

# The Problem of Overextension: Analyzing America's Black Sea Policies through Jentleson's 4 Ps Framework

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**ABSTRACT** *Historically, the U.S. strategy in the Black Sea region has been stable, limited, and not ambitious as American administrations prioritized certain foreign policy objectives over other interests. This careful strategy was transformed during the Clinton Administration in the mid-1990s as the U.S. started following an extensive foreign policy framework, which included all American national interests, formulated by Bruce Jentleson in his 4Ps framework: power, peace, prosperity, and principles. The article argues that this transformation was problematic because of two obstacles –the illusion of the unipolar moment and the growing polarization in American domestic politics– which prevented the U.S. from following an effective policy in the Black Sea region.*

**Keywords:** American Foreign Policy, Black Sea, Clinton Administration, 4Ps Framework National Interests

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## Introduction

In November 2018, the Russian Navy fired on and seized three Ukrainian ships when they were passing through the Kerch Strait. Already frustrated by the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, Ukraine declared martial law and raised the possibility of ‘full-scale war’ with Russia<sup>1</sup> while Moscow exacerbated the issue by refusing to release twenty-four sailors from the ships despite calls from Western countries. One of the most serious reactions came from the American Congress as some respected senators recommended military action against Russia. “Putin is somebody that respects strength and territory. Words don’t mean much to him. The action does, so I think we need to do more,” said Republican Congressman John Barrasso, who has a seat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.<sup>2</sup> Military commanders were also in favor of a show of strength as the guided-missile destroyer USS Donald Cook was sent to Odesa, Ukraine’s Black Sea port, to show solidarity.<sup>3</sup> The fact that more serious actions did not occur was mainly due to Trump’s isolationism. Although his advisers recommended applying new sanctions against Russia or increasing the American naval presence in the Black Sea, what Trump did at most was to state that he did not like what happened and to cancel a meeting with Putin at the G20 Forum in Argentina, September, 2018.<sup>4</sup>

Trump’s passivism toward Russia notwithstanding, the Kerch Strait affair demonstrates that the Black Sea region is still important for great power competition in general and American foreign policy in particular, despite the end of the Cold War. In this article, we will show the importance of the Black Sea in American foreign policy through both political history and international relations perspectives by examining certain foreign policy objectives of the U.S. In this regard, we borrow Bruce W. Jentleson’s ‘4 Ps’ framework which argues that there are four main foreign policy objectives that define American national interests: power, peace, prosperity, and principles. According to Jentleson, American interests abroad “almost always combines one or more of the 4 Ps” which are complementary but also regularly “pose trade-offs and tensions, and sometimes major dissensus.”<sup>5</sup>

We choose Jentleson’s framework to analyze U.S. Black Sea policy, as its constituting elements reflect major clashes of opinion about America’s role in global affairs while combining major international relations theories at the same time. Americans differ about their country’s appropriate role beyond the shores. The majority of Americans respect U.S. power and see their country as stronger than other countries, especially in terms of military power and technological achievements.<sup>6</sup> Americans, in general, prefer that the U.S. should maintain its superpower status in global affairs, while how the government should follow this objective is controversial. Whereas the Republicans are more inclined to favor military strength and unilateral action, Democrats overwhelmingly say

diplomacy is the best method to ensure peaceful relations.<sup>7</sup> In this regard, the clash of realist and liberal theories can be visibly seen in these contradicting worldviews about the relationship between power and peace.

Prosperity is another critical variable in the conduct of American foreign

policy. In partisan American politics, one of the rare agreements between the political parties is the belief that U.S. involvement in the global economy is a 'good thing' for Americans.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, as the trade wars and economic sanctions during the Trump Administration show, certain segments within the Republican Party believe that economic protectionism may be necessary for the prosperity of Americans while Democrats are more inclined to see free trade as a good thing while opposing protectionist policies.<sup>9</sup> In theoretical terms, this is the clash of mercantilism and liberalism.

