Black Sea Calling: Maritime Implications of the Ukraine Crisis for the US and NATO

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'All truly grand and successful strategies have been essentially, if not exclusively, maritime'
- Walter McDougall [1]

Russia's annexation of Crimea in February 2014 and its military support to the separatist movements in Donetsk and Luhansk caught the international community at large by surprise. The crisis was precipitated by a clash between Russia's resurgent power and progressive Western advances into Russia's 'near abroad'.[2] The annexation of Crimea was driven primarily by Russia's maritime imperatives in the Black Sea Region. The US and NATO military responses, therefore, need to be guided by a clear understanding of the maritime implications and dimensions of the Ukraine crisis. The maritime drivers of Russia's actions in Ukraine necessitate a regional maritime response by the US and NATO in the Black Sea Region in order to meet the immediate requirement of effective deterrence and the long-term requirement of balancing Russian maritime strategy.

Various theories and analyses have been propounded about the likely drivers for Russian actions in Ukraine. Arguably, as in most geo-political issues, the nature of these analyses are sometimes colored by respective perceptions and opinions of the analyst. Analysts such as Mearsheimer and French historian Helene Carrere d'Encausse have criticized NATO and EU for 'antagonizing Russia with their rapid post-Communist expansion into Eastern Europe' and disregarding how this would back Russia into a corner.[3] Others have attributed Russian actions as 'an inherently expansionist move on Russia's part, perhaps one long contemplated by the Russian leadership'.[4] One analyst states about Russia, 'the country tends to expand and contract like a beating heart — gobbling up nearby territories in times of strength, and then contracting and losing those territories in times of weakness'.[5] Russian concerns about the continuous eastward expansion of EU and NATO into its 'near abroad', its suspicions about Western intentions after Euromaidan protests in Ukraine, its realist view of global geopolitics (*realpolitik)*, its attempts at re-asserting global influence and the *derzhavnost* model of regional suzerainty[6] after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the general sense of ethnic kinship felt by the Russian public about Ukraine are some common themes brought out by various analysts, stressing on different aspects.

Despite the varying analyses, some common threads nonetheless stand out in evaluations of Russian intentions. Most analysts agree that one of the key factors which led to the Ukraine crisis was a clash between eastward expansion of the EU/NATO and the Russian

return to global power status.[7] The crisis would not have happened 15-20 years ago when Russia was still recovering from the collapse of the Soviet Union. Russian resurgence on the regional and global stage was therefore one of the key factors in leading to the crisis. Because of its geographical disposition, Russia historically has been viewed as a continental power. However, it would be presumptuous to assume that the same traditional continental outlook is driving Russia's actions as it strives for re-establishing itself as a key *pole* in the new world order. Maritime forces offer the best and most visible means of spreading an emerging power's influence. Despite years of neglect and challenges of vintage naval assets which beset the Russian Navy, a maritime resurgence has been prominently visible in Russian policies even prior to the Ukraine crisis. This Russian maritime resurgence has been reflected in ambitious plans for buildup of force levels and increased maritime activities in the Arctic, Baltics, Mediterranean, Black Sea and the Persian Gulf. A recent report by the Naval War College Faculty states that the faculty 'widely agreed that Putin views the Russian Navy as a key enabling tool for his dynamic approach in foreign affairs'.[8]

The Black Sea Fleet, because of its role in the strategically important Black Sea Region, is undeniably an important component of the Russian maritime resurgence. A recent report by Council of European Policy Affairs, emphasizing the 'maritime approach' by Russia, states, "Russia is using the Black Sea as a more advantageous method of revisionism than extensive land conquests. Control of ports and sea lanes delivers several benefits: it threatens to choke the trade and energy routes of wayward states, prevents NATO from projecting sufficient security for Black Sea members and gives Moscow a larger stake in exploiting fossil fuels in maritime locations."[9] Therefore, while the crisis in Ukraine may have been precipitated by the various geo-strategic factors mentioned ibid, maritime considerations would have played a key role in shaping the course of Russian actions in Ukraine.

The Ukrainian crisis effectively consisted of two distinct operations, viz. the annexation of Crimea and the separatist revolutions in Donbas region (Donetsk/Luhansk). A closer examination of the Russian approach reveals that Crimea was the more vital issue for Russia and that the Russian decision to seize Crimea was largely driven by maritime considerations. While the Russian hand might have been forced by the events after the Euro-Maidan, these core maritime considerations shaped the Russian decision about the course of action to be taken for Crimea. This assumption is vindicated by the subsequent Russian behavior in these two theatres.

