moscow and Ankara have vehemently opposed NATO’s extension into the Black Sea, and Washington yielded.<sup>35</sup> However, as noted above, Moscow has used BSH on at least one occasion in an abusive and dangerous manner against Georgia. The latter so far has been left outside the BSH, and even if Georgia joined this group, benefits Tbilisi may get out of it would be minimal. Despite Washington’s endorsement of BSH, its interest in the region has not diminished, and such an endorsement cannot be considered permanent, especially if the Russians continue to abuse the program for their aggressive needs.

---

<sup>30</sup> B.P. Jackson, “The ‘Soft War’ for Europe’s East: Russia and the West Square Off,” *Policy Review*, Hoover Institution, available at [<http://www.hoover.org/publications/policyreview/3202956.html>].

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>32</sup> Before the June 2007 G8 summit in Germany, President Putin insisted that U.S. ABM policies in Europe would trigger a new arms race (see: “Deistvitel’no razvorachivaetsia gonka vooruzheniy: Vladimir Putin otvetil zhurnalistam i Zapadu,” *Vremia Novostei*, 5 June, 2007, available at [<http://www.vremya.ru/2007/96/5/179687.html>]).

<sup>33</sup> See: “6th Fleet Competes Black Sea Port Visits,” Office of the Special Assistant for Military Deployments, available at [[deploymentlink.osd.mil/news/aug01/news\\_82901\\_001.shtml](http://deploymentlink.osd.mil/news/aug01/news_82901_001.shtml)].

<sup>34</sup> See: “Intelligence Brief: U.S. Military Bases in the Black Sea Region,” PINR, 19 November, 2005, available at [[http://www.pinr.com/report.php?ac=view\\_report&report\\_id=401&language\\_id=1](http://www.pinr.com/report.php?ac=view_report&report_id=401&language_id=1)].

<sup>35</sup> See: J. Dorschner, “Black Sea Security—Taking the Helm,” *Jane’s Defense Weekly*, 18 May, 2007, available at [[http://www.janes.com/security/international\\_security/news/jdw/jdw070518\\_1\\_n.shtml](http://www.janes.com/security/international_security/news/jdw/jdw070518_1_n.shtml)].

If Tbilisi plays its hand right, Georgia may benefit from continuing geopolitical revisions around the Black Sea. It will need to make a strong case with Americans and Europeans that its survival as a sovereign nation will benefit them all. However, as a maritime nation it cannot survive without having adequate military presence at sea. They will be helped by desires of non-Black Sea powers, especially by the U.S., to open up the sea. This sentiment can be strengthened by increasingly belligerent behavior by Russia, both toward its smaller neighbors, and the West.

### *C o n c l u s i o n*

In a recent interview to a Russian newspaper, Deputy Defense Minister of Georgia, Mr. Batu Kutelia noted that Georgia was already a *de facto* member of NATO.<sup>36</sup> Obviously, the Deputy Minister exaggerated somewhat, but developments in Georgia's defense policies since 2002, and its allied relations with the United States, and other NATO members, give Georgian officials confidence to declare that they are very close to joining NATO.

To continue and support this trend, Georgia needs active defenses to secure its Black Sea coastline, no matter how the Russian Federation may react to this idea. In the long run, Russia is not going away from the region, and Georgia will want to preserve its independence. Tbilisi will not be able to assert its sovereignty over Abkhazia without first securing its territorial waters and the coastline. Moscow is very unlikely to relinquish its unwarranted ambitions in the region, and they would only be deterred and eventually acquire some measure of respect toward their smaller neighbors if they have to deal with properly equipped and trained armed forces. Georgia's strive for survival will be helped by U.S. desire to increase its presence in the region. The 1936 Montreux Convention is not likely to last long as it against the spirit of more recent international treaties, and existing geopolitical realities.

---

<sup>36</sup> See: M. Vignanskiy, "Gruzia uzhe chlen NATO," *Vremia Novostei*, 5 June, 2007, p. 5.