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Finally, principles create both common understanding and disagreements among the American public. While the majority of Americans saw themselves as an 'exceptional' nation and regarded the U.S. as a model country that should be taken as an example by other countries, throughout American history this self-perceived belief caused a significant ebb-and-flow between isolationism and internationalism. Internationalists believe that the U.S. has a responsibility to spread its values around the world, while isolationists prefer to stay away from the rest of the world community to keep the Americans pure and good.<sup>10</sup> The partisan difference today shows itself regarding this issue too, as compared to Republicans, Democrats are more inclined to promote democracy and human rights in other countries and be interested in helping to improve living standards in developing nations.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, while Jentleson's framework reflects foreign policy contradictions within the U.S., it also focuses on different variables prioritized by various international relations theories, especially realism (power), liberalism (peace, prosperity), and social constructivism (principles). All these controversies are important to understand the challenges the U.S. has faced in the Black Sea region since the end of the Cold War.

Below we will first explain the particulars of the 4 Ps framework and how it affects U.S. foreign policy. By considering these elements, the next section will demonstrate American interest in the Black Sea region throughout history. Here we will show that in accordance with its power, the U.S. prioritized particular national interests at different periods and there was a relative consistency in the U.S. position over the Black Sea. The third section will concentrate on U.S. Black Sea policies after the Cold War and analyze how each administration focused on different goals in the 4 Ps framework, which prevented

consistent and continuous policies in the region while leading to ambiguity in the minds of regional allies. The concluding section will summarize the findings and present a brief analysis of the Biden Administration's approach to the region.

## 4 Ps Framework: The Foreign Policy Objectives of the U.S.

Whether it is a great power or not, power is crucially important for all states mainly because it provides a basic need: security. In the anarchical international system, security and survival are the main concerns simply because states can never be certain of other states' intentions. That is why states try to increase their capabilities and relative gains by relying on power.<sup>12</sup> What Americans cannot agree on is how much power they need for security and survival. The supporters of primacy assume that the most secure way to survive is to be a hegemon within the international system as there is always a threat from other great powers who also seek global leadership.<sup>13</sup> In this view, power accumulation is a never-ending process while American leaders cannot avoid developments in other parts of the world.

Realists, on the other hand, believe that preserving power is more important than increasing it and they are mainly concerned with protecting the existing balance of power. Pointing out that the U.S. power is limited; realists are more inclined to share power with like-minded countries through alliances while increasing their military capacity.<sup>14</sup> Realists too are interested in developments in other regions, but only if these developments affect the existing balance of power. Finally, there is the strategy of retrenchment which argues that the best way to provide for U.S. security is to define core strategic interests and decrease the number of American security commitments around the world. The retrenchment proponents' understanding of American power is more pessimistic than primacists and realists while they believe that American shows of military power around the world have detrimental effects on security such as the rise of anti-Americanism.<sup>15</sup>

If one purpose of power accumulation is to provide security, the other is to realize peace, which is the second national interest in Jentleson's framework. All U.S. grand strategies we mentioned above believe in the possibility of peace through U.S. power. Primacists propose the hegemonic stability theory which assumes that the world is more peaceful under a hegemonic power that provides for governmental stability in an otherwise anarchical international society.<sup>16</sup> Realists reject this argument by pointing out that hegemonic rivalry is always present in the international system so the best way to secure peace is to rely on the balance of power between great powers.<sup>17</sup> The proponents of retrenchment, on the other hand, believe that multi-polarity is more peace-

ful, either because it prevents excessive and unnecessary show of force around the world by the U.S. or it satisfies other great powers by offering control in their spheres of influence.<sup>18</sup>

At the same time, we need to emphasize that peace is not only attained through power. Democratic peace theory argues that the rising number of democracies is the main reason for the declining amount of warfare among independent states since it is believed that democracies do not fight with each other.<sup>19</sup> This theory assumes that what the U.S. should do for global peace is to help democratization in the world. Another liberal theory, Liberal Institutionalism, holds that global peace is attainable through cooperation in international organizations and institutions because they play crucial roles as crisis-prevention mechanisms.<sup>20</sup> Finally, some liberals argue that economic interdependence through free trade gives states an important motivation to establish peaceful relations. Because the presence of conflict costs states the economic advantages of trade, they would be prone to establish peaceful relations if the level of international trade increases.<sup>21</sup>

The theory of economic interdependence brings us to another important U.S. national interest: prosperity. Free trade and economic growth became the continuing objectives of the U.S. foreign policy since independence. Even when the newly-independent country was not powerful, U.S. leaders decided to enter into military conflicts in overseas regions when European and Barbary countries threatened U.S. economic trade in the Mediterranean in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>22</sup> Around 70 percent of international agreements the U.S. signed in this century were about economic matters;<sup>23</sup> while U.S. officials followed an active foreign policy to open Far East regions, especially China and Japan, to international commerce. Later during the Cold War years, the U.S. assumed the leadership of the capitalist world through international economic organizations such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. All in all, prosperity is a critical national interest in American foreign policy and sometimes it is at the center of American presidents' agenda as Donald Trump's 'America First' strategy and his trade war with China demonstrates.

