



U.S. Strategy in the Black Sea Region

By Ariel Cohen and Conway Irwin
December 13, 2006

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, U.S. interests in the Black Sea area span energy, military security, terrorist challenges, and the traffic in drugs, weapons, and people. The U.S. needs a comprehensive regional policy to protect American interests and influence security.

- The Black Sea region is a patchwork of overlapping civilizations and spheres of influence.
- Bulgaria and Romania are members of NATO and future members of the European Union (EU).
- Ukraine is caught between the West and Russia.
- Georgia leans toward the West but is under severe pressure from Russia, which endangers its sovereignty and territorial integrity in the secessionist territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.
- Turkey and Russia vacillate between East and West, pulled in different directions by history, religion, national interests, and national pride.
- The Black Sea's six littoral states (Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, Russia, Georgia, and Turkey) are beginning to construct a tentative regional identity just as foreign powers and outside forces are searching for footholds in their vicinity.

The region is geopolitically significant precisely because it is a nexus of cultures, international trade (both legal and illicit), ideas, and influences.

Oil and gas from Central Asia and the Middle East move along Black Sea shipping lanes and pipelines to Europe and other points west. These same shipping lanes are used for the traffic in narcotics, persons (including terrorists), conventional weapons, and components for weapons of mass destruction (WMD). The Black Sea region is an important platform for military, reconstruction, and stabilization operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, and possibly Iran, as well as for the protection of energy shipping lanes between the Caspian region and Western markets. It is also Europe's new southeastern border. Thus, both the European Union and the United States have strong interests in safeguarding the movement of some goods, preventing the movement of others, and maintaining a presence in the Black Sea region.

The U.S. presence currently has the support of Bulgaria and Romania, but U.S. relations with Russia, Turkey, and Ukraine are on shaky ground. Neither Turkey nor Russia supported U.S. operations in Iraq, and relations with both countries have taken a downturn ever since then. Ukraine has adopted a more pro-Russian stance since Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich took office. Georgia is under severe economic and political pressure from Russia and preoccupied with internal conflicts and is thus ill-equipped to act as a strong U.S. ally. This tangled web of interests and alliances and the recent rapprochement of Russia and Turkey, which has anti-American implications, may hamper U.S. activities in the area.

Given these circumstances, the Bush Administration should pursue a circumspect, balanced, and realistic strategy to enhance the security and stability of the Black Sea basin. Specifically, the U.S. should:

- **Take** a nuanced approach to Black Sea affairs and expand coordination of U.S. foreign policy in the region with the European Union. The U.S. and the EU share common goals of safeguarding peace in the region and encouraging democratic and economic reform while preventing a single power from dominating the region. The U.S. should push for expanded NATO cooperation with non-NATO countries through the Partnership for Peace, including technical and training assistance in security areas. The U.S. should also continue to strengthen bilateral military ties with Ukraine.
- **Encourage** Turkey to participate in trilateral military exchanges and consultations with Romania and Bulgaria to assuage Turkey's concerns that U.S. bases in Romania and Bulgaria threaten its dominant position in the Black Sea.
- **Encourage** the littoral states, specifically Bulgaria and Romania, to take the lead in multilateral regional organizations and initiatives, such as the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), that aim to improve regional security and stability. Where appropriate, the U.S. should request member or observer status in these organizations.
- **Contribute** to existing regional security structures, such as the Black Sea Naval Cooperation Task Group (BLACKSEAFOR) and Black Sea Harmony, as a participant or an observer. These structures could also be included in NATO military and disaster preparedness exercises to improve interoperability.
- **Strengthen** alliances with Bulgaria and Romania by assisting with military, emergency preparedness, and technological training of Romanian and Bulgarian forces in missions that are relevant to the U.S. presence there.
- **Urge** Russia to end its sanctions against Georgia and push for renewed multilateral talks to resolve Georgia's "frozen conflicts" through the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the U.N. Secretary General's Friends of Georgia group. The visibility of the conflicts could be enhanced by hosting high-level conferences and negotiations on their resolution in Washington. The U.S. should also seek to replace Russian/Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) peacekeepers in Abkhazia and South Ossetia with an international peacekeeping force, preferably under the OSCE's or EU's aegis.

- **Expand** bilateral trade agreements with the Black Sea states, such as the current agreements with Georgia, Moldova, Romania, Turkey, and Ukraine, with special emphasis on energy security and infrastructure investment in the transport of oil and gas from the Caspian region to Europe. The U.S. should also begin to lay the groundwork for a regional free trade area with the United States.

The U.S. does not have free rein in the Black Sea region, and that is unlikely to change in the near future. However, the region is critical to current U.S. foreign policy objectives, and the U.S. should make the effort to maintain its legitimate presence in the Black Sea.

