BULLETIN
OF "CAROL I" NATIONAL DEFENCE UNIVERSITY

The theory of the regional security complex — Case study, the riparian states of the Black Sea

Adrian GHENADE, MSc. Candidate*
Elena ONU, Ph.D. Student**

*"Mihai Viteazul" National Intelligence Academy, Bucharest, Romania
e-mail: ghenadeadrian@yahoo.com
**National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Bucharest, Romania
e-mail: e.tudor37@yahoo.com

Abstract

Known in Antiquity as the Pontus Euxinus, the Black Sea has been the bridge between European and Eastern civilizations since ancient times. Possessing a multi-varied mosaic of cultures, the Black Sea area has facilitated over the centuries, both the development of commercial and political relations and the maintenance and production of conflicts, being like the Sword of Damocles. Located at the intersection of three security zones (Euro-Atlantic, Russian, and Eastern), the Black Sea is currently a vulnerable space in terms of security. Heir to Byzantine culture, most of the riparian states have a complicated internal and external policy, being caught between the idealism of the Western world and the realism of the Eastern European space. At the same time, the revisionism of the Russian Federation and Turkey in terms of foreign policy will also mean a change in the dynamics of the relations between the states bordering the Black Sea, which could result either in its return to the status of a Russian lake or in a division of the spheres of influence between the Russian Federation and Turkey. In this sense, in order to analyze the future security dynamics of the riparian states, we used the theory of the regional security complex, which we consider very appropriate in our study of the Black Sea region.

Keywords:

The birth of the regional security complex approach

The context of the period of the 80'-90' is marked by a paradigm shift regarding the approach and understanding of the study of international relations and security relations. The new current of thought is not totally antithetical to the traditionalist current, coming more as a complement to this one. Thus, if the traditionalist current of thought associates military problems (hard power) as representing the only real threat to the survival of states, the non-traditionalist current of thought will consider that security problems are of a military, economic, social, societal, and ecological nature. In this sense, non-traditionalists offer a level of analysis that is inclusive at the level of society and even individuals and not just at the level of states. The approach is in full accordance with the new reality characteristic of the end of the Cold War, being marked by the neoliberal and idealist current, in which the emphasis will be placed more on the individual than on the state. Also, the non-traditionalists will analyze security by level, these being national, regional, international/global/systemic. One of the main thinkers of the new non-traditionalist trend and also the pioneer of the new trend is Barry Buzan, a British professor of political science at LSE. In the work People, States and Fear: National Security Problem in International Relations, since 1983, he criticizes the traditional conception of security, coming to formulate the main elements of the future approach of the Copenhagen school, including the idea that the state and society are the two objects security references. In this paper, Barry Buzan will also enunciate a new derivative concept of security, the security complex, which will constitute a new understanding of relations between states in terms of security at the regional level.

The security complex represents the existence of a group of countries with lasting, significant, and intrinsic characteristics of security problems. In this set of states, the major security perceptions are so interrelated that their national security issues cannot be rationally analyzed and solved without reference to the other states. The dynamics of the formation and its structure are determined by the states within it, more precisely by the perspectives of the states towards security and the interactions between the states. The security complex belongs to the postmodernism current, a current that emphasizes primarily the social component in the analysis of security, the approach being one of a multisectoral nature (Buzan 1983, 105-110). The international system is formed by several security complexes, many of them overlapping or intersecting with each other. These can be of several types: geographical, political, strategic, historic, economic, and cultural, and some security complexes can possess several characteristics or even all of them. Based on the postmodernist current, the analysis of security by referring to the security complex is made at the regional level, even if the complex sometimes includes states from outside the region. The logic of security regions is based on the fact that international security is a matter of relationships. International security is about how human communities relate to each other when it comes to threats and vulnerabilities, even as it sometimes refers to how these communities relate to threats from the natural