Finally, principles play a prominent role in shaping U.S. foreign policy behaviors. The first Europeans, especially the Puritans, stepped onto the American continent planning to establish a 'new Israel,' a perfect Christian community that would build God's Kingdom in America.<sup>24</sup> Although not every immigrant

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shared this religious goal, they all believed that what they had formed was an exceptional community that all other societies would take as an example, as a “city upon a hill” as John Winthrop famously imagined in 1630.<sup>25</sup> Since then this belief has created a self-righteousness among Americans which has led them to spread their values to other societies, often to hide rational objectives. The concepts such as ‘manifest destiny,’ ‘American exceptionalism,’ and ‘white man’s burden’ provided the ideological background to impose American values, economic lifestyle, and religious beliefs onto other populations, namely Indian, Mexican, and Caribbean populations, mainly to control their territory. As the U.S. turned into a world power after WWII, U.S. administrations continued to spread their own values in a worldwide campaign. Democracy, human rights, political freedom, a capitalist economy, and free trade became key concepts that the U.S. wanted all countries to pursue. As a result, the U.S. again did not refrain from using American military power to spread its principles as happened in Korea, Vietnam, and Iraq.

All these national interests are intertwined, and it is difficult to separate them when analyzing U.S. foreign policy behavior. Take the 2003 Iraq War for example. This military action had multiple objectives such as demonstrating American military presence in a distant region (power), overthrowing an enemy regime that was assumed to have weapons of mass destruction (peace), controlling oil reserves in the region (prosperity), and promoting democracy in the Middle East (principles). The U.S. presence in the Black Sea also reflects all the national interests explained above; yet, different interests are prioritized in distinct periods. What is most interesting to us is that American objectives in the Black Sea were consistent and stable before the end of the Cold War. The main effect of the so-called American “unipolar moment” in global politics<sup>26</sup> is that it forced the U.S. to meet all national interests simultaneously which brought only ambiguity and erratic policymaking.

### **Prosperity: American Black Sea Policies before the Cold War**

The American interest in the Black Sea region goes back to the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The U.S. at the very beginning was constructed as a trading country and the large landmass around the Black Sea region offered an op-





portunity to sell manufactured goods and obtain raw materials for American industry. As a result, one of the main motivations behind the U.S. attempt to establish diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Turks was to increase American prosperity by entering into Eurasian lands through the Black Sea.<sup>27</sup> This objective was achieved with the Treaty of Edirne, in September 1829 as the U.S. obtained free passage rights for its commercial ships to the Black Sea. Although American commercial traffic soon diminished because of natural and man-made difficulties,<sup>28</sup> American officials kept advocating for free access to the Black Sea in the subsequent decades. In this era, American interest in the region was mainly commercial, lacking any emphasis on power, peace, and principles.

During WWI, the Turkish Straits and the Black Sea gained strategic importance as Turkish control of the Straits prevented Western help to Tsarist Russia and hastened the revolutionary events in the country. As a result, the status of the Straits found a solid space in Wilson's Fourteen Principles; as Article XII stressed that "the Dardanelles should be permanently opened as a free passage to the ships and commerce of all nations under international guarantees."<sup>29</sup> Taking Wilson's internationalism into consideration, one can sense an element of power in this emphasis on the status of the Straits. Regulating the Straits naturally meant regulating the Black Sea and the power dynamics in this region where a socialist country under the Bolsheviks was about to be born. Yet, when Congress opposed Wilson's plan to integrate the U.S. into world politics, interest in the Black Sea vanished as well. The U.S. government preferred not

The Ocean Grand general cargo ship carrying two Island-class patrol boats, the Fastov and the Sumy, arrives in the port of Odessa from the U.S. on November 23, 2021. The two patrol boats are expected to be involved in ensuring Ukraine's maritime security in the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov.