Energy Security

Energy security is a precondition for economic stability and thus a top priority for the U.S. and EU economies. These economies require a consistent source of affordable energy supplies, ideally obtained from a diversity of transit routes and sources.

The Caspian region has piqued the West's interest as a source of oil and natural gas. During the Soviet era, all energy transit routes led from the oil and gas fields of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan to the Russian Federation. In addition, Russia has actively opposed new routes connecting the Caspian fields to potential customers and has denied non-Russian firms access to its excess pipeline capacity. Russia's monopolistic behavior in oil and gas transit has made many of its best customers—most importantly the EU—wary of continued reliance on Russia for their energy supplies. Thus, the EU along with other energy-consuming states has vocally supported diversifying pipeline routes from Central Asia and the Caucasus to points west.

The Black Sea is already an important avenue for the movement of oil and gas from the Middle East and Central Asia to Europe, from ports on Russia's Black Sea coast through the Turkish straits and into the Mediterranean, and Turkey is emerging as key to the diversification of energy-transit routes between energy-supplying and energy-consuming countries. Several recent pipeline project proposals envision Turkey as the conduit for energy supplies traveling from east to west.

One such pipeline, the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline, was completed in early 2005. The BTC transports oil from Baku on the Caspian Sea via Tbilisi, Georgia, to Ceyhan, Turkey. Other important projects include the Baku–Tbilisi–Erzerum (BTE) gas pipeline, which will run parallel to the BTC, and the planned Nabucco, which will connect the Turkish gas network to Europe through Romania, Hungary, and Austria.

Both European consumers and Caspian and Middle Eastern producers of natural gas stand to gain from pipeline diversification. More customers for Kazakh and Turkmen oil and gas may lead to more competitive prices and significantly increase demand for those countries' energy exports. Increasing the number of suppliers to energy-dependent European economies would enhance EU energy security, breaking Russia's transit monopoly and reducing its already excessive market power.

Turkey can derive numerous benefits, particularly transit revenues, from assuming a larger role in the energy transit market. However, oil and gas transit is a question not

just of economics, but also of geopolitics. Control over the production or distribution of one of the world's most precious resources gives its holder a great deal of power in the international arena. Turkey may gain more leverage in its EU accession negotiations as its importance in the EU energy supply chain grows.

Energy infrastructure's profound importance to the global economy has recently made it a target of terrorist attacks. For example, on August 19, 2006, separatists from the Kurdistan Workers' Party, a Kurdish terrorist group in eastern Turkey, attacked a natural gas pipeline in Turkey's Agri province, causing a massive explosion that disrupted gas deliveries from Iran.^[1] While the pipeline was quickly repaired and gas deliveries resumed on August 23, the attack highlights Turkey's emerging role as a strategically pivotal country in the transit of natural gas. More important, it highlights the security threats to energy infrastructure posed by regional instability in the Black Sea region.

Energy is probably the most important commodity shipped through the Black Sea, but it is not the only one. Illegal traffic in persons (including terrorists), narcotics from the opium fields of Afghanistan, conventional weapons, and even WMD components makes its way west from unstable and often impoverished nations of the Middle East and Central Asia.

The increasing terrorist attacks in the U.S., EU, and Turkey indicate that the greatest security threat to the West emanates from the Middle East, which underscores the importance of maintaining stability and tight security on routes from the Middle East to the West. During 2006, the U.S., NATO, and the EU have participated in a number of initiatives to improve security in the Black Sea, including NATO military exercises and a Southeast Europe Disaster Preparedness Conference. These initiatives have identified energy security and maritime security as major concerns.^[2] However, opposition to these endeavors from regional powers, particularly Turkey and Russia, has disrupted or precluded many similar initiatives, which they view as excessive Western interference.

Further complicating Black Sea regional security are the frozen conflicts in the region: South Ossetia and Abkhazia in Georgia and Transnistria in Moldova. These conflicts raise two primary concerns. First, they threaten the territorial integrity of internationally recognized states. The local governments of the secessionist regions operate according to their own laws, not those of the central governments of Moldova and Georgia, and this often leads to insufficient oversight and crime prevention. Second, these lawless enclaves have become breeding grounds for international smuggling and other illicit activities. Until the conflicts are resolved, ruling elites in these statelets will frustrate efforts to establish a lasting peace, which is a precondition for stability, security, and economic growth in the broader region.

Because the U.S. does not have a free rein in the Black Sea region, it is essential that the countries in the region develop their own intraregional capabilities in maritime security, counterterrorism, disaster preparedness, and other aspects of securing their waterways and coastlines. However, the Black Sea littoral states are operating according to their own distinct agendas, and there is no consensus about how to achieve common security goals. Tensions over status within the region, conflicting allegiances, and varying perceptions of what constitutes stability are preventing these states from finding mutually acceptable ways to combat their common problems.