Russia took only around 20 days to take over Crimea and recognize its independence. It was, however, much slower and guarded in its approach towards Donetsk and Luhansk. While the Russian actions in Donetsk and Luhansk do not clearly display maritime imperatives at the outset, a more detailed examination may reveal a possible plan to achieve a road link from Russia into Crimea. This could not, however, be achieved since the separatists could not capture territory in the farther Southern provinces of Zaporizhia and Kherson, despite a high percentage of ethnic Russians (as shown in the figure below).

Figure 1. Potential Land Link From Russia To Crimea

Some analysts have inferred that the Russian reluctance to acknowledge the secession of Donetsk and Luhansk is attributable to its strategy of retaining these pro-Russian provinces within Ukraine and using them as a 'safety catch' against Ukraine's pro-West inclinations.[10] Such an analysis also vindicates the hypothesis that the key Russian objective in its Ukrainian intervention was Crimea, primarily because of its enormous maritime value.

Crimea's accession into the Russian Federation will have far-reaching consequences on the future maritime dynamics of the entire Black Sea Region and is central to the probable Russian strategy of effectively controlling the Black Sea. Needless to say, these implications would have been a major contributing factor towards the Russian decision to annex Crimea. The Crimean Peninsula houses the naval base of Sevastopol, the Headquarters of the Black

Sea Fleet of Russia. Ukrainian ownership of Sevastopol enabled Ukraine to impose restrictions on the size of the Russian Black Sea Fleet by allowing only 'type for type' replacements through bilateral legal agreements. It was therefore a key bargaining chip for Ukraine in its relations with its powerful Eastern neighbor. Accession of Crimea removes these constraints on Russia and further expansion of its Black Sea Fleet. An analyst has noted, 'now that Moscow's military presence is no longer constrained by former legal agreements with the Ukrainian side, it can fully utilize the geostrategic potential of Crimea by implementing a broad spectrum of mutually reinforcing instruments'.[11] The recently announced ambitious expansion plans of Black Sea Fleet, including the proposed addition of six new frigates, six new submarines, amphibious assault ship and several other smaller vessels are reflective of this new dynamic.

In addition to Sevastopol, Crimea also houses the important ports of Yevpatoria, Yalta, Feodosia and Kerch. It houses 23 defense industry plants and seven shipyards– Kranship (Kerch), Stekloplastik (Feodosiia), More Shipbuilding (Feodosiia), Zaliv Shipyard (Kerch), Metallist shipyard (Balaklava), Sevastopol Shipyard and MIK Shipyard in Sevastopol, which will all help in the build-up of the Black Sea Fleet. Crimea's civilian shipyards also have the potential to build advanced tankers for Russia's Arctic oil installations.[12] All these will add to a significant enhancement of Russian maritime capabilities in the region.

With the accession of Crimea into the Russian Federation, the coastline of Russia has increased by hundreds of kilometers. This increased coastline, subject to international recognition of Crimea, would result in a significant increase in the Russian EEZ, including oil-rich fields off Crimea (Skisfka oil field) and the Kerch Straits (Pallas gas and oil fields). Ongoing issues between the two nations regarding control of the Sea of Azov and the Kerch Straits would tilt unequivocally in Russia's favor. The increased maritime footprint of Russian Navy in the Black Sea would also give it necessary freedom of maneuver to progress and safeguard its energy pipelines getting laid on the Black Sea bed as a part of the erstwhile South Stream or the new proposed Turkish Stream project.

In addition to purely maritime capabilities, Crimea also brings noticeable military advantages for the Russians such as access to ex-Ukrainian air bases on the island, facilitating positioning of aircraft, airborne troops and naval infantry, options for forward-basing of ballistic surface-to-surface missiles such as Iskander thereby increasing their operational reach, and increase in the Russian 'defense-in-depth' against NATO by giving it a forward base. However, the key advantages nonetheless are primarily maritime. Control of Crimea significantly increases Russian strategic footprint in the Black Sea Region and enhances its ability to project power, not only in Southern Ukraine, Balkans and Turkey, but

also onto the Mediterranean and the Middle East. An understanding of these aspects is key to arriving at a prognosis for the future, with an aim to deduce the required response by the US and NATO.