environment. The emphasis on the relational nature of security is in line with writings on security studies that have emphasized relational dynamics such as security dilemmas, balance of power, arms races, and security regimes. For a group of states to be considered a security complex, it must have a distinctive territorial pattern of interdependence that distinguishes members of a security complex from other neighboring states. Regional security complexes cannot exist under 2 conditions: in some areas, local states have such a low capacity that their power projects little or not at all beyond their own borders. These states have inward-looking security perspectives, and between them, there is no security interaction large enough to generate a local complex. The direct presence of external powers is so great that it suppresses the security dynamics between local states - this state is also called cover (exp. Colonialism, European security dynamics during the Cold War, USA-USSR rivalry). For a group of states to be able to constitute a security complex, it must meet the following structure and all conditions must be met cumulatively: 1) the arrangement of the units in the same geographical space and the existence of some differences between them; 2) the existence of friendship or enmity patterns and 3) the distribution of power between the principals (Buzan 1983, 110-115).

At the conceptual level, there are two types of regional complexes: the homogeneous (classical ones, stated for the first time in the work People, States and Fear: National Security Problem in International Relations, from 1983 by Barry Buzan) and the heterogeneous ones (which preserve the characteristics of the classical complexes, but they are complemented by the economic, financial, social, cultural, societal spectrum, being stated in the work Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security from 2003, by Barry Buzan in collaboration with Ole Waever).

The classical theory of the security complex

The rationale behind it is that for most actors at the unit level, politico-military security falls into medium-sized bundles, and the most relevant theory is the one that relates to the regional level. Also, the classical theory of security complexes asserts the existence of regional subsystems as objects of security analysis and provides an analytical framework for working with these systems. The theory focuses primarily on the state as the key unit and the political and military sectors. All states in the system are interconnected in a fabric of security interdependence. The pattern of interdependence in a geographically diverse but also anarchic international system is based on regional clusters, which we call security complexes. Security interdependence is obviously more intense between states within such complexes than between states outside them. Security complexes refer to the relative intensity of interstate security relations that form distinct regional patterns, shaped both by the distribution of power and by historic relations of friendship or enmity. As they are formed by local groupings of states, not only do classical security complexes have a central role in the relations between their members; they actually

condition centrally, if at all, how external powers penetrate the region. The external dynamics of security complexes can be located along a spectrum depending on what defines security interdependence: amity or enmity. At the opposite pole is the emergence of conflicts where interdependence is born out of mutual fear, rivalry, and threat perception. In the middle, there are security regimes, in which states treat each other as potential enemies, in which they have entered into assurance agreements with the aim of reducing the security dilemma between them. At the positive end of the spectrum is a pluralistic security community in which states no longer expect or prepare for the use of force in their relations. Regional integration will eliminate a security complex with the same boundaries, transforming it from an anarchic subsystem of states into a single larger actor within the system. The regional integration of the members of a complex will transform the power structure of that complex. The security complex is a product of the anarchic system (Buzan 1983, 93-95). Since the power dynamics are very solid and friendship/enemy relations are constantly changing, there are 4 structural options for evaluating the impact on a regional complex of security: maintaining the status quo, international transformation, external transformation, and coverage. The theory of the regional security complex can be used to generate definitive scenarios and to structure the study and predictions related to the possibilities of change and stability (Buzan 1983, 113-115). After the Cold War, international relations acquired a more regionalized character. As regions are a special type of subsystem, Hans Mourizen argues that states are more fixed than mobile. At the security level, regions have the following characteristics: they consist of two or more states forming a cohesive geographical unit, and the relations between these states are marked by security interdependence, which can be either positive or negative.

Security Complex Theory - Black Sea Case Study
After the Annexation of the Crimean Peninsula
by the Russian Federation

In terms of security, the Black Sea region is an unsafe area, where three security zones overlap: European, Eurasian, and Islamic, this determines both the existence of hostile relations and the existence of alliances based on friendship between the riparian states (Cojocaru 2014, 23). Being a commercial space since Antiquity, the Black Sea region was primarily a transit space for different peoples, a fact that will fully mark the history of this region through the multicultural and ethnic mosaic created. Taken as a whole, although the diversity of a region often means an increase in creativity and tolerance among the surrounding populations, it seems that in the case of the Black Sea region, the principle of the sword of Damocles applies; this region has been marked by conflicts for almost its entire history between the riparian states. From the Russo-Ottoman wars to the current invasion of Ukraine by Russia, the Black Sea area has almost always been a politically and militarily unstable area, preferring war to trade. Thus, it can be explained that although it holds approximately