Turkey

Turkey desires stability in the Black Sea, but the government in Ankara, dominated by the moderate Islamist AK Party, does not agree with its Western partners on how to achieve this. For example, Turkey's top security priority at present is dealing with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a terrorist organization that has claimed responsibility for the deaths of over 30,000 people since the 1980s and for a number of recent attacks on Turkish civilians and essential infrastructure. Turkey fears that promoting democracy in its neighborhood may stoke Kurdish secessionist aspirations, creating pockets of instability.

These fears have profoundly affected Turkey's perception of the United States. Long an ally of the West and an EU aspirant, Turkey has recently distanced itself from the U.S. and NATO. Turkish opposition to U.S. operations in Iraq caused a rift in the U.S.–Turkey alliance in 2003, when the Turkish parliament voted against allowing U.S. troops to use Turkey as a base of operations for invading Iraq.^[3] An underlying reason for the denial was fear that instability in Iraq could lead to civil war and the domination of northern Iraq by Kurdish nationalists. The specter of Kurdish national independence in Iraq could in turn provoke further unrest among the Kurdish minority in eastern Turkey.^[4] Many Turks feel that the U.S. is pursuing its interests in Iraq at the expense of the U.S.–Turkey relationship and stability in Turkey.

Furthermore, Iran, with its sizeable Kurdish population, shares Turkey's anxiety over the U.S. presence in Iraq and is even more at odds with U.S. policies. Common interests and common adversaries are creating new security bonds between the two neighbors.

Compounding Turkish acrimony toward the West and its involvement in regional matters is the reluctance by EU leaders to support Turkish accession. Their hesitation is breeding resentment among the Turks, who have undergone numerous and often economically painful reforms in pursuit of EU membership. EU indecisiveness also strengthens Turkish ties with other nations, including Russia, that are convinced that the West will never accept Muslims into their "clubs."

In response to its grievances with the U.S. and the EU, Turkey is seeking a stronger position from which it can pursue its own ends without interference. The government's most recent National Security Policy Document emphasizes the importance of using Turkey's geopolitical position to make the country a hub for energy storage and transit between suppliers in Russia, the Middle East, and Central Asia and markets in the West.^[5] If Turkey succeeds in establishing itself as an invaluable energy transit hub, it will enjoy enhanced geopolitical status, gain leverage in its bid for EU membership, further its aspirations of regional hegemony, and increase its influence in the Black Sea area. Turkey's aspirations partially account for its recent rapprochement with Russia, which seeks to partner with a strong Turkey to keep the West at bay from its traditional sphere of influence.

Russia

Russia, like Turkey, has been moving increasingly away from the West and is focused on maintaining regional hegemony. The Kremlin has been using Russia's recently acquired economic might, by virtue of the high price of oil and unprecedented demand

for natural gas, to achieve its foreign policy goals. One of those goals is to become the world's primary supplier of energy resources. That requires a tight grip on the purchasing and distribution of the oil and gas resources of the former Soviet Union.

Russia has turned a generous profit as the middleman between cheap Central Asian oil and gas and energy-hungry economies in the West. By selling Central Asian oil and gas at a premium abroad, Russia has earned windfall profits and undertaken obligations to supply countries such as EU members and China well beyond its own abilities to produce. Even as Russia seeks further control of the oil and gas transit market and all exports from Central Asia to the West, the West is seeking to diversify sources and suppliers. U.S. and EU plans to create new energy transit routes through Turkey have already caused some tension in global energy markets. Russia supplies more than 70 percent of Turkey's natural gas^[6] and roughly 40 percent of the EU's—a position that may be in jeopardy if the pipelines through Turkey are built using non-Russian sources of supply.

Russia initially objected to the construction of Nabucco on grounds of being cut out as an intermediary between Central Asia and Europe. However, analysts suggest that the Kremlin, having realized it cannot stop the project, has proposed expanding the Blue Stream gas pipeline, which crosses the Black Sea between Russia and Turkey, and acquiring a stake in MOL, Hungary's oil and gas company.^[7] This way, Russia can reap the benefits of the Nabucco route while continuing to exercise some control over it.

Russia's Regional Power Politics

In addition to Russia's oil and gas concerns in the former Soviet republics, the Kremlin is trying to rebuild its sphere of influence to the south. It has exerted tremendous political pressure on Western-leaning states, such as Georgia, and rewarded states that have remained loyal to Russia, such as Armenia. Ukraine falls under both categories. The 2005 Orange Revolution ushered in a pro-Western democratic government, but recent elections produced a pro-Kremlin prime minister and a majority in the Verkhovna Rada (parliament) to replace the Orange Coalition.