Analysts have differing perceptions of what lies ahead with regards to the likely Russian actions and the prognosis for the crisis in short and long-term. Rajan Menon and Eugene Rumer forecast three possible scenarios viz. a frozen conflict, Russian invasion or Ukrainian victory.[13] The first option, namely that of a 'frozen conflict' has been listed as the most likely by them. Several others like Wayne Merry have also echoed similar sentiments, stating that 'the prospects (of restoring territorial integrity) through either political/diplomatic or military means are effectively nil.'[14] While opinions differ on the likely future for Donetsk/Luhansk, most analysts opine that the incorporation of Crimea into the Russian Federation is now *fait accompli*. While it is undoubtedly difficult to be certain about the prognosis, a pragmatic understanding of the possible outcomes needs to guide the trajectory of the Western response.

The Western response to the Russian actions has been largely cohesive. However, it is important to understand and acknowledge the differences in general approach to Russia by the three main Western players, viz. US, NATO and EU. Arguably, the US, with its 'lead from behind' policy in NATO, is able to exercise much more influence on NATO actions than on the EU. The geographical proximity and close economic linkages of the key European powers (such as Germany, France, UK and Italy) with Russia lead them to have a much more moderate approach as compared to the US. This has also led to some European powers wanting to have a more independent approach instead of a US-dictated approach to their foreign policy. Measures such as the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) and its predecessor, the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) arguably are steps towards this direction. Several members like Austria and France have also voiced opinions about progressively removing the sanctions on Russia, accepting a *status quo* in Crimea.[15] Despite the differences, however, there are key historical and cultural values, principles and perceptions which bring together the major European nations and the US in their approach towards major security issues. In the Ukraine crisis, the US has chosen to keep a lower profile, letting the 'Normandy Four' of Germany, France, Russia and Ukraine conduct the negotiations at Minsk. The US military response in the region, coordinated by the EUCOM, is largely through the mechanisms of NATO. Proceeding with an assumption of a general, though not necessarily absolute, consensus, this paper approaches the issues from a common US-guided NATO perspective.

Consequent to the Crimean crisis, NATO adopted a policy of 'deterrence and defense' and initiated the Readiness Action Plan (RAP) to respond swiftly to the fundamental changes in the security environment and respond to the challenges posed by Russia and their strategic implications.[16] Consisting of Assurance Measures and Adaptation Measures, the RAP included concrete measures to boost its overall military posture in the region such as enhancing the NATO Response Force (NRF) to a division-size land element with air, maritime, and special operations forces components; creation of a new Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF); establishment of eight multinational NATO Force Integration Units to assist in training of Alliance forces and in the reception of reinforcements when needed and execution of several ambitious NATO exercise programs.

Some of the additional measures planned and executed by NATO have included the operationalization of the ballistic missile defense system Aegis Ashore at Caracal in South central Romania as part of the European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA); conduct of Joint air patrols in the region along with Bulgarian Air Force[17]; operationalization of a Black Sea Rotational Force of 150 US Marines in Bulgaria; ensuring enhanced forward presence of four battalion-sized battlegroups in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland; setting up of the Headquarters of a Multinational Division Southeast in Romania and progressing of a Romanian initiative to establish a multinational framework brigade to help improve integrated training of Allied units under this Headquarters. Additionally, NATO has been involved in several military aid activities in Ukraine including establishment of five trust funds and various defense capacity building and capability development programs.[18]

Various maritime measures have also been initiated by NATO. These maritime actions have not, however, formed the main thrust area of the NATO response. Despite the constraints of the Montreaux Convention 21 day stay-limit, near-continuous presence of NATO warships, including missile cruisers from US and other Allied nations, was ensured in the Black Sea. The SEA BREEZE Exercises have been conducted annually, involving participation by Ukraine and Georgia, along with NATO countries in order to signal a clear intent to Russia. While creation and positioning of a permanent NATO Black Sea Flotilla has recently been proposed by Romania, it has got a mixed response in NATO, with Turkey supporting it but Bulgaria opposing it because of concerns over militarization of the Black Sea. While the freezing of the conflict may be seen as a short-term success of NATO's initiatives, it nonetheless is required to assess the required nature of future NATO response from a longer-term perspective.