between 70 and 200 billion barrels of oil (an amount greater than the reserves of the North Sea and Alaska combined, which turns the region into the second area in the world in terms of energy potential for the West), the Black Sea region, due to unstable security, does not fully enjoy its economic potential (Cojocaru 2014, 25). Thus arises the question "What determines this instability of the region?" An answer to this question is the fact that the states bordering the Black Sea (Russia, Turkey, Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria, and Georgia) are in a regional complex of security. As I said above, the existence of any regional security complex is determined by the cumulative fulfillment of 3 conditions, which the Black Sea riparian states fulfill. The arrangement of the units in the same geographical space and the existence of some differences between them: the states in the Black Sea region are in the same geographical area, being located in the eastern region of Europe, having direct access to the Black Sea. Also, although they are in the same geographical proximity, at the state level the differences between them are substantial in terms of culture, ethnicity, language, and, in some cases, even religion. Due to these substantial differences found at the level of the states, each country bordering the Black Sea has its own specificity that makes it totally different from the other surrounding countries, making it difficult to achieve uniformity in terms of zonal specificity.

The existence of patterns of friendship or enmity: the Black Sea region was/is the space of clash between Russians and Turks. Since the time of Peter the Great, the Russians have wanted to turn the Black Sea into a Russian lake, the only obstacle to achieving this goal being the Ottoman Empire. Thus, from 1683 until now, Russia and Turkey have constantly disputed their influence over the Black Sea, an extremely important geostrategic area for the achievement of the expansionist foreign policy of both powers. Also, another conflict was between Romania and Bulgaria. As a result of the Berlin Congress of 1878, Romania obtained access to the Black Sea following the ceding of Dobrogea by Bulgaria. Thus, the new border between the two young states represented a reason for a long conflict, both entities until 1945 being in separate camps, both in the two Balkan Wars and both World Wars. At the same time, even when in the Black Sea region there was a pattern of friendship between states, in which 5 of the 6 riparian states were part of a common alliance, the Warsaw Pact (USSR- Russia, Ukraine, and currently Georgia, Romania, and Bulgaria), there were misunderstandings of a territorial nature, Romania ceding Snake Island to Ukraine in 1948, a fact that created tensions among the allies. Although in 2009 the Hague Tribunal recognized 79.34% of the island's territory as Romania's (the rest belonging to Ukraine), both states still have much greater claims to this territory, with disputes continuing even to this day. Also, another pattern of enmity is between Russia and Georgia.

At the beginning of 2000, Russia adopted a new concept at the level of foreign policy and geostrategic framework, declaring itself to be a great power (Smith 2020, 7). Also, by adopting this concept, Russia will show its first signs of revisionism, suggesting that intervention in frozen post-Soviet conflicts (both those in the Black Sea area

and those in neighboring areas) is justified in accordance with its status. This led to the first revisionist tendencies on the part of Russia. In 2004, Georgia, due to its geographical position on the Black Sea, represented a new gateway for Black Sea oil, allowing the installation of pipelines that could bypass the Russian Federation. To the economic reasons we can also add Georgia's desire to be part of the European Union and NATO, organizations that would have allowed it a substantial detachment from its status as a former Soviet socialist republic. Therefore, in 2008, Russia intervened directly in the war in Georgia, and as a result, Abkhazia and South Ossetia declared their independence, an act that is currently recognized internationally only by the Russian Federation. (Cojocaru 2014, 110-112), Nicaragua, and Syria (Curtifan 2018).

Although all past conflicts have had a substantial influence on the Black Sea region, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine has truly had the greatest impact on the region. We will address this conflict later, as I will devote a special section to it in this essay. Distribution of power between the main units: each country bordering the Black Sea has a say in the area's security policies. However, in relation to the distribution of power, at present, the Black Sea has two main actors – Russia and Turkey, which were recently joined by Ukraine. In this sense, we can say that Russia currently has the advantage of the hard power component, through the military capabilities it has in the area, a fact also proven by the constant aggressive policy it practices. Turkey, due to its control over the two straits (Bosphorus and Dardanelles) essential for the connection with the Mediterranean Sea, thus implicitly owns the main economic and commercial area of the Black Sea, a fact that gives it a much more complex advantage over Russia, being stronger in terms of the smart component, Turkey having the opportunity to combine the economic and military components.