Although Russia purports to seek stability on its borders and among its neighbors, many of its actions seem designed to destabilize its neighbors, specifically those without allegiance to Moscow.

Ukraine. In Ukraine's 2005 Orange Revolution, voters chose pro-Western Viktor Yushchenko over Kremlin-backed Viktor Yanukovich. This was a blow to Russia because Ukraine historically has been a cultural "younger brother," a province or a client state, and a buffer against the West. Ukraine–Russia relations soured, culminating in the January 2006 Ukrainian gas crisis. When Russia doubled the price of natural gas in mid-winter and Ukraine refused to pay, Russia cut off gas deliveries, causing shortages throughout Europe. Although gas deliveries resumed soon afterward, the high price of gas weakened the Ukrainian economy and the Yushchenko government.^[8]

Ukrainian disillusionment with the Yushchenko government has since led to Yanukovich's Party of Regions winning a plurality in the Ukrainian parliament in the March 2006 election. The new cabinet and parliament are more pro-Russian and less inclined to seek favor with the West. In June 2006, anti-Western protests instigated by

pro-Russian parties in Ukraine forced cancellation of the planned NATO Sea Breeze and Tight Knot exercises in the Crimea.^[9] This triumph galvanized anti-NATO sentiment among Ukrainians (60 percent oppose NATO accession) and damaged Ukraine's relations with the U.S. and NATO. On September 14, 2006, Prime Minister Yanukovich informed NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer and other NATO ambassadors that because of widespread public opposition and a desire to maintain good relations with Russia, Ukraine would not seek NATO membership.^[10]

Relations between Ukraine and Russia have improved, and their rapprochement bodes ill for U.S. and NATO interests in Ukraine.

Georgia. Russia has also applied significant political pressure on Georgia, but with less success. The Georgian government remains dedicated to cooperating with the West and promoting security and stability in the Black Sea. However, mitigating circumstances, many created or fueled by Russia, frustrate Georgia's efforts to integrate more closely into Euro-Atlantic structures.

Georgia's Rose Revolution in 2004 ushered in the pro-Western government of Mikhail Sakaashvili. Russia feels threatened by Georgia's Western political orientation, massive economic and governmental reforms, and intensified dialogue with NATO about membership in the Alliance. Georgia has utilized Partnership for Peace with NATO to the maximum extent possible and would like to upgrade its relationship with the Alliance to full membership. In response, Russia has punished Georgia for its pro-Western leanings by providing political, financial, and suspected military support to Georgia's secessionist regions, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, which are planning independence. On November 12, South Ossetia held a "presidential" election and passed a referendum supporting independence. Russia recognized the territory's independence, while the U.S. refused to do so.^[11]

Georgia's primary concern is resolving the conflicts with these two territories. The Georgian Foreign Minister recently explained that these confrontations—commonly referred to as frozen conflicts—are not frozen, but rapidly deteriorating, and he raised the specter of full-scale military confrontation.

Georgian leaders have accused Russia of plotting to annex the regions, and Russian actions have lent credence to these allegations. Russian "peacekeepers" in Abkhazia and South Ossetia are not under international mandate and are suspected of arming the secessionist territories and participating in raids and smuggling operations. The Georgian parliament has called for their replacement by an international force.^[12] Russia has offered open political support to the separatists, including praise for South Ossetian efforts. When South Ossetian President Eduard Kokoity recently announced that South Ossetia would hold a referendum on independence in November 2007, Russian Duma Chairman Boris Gryzlov hailed the decision as "their right."^[13]

In September 2006, Georgian officials arrested four Russian military officers for espionage. They were released several days later and returned to Russia. Russia responded by severing all links between Russia and Georgia—air, land, and postal—and ordering widespread deportations of Georgians living in Russia, even those who are there legally.^[14] The sanctions are crippling Georgia's economy, one fifth of which depends on remittances from friends and family members living and working in Russia.

Russia's reaction has been decried as harsh, but no concrete measures have been taken to ease tensions.

Moldova. Transnistria, an area of eastern Moldova, also has secessionist aspirations supported by Russia. The region is ruled by former communists and is heavily criminalized. In a recent referendum, 97 percent of voters—primarily Russians and Ukrainians—supported full independence and eventual unification with Russia.[\[15\]](#)

Neither the Moldovan government nor the international community accepts this referendum as legitimate, but the Russian Foreign Ministry stated that the people of Transnistria had used "direct democracy" to express their preferred model of regional stability and expressed hope that this would lead to negotiations with the Moldovan government.[\[16\]](#) This statement confirms, as many analysts have suggested, that the Kremlin supports Transnistria's secessionist tendencies, much as it does Abkhazia's and South Ossetia's.