If one accepts *status quo* in Crimea and possibly also in Eastern Ukraine as the most likely scenario, the immediate aim of the NATO military response should be to prevent any

further Russian expansion into Ukrainian territory. One way of signaling this intent, as espoused by several analysts, could be by a direct military presence in Ukraine and clear steps towards integration of Ukraine into the NATO. However, this approach has associated risks. It would play into the Russian narrative of aggressive Western expansion into Eastern Europe and efforts to remove Russian influence from its former allies. This would invariably lead to a further escalation of the situation. Domestic pressures may force Putin into taking even more aggressive actions to defend Russian core interests. Undeniably, the importance of Ukraine for Russia is much more than for the US because of its sheer physical proximity to Russia's borders and historical factors. Analysts such as Larrabee[19] and even the US President Obama, in a recent interview with Jeffrey Goldberg [20], have acknowledged that Ukraine is a core interest for Moscow, in a way that it is not for the United States. It would be short-sighted to follow an overly aggressive approach against these core Russian interests. While persistent 'push and prod' strategy against the Russian boundaries may be acceptable and maybe even required from a Western perspective to keep Russian expansion in check, US and NATO need to be wary of unnecessarily crossing the 'red line' which Russians have persistently reiterated.

Instead of directly going militarily into Ukraine to deter Russian expansionism, the same effect can be achieved by a clear signaling of NATO intent at a 'regional' level. Two contentious questions would however need to be answered in deciding the response. The first is the question of granting NATO membership to Ukraine, starting with the acceptance of Ukraine into the Membership Action Plan (MAP). The second is to decide whether NATO's assistance to Ukraine should include arms and ammunition, or be restricted to non-lethal areas like training, advice, restructuring, reforms etc. A longer term view of the issue makes it apparent that both these questions need to be viewed from this regional perspective to arrive at a correct course of action.

While NATO has extended and is maintaining a 'Distinctive Partnership' with Ukraine, full time membership is not yet on the agenda. The US, in the past, had strongly recommended granting NATO membership to Ukraine. The same had, however, been opposed by several NATO members like France and Germany. At the Bucharest Summit of 2008, NATO committed to an eventual NATO membership for Ukraine without committing to a firm timeline. At the same time, within Ukraine also, opinions on NATO membership have been quite divided. Until 2013, almost two-thirds of Ukrainians strongly opposed NATO membership. The Crimean crisis led to Ukraine repealing its avowed 'non-block' status that it had adopted in 2010 and requesting once again for NATO membership in Dec 2014. In a July 2015 poll, 64 percent of respondents supported joining the alliance, with 28.5 percent speaking out against it.[21]

From NATO's perspective also, there are differences in opinion about the suitability of accepting Ukraine into NATO. Some of the major concerns of the opponents are regarding the readiness by Alliance members to honor the Article V commitments, Ukraine's disputes with Russia, apprehensions about Russia's response and the divided Ukrainian national opinion on the issue. Perhaps, most importantly, granting NATO membership to Ukraine would be akin to crossing the 'red line' which the Russians are so vociferous about. A cost-benefit analysis therefore reveals that NATO membership for Ukraine would serve neither the cause of NATO nor the overall stability of the Black Sea Region. In fact, displaying an empathy for Russia's strategic apprehensions, some analysts have recommended a new non-NATO security architecture for the region involving the existing non-NATO Eastern European nations along with the US and Russia.[22] Similarly, opinions on providing arms and 'defensive' weapons to Ukraine are divided within the Alliance, with most Western European members fearing that such a move would further escalate the situation and invite a hostile response from Russia. Therefore, at this juncture, incorporating Ukraine into NATO or supplying it arms would both be counter-productive. Russian expansion can be effectively deterred without both these actions. This is where the naval forces play a vital role by showing robust resolve, albeit with a scalable offensive posture.

The ongoing land conflict in Donetsk/Luhansk tends to draw one's focus away from the underlying maritime strategy in Russian actions. Also, arguably, the NATO strategic mindset has understandably became deeply ground- and counterinsurgency- centric over the course of a decade of operations in Afghanistan.[23] It would be a mistake to focus primarily on the 'land battle' in Ukraine at the expense of disregarding the primacy of maritime dimension and Crimea in this crisis. The primacy of the maritime dimension is defined not only by the Russia's maritime objectives, but also by a clearer understanding of what the long-term US objectives should be and how they are to be achieved. While the immediate requirement for the US and NATO is for effective deterrence against further Russian expansion, the long-term objective should be to effectively counter-balance the Russian maritime strategy in the region. Russia is capitalizing on the enormous power of naval forces to project the nation's influence and power in the region. Needless to say, this maritime strategy needs to be balanced by an effective counter-maritime strategy and equal demonstration of Western naval power. Acknowledgement of this long-term objective would inevitably lead to the adoption of a regional maritime approach.