On the other hand, Ukraine until the Crimean conflict had the soft advantage of the Black Sea region, with most oil companies with foreign capital located in Ukraine's commercial zone, which is also the most attractive area for foreign investments. A relevant example in this sense is represented by the Skifska company, owned by the British-Dutch corporation Royal Dutch Shell, which in 2012 obtained the right to drill for oil starting in 2015 (unfortunately, the initiative will be abandoned as a result of the Crimean War). Also, until the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation, Ukraine had the advantage of having the largest port on the Black Sea, Sevastopol being both the largest port and the most strategically positioned, being a bridgehead connection with the Mediterranean Sea, the Sea of Azov, the Maghreb area and even the Middle East (Cojocaru 2014, 74-75). Thus, we can note that at the level of the Black Sea region, the distribution of power was relatively balanced and no actor could dominate everyone else. We also note that all the necessary conditions for the existence of a regional security complex in the Black Sea area were met simultaneously, which proves the existence of such a complex. Moreover, using the counterexample method, we note that including the 2 limitations that would not have allowed the formation of a security complex (the inability of states to project their power outside their own borders, respectively the

existence of an external power so great that it suppresses the dynamics of security between local states) are not possible for the Black Sea region. First, the region has actors capable of projecting their power beyond its borders. Taking the case of the Russian Federation again, we can see that through the Great Power concept used in its foreign policy, it is able to project its military capabilities outside its own borders, in this sense maintaining a series of frozen conflicts in its former satellite states, but also outside the European continent (the war in Syria, the year 2015). Also, in 2015, Russia adopted a new Naval Doctrine, which offered the Black Sea both a significant defensive and offensive, respectively economic, tactic. On the defensive level, the Naval Doctrine viewed the Black Sea as an essential means of blocking NATO expansion and the deployment of military capabilities near Russia's borders (Davis 2015, 10-11). By annexing Crimea (also called a Black Sea aircraft carrier), on an offensive level, Russia managed to gain control and influence over the communication routes of the entire Black Sea aquarium, from East to West. The extremely good position of Crimea at the geopolitical and geostrategic level allowed the sending of Russian troops within the conflagration in Syria, demonstrating Russia's ability to create pressure on the southern flank of NATO, North Africa, the Middle East, but also an access route secondary to the Planetary Ocean. Another riparian state that can project its power outside its borders is Turkey, which constitutes the second-largest NATO army (Dinu 2020, 7-9). Also, for the Black Sea region, there is no external power so great as to be able to suppress the dynamics of security among local states. Although we would be tempted to state that NATO (and implicitly, the United States), represents a factor that can definitively limit the dynamics of security among the riparian states, this did not happen entirely. Although 3/6 riparian states are NATO members, and 2 states have pro-Western views (Ukraine and Georgia), NATO and implicitly the US have limited military capabilities for acting in this region.

However, on March 16, 2023, the Chairman of the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence of the House of Representatives, Mike Turner, together with Congressman Bill Keating, the ranking member of the Foreign Affairs Subcommittee of the House of Representatives for Europe introduced the Maritime Security Act for approval with the aim to stop the expansion of conflicts at the level of the Black Sea; being perceived as a matter of security for the United States, this has substantial limitations of a legal nature (The Senate of the United States 2023). According to the Montreux Convention of 1936, warships of states that do not have direct access to the Black Sea must not exceed a tonnage of 15,000 tons and cannot remain for more than 21 days in these waters. Under these conditions, with Russia and Turkey as the dominant actors, it is almost impossible for an external power to radically change the dynamics between riparian states better than a riparian state (Britannica 1936). Thus, regardless of the type of political-military alliance in which the states around the Black Sea find themselves, the main power that will be held in the region will be projected only by the riparian states.