Finally, on September 20, 2006, the Russian Foreign Ministry confirmed previous statements that the resolution of Kosovo's political status will set a precedent for other separatist regions, specifically South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Transnistria,[\[17\]](#) suggesting that if Kosovo is granted independence, then so should these regions. By aiding and abetting secessionist aspirations in southeastern Europe and the Caucasus, Russia is significantly complicating efforts to enhance the security and stability of the Black Sea.

The Turkish–Russian Partnership

Paradoxically, Turkey and Russia have sided together against the West's "destabilizing" influence in the region. Despite a centuries-long history of warfare and antipathy, since the AKP Islamist Party's accession to power, Turkey and Russia have been displaying signs of improved relations that may have more to do with anti-Western sentiment than actual common interests. As the two strongest nations on the Black Sea, they seek to minimize U.S., EU, and NATO influence because it challenges their own regional superiority. Fiona Hill and Omer Taspinar explain the recent Turkish– Russian rapprochement:

[Turkey and Russia] see the new Bush administration policy 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 interests by encouraging even more chaos on their southern tiers.[\[18\]](#)

They are also uncomfortable with any other Black Sea state's taking the initiative on a regional scale. In June 2006, Romania hosted the Black Sea Forum for Dialogue and Partnership to bring together representatives from each of the Black Sea states to discuss cooperative efforts to combat narcotics trafficking, human trafficking, pollution, and cross-border crime. It was also a means to conceive of and discuss joint energy projects, improvements in regional infrastructure, and general regional cooperation.[\[19\]](#) The Romanian initiative was an effort to develop a regional identity and consultative process for the Black Sea states and multilateral organizations involved in the Black Sea, such as the EU.[\[20\]](#) The statement of the summit even calls upon the EU to "interfere more in the region."[\[21\]](#)

Fearful that the Black Sea Forum would offer the West an entrée into Black Sea regional affairs, both Turkey and Russia carefully downplayed its importance. Romania, Ukraine, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Bulgaria, Moldova, Turkey, and Greece sent presidential and ministerial representation, but Russia sent only its ambassador in Bucharest as a form of protest.

Russia has insisted that the BSEC and BLACKSEAFOR, a joint naval task force of the six Black Sea littoral states, provide sufficient regional cooperation in economics and naval security. Analysts suggest that Russia wants to convey the message that no regional initiative can succeed without Russia's participation and that smaller countries, such as Romania and Bulgaria, should refrain from taking regional initiatives without Moscow's consent.[\[22\]](#) According to Turkish State Minister Besir Atalay, "This initiative of Romania will not dilute the importance of BSEC, which remains the actual platform for the procurement of solutions to the problems of the region."[\[23\]](#)

Turkey and Russia have also worked in concert to block U.S. involvement in regional initiatives. When the U.S. requested observer status in the BSEC in 2005, Russia demurred. Turkey, ostensibly a U.S. ally, offered the U.S. no assistance. Advocacy by more pro-Western Black Sea littoral states, such as Romania and Bulgaria, eventually secured approval of the U.S. request.

In 2006, Russia and Turkey jointly vetoed a U.S. proposal to expand NATO's Operation Active Endeavor into the Black Sea. Operation Active Endeavor was created in 2001 to combat terrorist and other criminal activity in the Mediterranean. Russia and Turkey are both members, but both objected to expanding it into the Black Sea. Russia fears that more active U.S. involvement in the region may be destabilizing. Turkey has claimed that NATO activity in the Black Sea may threaten the 1936 Montreux Convention, which stipulates that Turkey alone controls the Turkish Straits connecting the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, and that Operation Active Endeavor would be redundant to Black Sea Harmony, a 2004 Turkish initiative to police the southern Black Sea, and BLACKSEAFOR.[\[24\]](#)

Russia and Turkey are also pursuing closer trade ties, especially in oil and natural gas. Russian officials have proposed projects to transport Russian oil and gas via Turkey to Italy, Israel, and Lebanon. Russia and Turkey are conducting a feasibility study of a joint venture to build a gas pipeline from the terminal of the Blue Stream Pipeline at Samsun to Ceyhan on the Mediterranean Coast. Gazprom has suggested that it may help to finance the construction of natural gas reservoirs in Turkey.[\[25\]](#) Lukoil, a Russian oil company, is conducting its own feasibility study of constructing an oil refinery in Turkey and a pipeline linking the refinery to the Sea of Marmara.[\[26\]](#)

These proposals suggest a long and possibly lucrative period of economic cooperation between Russia and Turkey. Their shared economic and security interests and, more important, their shared anti-U.S. and anti-Western sentiment may lead them to maintain their political distance from the West.