A potential counter-argument against a regional maritime approach could be to question the efficacy of a maritime approach in achieving the desired deterrence, as also the risks of encouraging further Russian adventurism not going directly militarily into Ukraine to show

support. However, as brought out earlier in this paper, the requirement in front of the West today is to achieve deterrence, without needlessly escalating the situation. It is in this context that maritime forces become relevant by virtue of their rapid deployment capability, visibility and scalability of their offensive posture. By annexing Crimea, Russia has got the primary objective which it had wanted. Further expansion into Ukraine, in the face of the strong international sentiment, would be counter-productive to Russia's long-term interests. Therefore, a strong maritime presence as the 'main effort', along with the supporting land and air force accretion at a regional level, would suffice to send a clear message to the Russians.

In deciding the nature and scope of the maritime response, the NATO and US would need to overcome two main obstacles. These are the 1936 Montreaux Convention and the weak naval strengths of the NATO Black Sea maritime states. The Montreaux Convention, by imposing restrictions on the tonnage and duration of stay of naval assets of non-Black Sea nations was designed to prevent a naval arms race and militarization in the Black Sea. Non-Black Sea state warships in the Straits must be under 15,000 tons. No more than nine non-Black Sea state warships, with a total aggregate tonnage of no more than 45,000 tons, may pass at any one time, and they are permitted to stay in the Black Sea for no more than 21 days at a time. Despite being a NATO member, Turkey, as the 'gatekeeper of the Bosphorus Straits' and the nation responsible for ensuring adherence to the provisions of the Convention, has been reluctant in the past to allow any contraventions of the Convention. Its refusal to allow American ships into the Black Sea for Operation *Enduring Freedom* and for 'humanitarian assistance' during the Georgian crisis was guided by its adherence to the articles of the Convention, concerns about militarization and possibly its own regional aspirations. The Montreaux Convention does not impose equivalent restrictions on the Black Sea states such as Russia. With the removal of the constraints imposed by Ukraine through the legal Sevastopol-basing agreements, Russian naval presence in Black Sea can now progress unhindered. Thus, the Montreaux Convention places the advantage firmly with the Russians by imposing severe restrictions on the US ability to respond to Russian naval moves in the region.

In keeping with its immediate and long term considerations in the region, US would do well to find a way to neutralize this tactical advantage that the Montreaux Convention provides to the Russians. Revision of the Montreaux Convention is not an easy option, particularly since US was not a signatory to the Convention, and Turkey enjoys veto powers over any such proposals. At the same time, blatant disregard of the provisions of the Convention by the US would also not be a recommended way ahead, given the US' international stature and its efforts to ensure respect to the 'rule of law' in the international maritime arena.

Therefore, the US needs to pro-actively progress a case for revision or repealing of the Montreaux Convention through diplomatic channels. In the event of lack of international support for repealing of the Convention, an alternative approach for the US could be to push for a revision to incorporate legitimate restrictions on the naval force levels of the Black Sea states. This would enable Russia's Black Sea Fleet expansion plans to be kept in check and help in maintaining a healthy balance of power in the region.

The second obstacle in way of the US/NATO maritime response is the large capability difference between the Russians and the rest of the regional navies. Analysis of the current naval forces based in the Black Sea Region, based on open-source material such as *Janes*[24] and relevant books/reports[25] reveals that while the overall numbers seem to favor the NATO forces, in terms of actual capability and warfighting potential, the Russian naval forces completely outclass the other Black Sea Navies. The Romanian and Bulgarian Navies are old and have obsolete equipment because of their Russian origins. Despite Russia subsequently returning most of the naval assets to Ukraine after annexing Crimea, the Ukrainian Navy has been made totally ineffective, except for one frigate. Most of its 12000 personnel based at Crimea defected to Russia and Ukraine has lost most of its naval manpower, infrastructure and facilities. The Georgian Navy, after the war with Russia in 2008, has been incorporated into the Coast Guard and is only capable of constabulary functions. Turkey is the only other significant naval force in the Black Sea Region. However, its focus is divided between the Black Sea and its other commitments in the Mediterranean/Aegean and the Sea of Marmara. Also, recent internal developments around the attempted coup in July 2016 and consequent reprisals against military officers are reported to have adversely affected the morale and effectiveness of the Turkish military forces.[26] With the proposed expansion plans of the Russian Black Sea Fleet the disparity between Russian and NATO Navies in the Black Sea will increase even further.