The security complex in the Black Sea as a result of the conflict in the Black Sea

As I have demonstrated through previous arguments, the Black Sea region constitutes and facilitates the existence of a security complex. Currently, Russia is the main actor in the area that constantly maintains hostile relations with the rest of the riparian states, the most recent conflict being the one with Ukraine. Russia and Ukraine share a millennial history, the relationship between the two states being marked by constant conflicts and alliances. At the level of common elements for the two peoples, we can see that they have a common geographical origin (Kiev being the city of "birth" of both kingdoms), they have been part of the same political unit for almost 70 years (USSR) and have had Orthodox Christianity as a common identity element. Despite the similarities, throughout history, the two countries seem to have shared more differences than friendships. In this sense, we can recall the fact that Ukraine was part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (Polish-Lithuanian Union), a kingdom that over time had direct conflicts with both Tsarist and Imperial Russia. The fact that Ukraine was part of the Polish-Lithuanian Union will also be found in the national character of the Ukrainians, who consider themselves a different people from the Russians. At the same time, probably the most important constitutive element of a people's identity, language, is very different between the two nations as Ukrainian has a vocabulary consisting of 55% of words of Polish origin, being more similar to this language than to Russian.

At the cultural level, there are also substantial differences between the two peoples, sharing quite different traditions and values. Thus, we can see that both peoples have a sufficiently different national identity, thus theoretically allowing them to evolve in separate directions from the point of view of the political, economic, and social points of view. As a result of the collapse of the USSR in 1991, Russia and Ukraine would once again become two separate entities at the political, economic, and social levels that sought to form their own policy, both internally and externally. In terms of security, in the last decade of the 20th century, the Black Sea region was extremely stable. Except for Transnistria, no conflict took place, and the relations between the states were only economic. The first relevant sign of a desire to change Ukraine and break away from the influence of the CIS states came in 2004, during the Orange Revolution when thousands of Ukrainians marched for better integration into Europe. Another moment when Ukraine's growing distance from the Russian Federation was observed was at the NATO Summit in Bucharest, in 2008, when Ukraine conveyed to the international community its clear desire to join NATO. All these actions culminated in 2014 with the first armed conflict after almost a century between the two countries, with Russia's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula. At the level of the security complex, the annexation of Crimea by Russia marked a renunciation of the status quo within the region which is about 70 years old. Also, by annexing Crimea, Russia considerably increased its tactical and geostrategic advantage in the region, since by annexing Crimea (also called a Black Sea aircraft

carrier), it managed to gain control and influence over the communication routes on the entire Sea Aquarium Black, from East to West. The extremely good position of Crimea at the geopolitical and geostrategic level allowed the sending of Russian troops within the conflagration in Syria, demonstrating Russia's ability to create pressure on the southern flank of NATO, North Africa, the Middle East, but also a secondary access route to the Planetary Ocean. Thus, by annexing Crimea, Russia managed to transform the security complex of the Black Sea externally, by changing its structure (Dinu 2020, 10-11).

Moving on to the present, we can see that the war in Ukraine has once again altered the dynamics of the current Black Sea regional security complex. Although they are traditional adversaries in the region, Russia and Turkey now seem more eager to avoid starting a conflict with each other. Also, the aggression in Ukraine brings Romania and Bulgaria closer to each other, their security region also being the security spectrum of NATO and the European Union. Yet, as I said above, NATO's military capabilities for the Black Sea area are limited by the provisions of the Montreux Convention, a fact that produces a vulnerability in terms of security in the event of the subsequent degeneration of the conflict. Also, another sensitive area in the current context is Georgia, which, after having suffered as a result of the separatism produced in 2008, currently presents multiple vulnerabilities in the face of a possible escalation of the conflict, being a potential direct victim of a possible Russian revisionism (South Ossetia and Abkhazia). In this sense, concern for the national security of Georgia has already been shown by NATO, Romania together with the UK holding the NATO Contact Point Embassy mandate in Georgia for a period of 2 years. The fact that a Black Sea riparian country holds such a mandate in the current conflict in another country shows certain concern about a further generation of this conflict. At the level of the current War in Ukraine, Kyiv tried to consolidate its main strategic arteries from the Black Sea. In this sense, it was sought to defend the port of Odesa, through an extensive process of de-Russification. At the same time, since the beginning of the conflict, Ukraine sank the Moscow ship - one of Russia's main warships, also managing to gain a significant tactical advantage in this conflict.