Bulgaria and Romania

Romania and Bulgaria, NATO members since 2004, are decidedly pro-Western. Both countries have negotiated shared-base agreements with the U.S. that allow the U.S.

military to position personnel, storage facilities, and logistical support in their countries, placing them in reach of Afghanistan and Iraq.[\[27\]](#)

Both countries are slated for EU membership in 2007, although there have been rumblings over the need for further reform in both countries.[\[28\]](#) Additional concerns have been raised over whether or not Romania was complicit in U.S. use of its Mikhail Kogalniceanu base at Constanta as a secret CIA prison.[\[29\]](#) These issues are unlikely to affect Bulgaria and Romania's entry into the EU and do not call into question the dedication of both countries to contributing to stability in the Black Sea. Bulgaria even stated its intention to support Turkey's accession to the EU as a means of further fostering stability and security in the region.[\[30\]](#)

Bulgaria and Romania provide an anchor for the U.S. in the Black Sea, but they cannot exert a dominating influence in the region; Russia and Turkey are still the primary players. Until U.S. relations with either country begin to thaw, the U.S. will have to act carefully in the region. Judging from the Russian and Turkish reaction to the Black Sea Forum, more substantive regional efforts initiated by Romania and Bulgaria should be treated with caution. As EU members, Romania and Bulgaria may come to be viewed as an integral part of "the West," which could further impede region-wide cooperation on important economic and security issues.

What the U.S. Should Do

To maintain good relations and influence in the Black Sea, the U.S. and other Western partners should cultivate relationships with their allies (Bulgaria, Romania, and Georgia) and attempt to mitigate anti-Western sentiment in Turkey, Russia, and Ukraine. This can be done by, among other things, expanding public diplomacy efforts in all three countries. In some cases, as in the conflict between Russia and Georgia, it is difficult for the U.S. and its allies to support one side without angering the other.

The EU is divided over whether or not to condemn Russia's actions in Georgia because Russia is an important energy partner. Certain countries, particularly France, have argued for softening criticism of Moscow.[\[31\]](#) Like the EU, the U.S. has pressing foreign policy concerns (e.g., Iran and North Korea) that will be made more difficult without Russia's cooperation and thus at times is reluctant to criticize Russia heavily, even for the sake of its relations with Georgia.[\[32\]](#)

Both the EU and the U.S. will have to walk a fine line on the Russian–Georgian issue because neither wants to provoke Russia. Stability in Georgia and the South Caucasus is a Western geopolitical goal, while Russia is an essential partner at the U.N. Security Council in dealing with nuclear proliferation in Iran and North Korea and in the energy sector. This particular conflict exemplifies the difficulties that Western powers face in the Black Sea region. The countries' disparate interests preclude a general regional approach. Each state must be addressed with its particular interests in mind, which may require the U.S. to deal with each country bilaterally.

The Bush Administration should pay close attention to developments in the Black Sea region because the region's stability or instability directly affects U.S. national security. The Administration should also assess existing relationships with the Black Sea states to determine which relationships with individual states are essential and can be cultivated

and which will be difficult to improve in the short term and perhaps require a pragmatic approach.

Specifically, the U.S. should:

- **Coordinate** U.S. and EU foreign policy in the region, especially in regard to the European Neighborhood Policy; increase NATO cooperation with non-NATO countries through the Partnership for Peace by offering technical and training assistance in security areas; and strengthen bilateral military ties with Ukraine.
- **Conduct** trilateral military exchanges with Turkey and encourage consultations with Romania and Bulgaria to assuage Turkey's concerns about losing its dominant position in the Black Sea basin to the growing influence of the U.S. via its construction of military bases there.
- **Encourage** the littoral states, specifically Bulgaria and Romania, to take the lead in multilateral regional organizations and initiatives, such as the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, which aim to improve regional security and stability. Where appropriate, the U.S. should request member or observer status.
- **Contribute** to existing regional security structures (BLACKSEAFOR and Black Sea Harmony) as either a participant or an observer. This could include providing crucial technical intelligence capabilities, airlift, and other specialty capacities. These structures could also be included in NATO military and disaster preparedness exercises to improve interoperability.
- **Strengthen** U.S. alliances with Bulgaria and Romania and provide assistance in the military, emergency preparedness, and technological training of Romanian and Bulgarian forces in missions relevant to the U.S. presence there.
- **Urge** Russia to lift sanctions against Georgia and push for renewed multilateral talks over the resolution of Georgia's "frozen conflicts," using the OSCE and the U.N.'s Friends of Georgia Group. The visibility of the conflicts could be enhanced by hosting negotiations and/or forums in Washington. The U.S. should also promote replacing Russian/CIS peacekeepers in Abkhazia and South Ossetia with an international peacekeeping force.
- **Expand** bilateral trade agreements with the Black Sea states, with special emphasis on investments in infrastructure for the transport of oil and gas from the Caspian region to Europe and energy security.