In addition to the force levels, an examination of the naval ports reaffirms Russia's dominance and reach in the region. In addition to its own ports, Sevastopol and other Crimean ports, Russia is also planning to develop a port at Ochamchire in Abkhazia. Russia's support to Syria has also ensured it the availability of the Tartus port in Syria. This port significantly increases Russia's ability to base warships in the Mediterranean, close to the Black Sea Region. In contrast, Ukraine has lost most of its naval infrastructure and the main naval port (Sevastopol), forcing it to base its Navy at the commercial port of Odessa. As of date, the Black Sea NATO Navies by themselves are grossly inadequate to 'balance' Russian naval presence in the Black Sea Region. A situation of unequivocal maritime supremacy of Russia in a vital area of interest to the NATO would not be acceptable from NATO or US perspective.

Given the complexities of amending the Montreaux Convention and the likely long lead time, it would be required for US and NATO to find innovative solutions to match Russian naval forces in the Black Sea Region. Regular and sustained 21 day deployments of NATO assets deployed from the Mediterranean theatre would serve the purpose quite well, though with associated logistic and sustainability limitations. NATO would need to examine several other short and medium-term solutions to circumvent the provisions of the Convention and ensure an equitable playing field for the Western Navies. These could include options such as reflagging of NATO units under the flags of Black Sea NATO member states like Turkey/Romania/Bulgaria and accelerated build-up of the naval forces of these states. Progressive building up the naval forces of NATO Black Sea states is a pressing concern which must be given utmost emphasis by the US. In view of Bulgaria's reluctance to toe a hard anti-Russia line and Turkey's unsettled relations with NATO, Romania may be the most suitable option for this assisted force build-up.[27] Setting up a permanent Black Sea Fleet, as proposed by Romania and a dedicated NATO Black Sea Command would also be steps in the right direction.

The naval buildup in the Black Sea Region, by the West and also by Russia, would also bring with it a high element of risk. Analysts have prophesized about a return to the Cold War era and 'the return of geopolitics to the forefront of international relations'.[28] While the situation is possibly returning to a Cold War-like scenario, the extensive checks and balances and formal communication mechanisms designed to prevent accidental escalation are no longer in existence. There is, therefore, a real risk of a minor or inadvertent tactical action leading to uncontrolled escalation. Deborah Sanders states, 'Given the unwillingness of the Russian Federation to give up Crimea, its commitment to promoting a federal structure in Ukraine, and the US commitment to the Black Sea Region, the potential for escalation and miscalculation in the region are likely to remain high in the medium term, creating a challenging maritime environment'.[29] There may therefore be a case to visit these challenges and set clear rules of engagement and Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) between the Russian and NATO naval Forces.

In conclusion, while a lot has undoubtedly already been done on the maritime front by NATO, a re-orientation of priorities is recommended to make it the 'main effort' of the NATO forces in the region. With the immediate deterrence effect seeming to have been successfully achieved by the steps undertaken so far, a maritime focus would serve the US and NATO better in countering the long-term Russian maritime strategy in the Black Sea Region, which has evolved into a 'strategic frontier' for Europe, Russia and the US.[30] NATO membership for Ukraine or direct supply of arms and ammunition to it would needlessly

escalate the situation in the region. Instead, concrete steps towards overcoming the obstacles of the Montreaux Convention and reducing the likely future imbalance in naval forces in Black Sea Region would go a long way in ensuring that the West remains on an 'equal footing' in the region.

In his book *The Choice: Global Domination or Global Leadership* (2004)*,* Brzezinski argued that the US had to choose between a policy aimed towards America's global domination versus a position of global leadership.[31] In a post-Cold War era led by the Americans, the Ukrainian crisis has challenged the status quo of *Pax Americana.* Instead of falling into the trap of blindly blaming the other side, it may be worthwhile for the US and the West to reflect on the drivers for Russian actions. A mature and respectful consideration of Russia's concerns, along with a robust maritime force structure in the Black Sea Region, would serve to stabilize the situation, instead of hastening a return to the days of the Cold War.

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Notes

[1] Geoffrey Till, *Seapower - A Guide for the Twenty-First Century*, Third (London and New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), 2.

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