As I said at the beginning, the security complex theory can also be used to generate scenarios for certain conflicts. In this sense, I believe that in the case of the two main belligerents, Russia and Ukraine, the role of the Black Sea takes on a double meaning, since for Russia it means hegemony, while for Ukraine it means survival. Many experts believe that "whoever controls or dominates the Black Sea can easily project power over the European continent, mainly in the Balkans and Central Europe, but also in the eastern Mediterranean, the South Caucasus and the Northern Middle East. Thus, a possible victory of Russia in the conflict will allow it to have increasing chances to transform the Black Sea into a "Russian lake", a fact that also allows it to return to the ambition from the time of Peter the Great to have access to the Mediterranean Sea, having the real possibility of modifying the Regime of the

Straits, thus imposing its total dominance over the Black Sea. On the other hand, a potential Ukrainian victory would likely mark a return to the status quo specific to the region, by restoring the same pre-conflict spheres of influence. Also, a potential accession of Ukraine to NATO would mark an increase in the influence of the North Atlantic Alliance in the region, a fact that would probably also allow a modification of the provisions of the Montreux Convention.

As I said at the beginning of the paper, in the Black Sea region 3 security areas are intertwined: European, Eurasian, and Islamic. At present, Turkey is the only country that is crossed by all these demarcations, being the smart power actor in this region. The re-election of Recep Erdogan as president will mean a resumption of his neo-Ottoman policies, evidenced by his desire to make Turkey an important player in the Middle East and implicitly in the Islamic world. An important role in this scenario will be played by the current "reacquisition" of Nagorno-Karabakh by Azerbaijan, a traditional partner of Turkey. Thus, the regional security complex would be extended including to the Near East area, a fact that would determine its expansion and the inclusion of new actors. Moreover, Russia's weakening of its support for Armenia will cause Yerevan to look elsewhere for security alliances, including the US, France, India, and Georgia, but also to reconsider its continued participation in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), which is under the influence of Moscow. Although Russia has two military bases in Armenia that are designated to deal with the southern or Caucasus external sector and its surroundings and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has allowed Russia to expand its military influence in his region, despite the role Moscow in Nagorno-Karabakh, a possible reorientation of Armenia to the US would lead to the accession of this country to the Georgia-Ukraine security sub-complex. This fact would increase the security vulnerability of all the riparian states, at the same time increasing the dynamics of relations between them. I believe that this scenario would be possible in the event of the enormous weakening of Russia and Ukraine as a result of this conflict, followed by a possible implosion of Russia and its division into several states, respectively zones of influence, as well as a Ukraine that after the war would not benefit from a reconstruction and would not be welcomed into the European Union or NATO.

Conclusions

We can affirm that the theory of the regional security complex is a useful tool for the geopolitical and geostrategic realities of the 21st century, helping us to observe how it is formed and how conflicts take place in different geographical regions of the world, being one of the theories that allow us to be able to generate certain scenarios about their further evolution. Also, although it was developed in the previous century and improved in 2003, it continues to be a topical subject, given the fact that it emphasizes the social component as well as the financial, economic, and societal sectors, being an extremely complex theory. Based on the above analysis, we

can note that the theory respects the new reality of the post-Cold War international system through the prism of the fact that regions are currently the main dynamics in terms of friendship/conflict, as evidenced by the majority of ongoing conflicts. Thus, based on it, we can identify those areas on the globe that present the necessary characteristics to constitute a regional security complex, thus being able to create certain commercial and economic blocs that help the development of certain regions and implicitly strengthen security. Alternatively, we can identify those regions that present the risk of generating a potential regional conflict with certain likely consequences materialized in the loss of human lives and goods, the aim being to reduce it or perhaps even avoid it.

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