Conclusion

Despite the obvious importance of such current foreign policy issues as Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, and North Korea, the U.S. would be unwise to concentrate on these concerns to the exclusion of all others. Shoring up alliances and improving relations with states in strategic areas bordering on main theaters of operation, such as the Greater Middle East, is of the utmost importance in developing future geopolitical arrangements, enhancing strategic stability, and assuring military egress and resupply.

Given the current state of U.S. relations with Turkey and Russia, the only way for the U.S. to maintain and strengthen its footholds in the Black Sea is to develop cooperation across a broad spectrum of issues of common interest and mutual concern. The U.S. needs to learn to tread lightly, offering support where possible and backing off where necessary.

This is not an impossible balance to achieve. If successful, it could be used as a model for cementing the U.S. presence in other strategic areas, such as Central Asia. It is time for the U.S. to launch a coordinated policy effort in the Black Sea area to gain support for addressing some of the most pressing issues of the decade: the rise of Iran, WMD proliferation, cooperation in the global war on terrorism, and energy security.

Ariel Cohen, Ph.D., is Senior Research Fellow in Russian and Eurasian Studies and International Energy Security in the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign Policy Studies, a division of the Kathryn and Shelby Cullom Davis Institute for International Studies, at The Heritage Foundation. Conway Irwin is a Washington-based freelance writer.

Notes

[1] Cihan News Agency, "PKK Claims Saturday's Gas Pipeline Explosion in Agri," *Zaman*, August 21, 2006, at www.zaman.com/?bl=hotnews&alt=&trh=20060821&hn=35840 (October 30, 2006).

[2] U.S. Department of State, Bureau of International Information Programs, "U.S. Promotes Disaster Planning Cooperation in Southeast Europe," March 22, 2006, at www.usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=March&x=20060322135136MVyelwarC0.265423 (September 20, 2006), and "Thousands Participate in NATO Black Sea Exercise," *Stars and Stripes*, June 27, 2006, at www.estripes.com/article.asp?section=104&article=37343 (September 20, 2006).

[3] CBS News, "OK of US Troops in Turkey Nullified," March 1, 2003, at www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/03/02/iraq/main542467.shtml (September 25, 2006).

[4] Phillip Gordon and Omer Taspinar, "Turkey on the Brink," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (Summer 2006), p. 57, at www.twq.com/06summer/docs/06summer_gordon.pdf (November 9, 2006).

[5] Vasily Zubkov, "Russian–Turkish Energy Cooperation Worries U.S.," *Turkish Daily News*, May 10, 2006, at www.turkishdailynews.com.tr/article.php?enewsid=43005 (November 9, 2006).

[6] Fiona Hill and Omer Taspinar, "Turkey and Russia: Axis of the Excluded?" *Survival*, Vol. 48, No. 1 (Spring 2006), at www.brookings.edu/views/articles/fhill/2006_survival.pdf (September 19, 2006).

[7] Roman Kupchinsky, "Russia: Putin Pushes Energy Expansion into Central Europe," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, March 6, 2006, at

www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/03/b68d450e-041c-473b-b54e-9c64252e5a5e.html (September 20, 2006).

[8] For a detailed discussion of the Russian–Ukrainian 2006 gas crisis, see Ariel Cohen, Ph.D., "The North European Gas Pipeline Threatens Europe's Energy Security," Heritage Foundation *Backgrounder* No. 1980, October 26, 2006, at www.heritage.org/Research/Europe/upload/bg_1980.pdf.

[9] Vladimir Socor, "Protests in Crimea, Incitement from Moscow, Paralysis in Kyiv Thwart Military Exercises," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, June 14, 2006, at www.jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article_id=2371180 (November 9, 2006).

[10] CNN, "Ukraine 'Shelves Bid to Join NATO,'" September 14, 2006, at www.edition.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/europe/09/14/ukraine.nato.reut/index.html (September 20, 2006; unavailable November 9, 2006).

[11] Vince Crawley, "U.S. Rejects Independence Referendum in Georgia's South Ossetia," U.S. Department of State, November 9, 2006, at www.usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=November&x=20061109165249MVyelwarC0.5890009 (November 22, 2006).

[12] Jean-Christophe Peuch, "Georgia: Parliament Votes Russian Peacekeepers out of South Ossetia," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, February 15, 2006, at www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/news/2006/02/mil-060215-rferl08.htm (September 25, 2006).

[13] Robert Parsons, "Georgia: South Ossetia Throws Down Gauntlet with Referendum on Independence," Radio Free Europe/ Radio Liberty, September 14, 2006, at www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/09/511365e2-bca3-43ac-aade-046dc187a603.html (November 9, 2006).

[14] Associated Press, "Russia Refuses to Drop Sanctions Against Georgia," *International Herald Tribune Europe*, October 3, 2006, at www.ihrt.com/articles/ap/2006/10/03/europe/EU_GEN_Georgia_Russia.php (October 18, 2006).

[15] ITAR-TASS, "Moldova Does Not Recognize Election Referendum," September 18, 2006, at www.tass.ru/eng/level2.html?NewsID=10801983&PageNum=0 (September 20, 2006; unavailable November 9, 2006).

[16] "Russian MFA: Transnistria Residents Used Direct Democracy Institution," *Yerkir*, September 20, 2006, at www.yerkir.am/eng/index.php?sub=news_arm&id=26403 (November 9, 2006).

[17] Simon Saradzhyan, "Russia Says Kosovo Will Set a Precedent," *The Moscow Times*, September 21, 2006, at www.themoscowtimes.com/stories/2006/09/21/011.html (November 9, 2006).

- [18] Hill and Taspinar, "Turkey and Russia," p. 87.
- [19] Andreea Pocotila, "Black Sea Summit Boosts Cooperation in the Region," *Bucharest Daily News*, June 5, 2006, at www.daily-news.ro/article_detail.php?idarticle=27158 (September 18, 2006).
- [20] Vladimir Socor, "Black Sea Forum Seeking Its Rationale," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 3, No. 111 (June 8, 2006), at www.jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article_id=2371162 (September 18, 2006).
- [21] Necdet Celik and Ozgur Guralp, "Russian Clouds over Black Sea Forum," June 6, 2006, at www.zaman.com/?bl=international&alt=&hn=33765 (September 18, 2006).
- [22] Vladimir Socor, "Moscow, Ankara Reluctant to Welcome New Black Sea Forum," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, June 9, 2006, at www.jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article_id=2371171 (November 9, 2006).
- [23] Celik and Guralp, "Russian Clouds over Black Sea Forum."
- [24] Igor Torbakov, "Turkey Sides with Moscow Against Washington on Black Sea Force," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, March 3, 2006, at www.jamestown.org/edm/article.php?article_id=2370832 (September 19, 2005).
- [25] Zubkov, "Russian–Turkish Energy Cooperation Worries U.S."
- [26] ACTURCA, "Lukoil Plans Pipeline on Black Sea Coast," *Gulf Times* (Qatar), August 16, 2006, at www.acturca.wordpress.com/2006/08/20/lukoil-plans-pipeline-on-black-sea-coast (November 9, 2006).
- [27] U.S. Department of State, Bureau of International Information Programs, "Rice Hails Romania as One of United States' 'Strongest Friends,'" December 6, 2006, at www.usinfo.state.gov/eur/Archive/2005/Dec/06-97381.html (November 9, 2006), and Vince Crawley, "Rice Signs U.S. Shared-Base Agreement with Bulgaria," U.S. Department of State, Bureau of International Information Programs, April 28, 2006, at www.usinfo.state.gov/eur/Archive/2006/Apr/28-844894.html (September 20, 2006).
- [28] Dan Bilefsky, "Europe Presses Romania and Bulgaria on Reform," *The New York Times*, May 17, 2006, at www.select.nytimes.com/search/restricted/article?res=F70C16F63E5A0C748DDDAC0894DE404482 (November 9, 2006).
- [29] Dorren Carvajal, "Swiss Investigate Leak to Paper on C.I.A. Prisons in Eastern Europe," *The New York Times*, January 12, 2006, at www.nytimes.com/2006/01/12/international/europe/12cia.html (November 9, 2006).
- [30] Bulgarian Telegraph Agency, "Bulgarian President, Prime Minister Confer with Turkish Assembly Speaker," June 21, 2006.
- [31] Ingrid Melander, "EU Argues over Criticising Russian on Georgia," Reuters UK, October 17, 2006, at www.today.reuters.co.uk/news/articlenews.aspx?type=worldNews&storyID=2006-10-

[17T094301Z 01 L17909917 RTRUKOC 0
UK-GEORGIA-RUSSIA-EU.xml](#) (October 18, 2006).

[32] Claire Bigg, "Georgia: Russia, U.S. Take Uncustomary Approaches Amid Crisis," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, October 5, 2006, at www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/10/ea17387b-3176-4dde-89f2-b142b75970a6.html (October 18, 2006).