KONSTANTIN SAZONCHIK / TASS via Getty Images

to be a part of the Document of Serves, Lausanne Conference, or the Montreux Convention which regulated the status of the Straits and the Black Sea. As long as the Straits and the Black Sea were open to commercial ships, the U.S. was mainly disinterested in the Black Sea region.

A minor exception to U.S. power-related disinterest in the Black Sea region may be the appointment of Mark L. Bristol, a Navy Admiral, to İstanbul as U.S. representative after WWI. One of the major aims of this appointment was to monitor the Black Sea and protect U.S. interests as power was redistributed in the area.<sup>30</sup> During Admiral Bristol's term in İstanbul between 1919 and 1927, there were intensive U.S. commercial and naval activities in the Black Sea; however, after Bristol, the U.S. government minimized their interests and military visibility in the region following the empowered isolationist mood in the U.S. In this regard, the new international order at the beginning of the Cold War, offensive realistic security threats, and bipolar international system together with Stalin's strong claim to the Turkish Straits, and correspondingly Soviet desire to control the Black Sea, became a litmus test for the U.S. To keep its vital interests in the Black Sea the U.S. either had to confront Stalin or leave the area to the Soviets.

## **Power: U.S. Black Sea Policies during the Cold War**

In his speech at Harvard University on September 6, 1943, Winston Churchill called on the U.S. to take more responsibility in world affairs by stating that "one cannot rise to be in many ways the leading community in the civilized world without being involved in its problems, without being convulsed by its agonies and inspired by its causes...The people in the U.S. cannot escape world responsibility."<sup>31</sup> Yet, when the U.S. first confronted the hostile Soviet Union after the WWII, there was a great ambiguity in American foreign policy decision-making about which policy track the U.S. should follow in world affairs.<sup>32</sup> This was clearly visible in U.S. hesitation to give firm support to Turkey against Soviet aggression and its unacceptable demands on the Turkish Straits.<sup>33</sup> Washington noticed that the goal of the Soviet enlargement into the Black Sea was to dominate the strategic area including the land mass encircling the Black Sea.<sup>34</sup> The strong demands on the Turkish Straits and growing Soviet presence in the Balkans, where the Danube runs into the Black Sea, were clear signs of Stalin's aggressive intentions.

After considering all strategic priorities and possible vital problems concerning Soviet rule in the Black Sea, U.S. policymakers decided to confront the Soviets at the beginning of 1946. President Truman gave the first signs of a new policy in his Army Day speech on April 6, 1946, saying that, the Middle East with its energy sources bore economic and strategic importance; therefore, all weak



states in this area would be supported by the U.S.<sup>35</sup> In his speech, Truman did not say anything about the Black Sea or the Balkans but diplomatically he implied that priority support would be given to Turkey and Greece, and his speech was clearly showing that the American confrontation with the Soviets would start at the Southern coast of the Black Sea. George

Kennan's famous telegram to the Department of State about Soviet intentions accelerated the shift and the Truman Doctrine one year after formulated a new American foreign policy towards the Black Sea. To enforce the new world order, U.S. policymakers decided to keep the Soviets on the Northern coast of the Black Sea, which naturally meant that their interests in the region would not be limited to prosperity anymore. That was a radical change in the U.S. Black Sea policies. The defense of the Middle East, Eastern Mediterranean, and Balkans, or the containment of the Soviets in general, started in the Black Sea.

## **The Soviets systematically complained about the U.S. presence around the Black Sea and American naval visits to Turkish ports in the Straits**

Following the Truman Doctrine, U.S. officers and experts were appointed to Turkey to establish military bases and monitor Soviet activities in the region. The Turkish government welcomed U.S. strategic interests and allowed U.S. officers to access top-secret military areas.<sup>36</sup> Yet, U.S. policymakers believed that their position in the Black Sea was vulnerable because of two obstacles. First, Turkey's traditional neutrality policies were dangerous as, if strictly followed; Ankara would not allow the U.S. to use its ports, straits, or airbases. The Turks were afraid of the Soviet threat, but more should have been done to guarantee Turkey's wholehearted support.<sup>37</sup> The solution to this problem was to support Turkey's accession to NATO. While the first problem was political, the other was technical. Under the Montreux Convention (1936), it was impossible to keep a naval power over a definite size and more than twenty-one days in the Black Sea. The U.S. was not a signatory to the convention but had to act in conformity with international law, so as not to be seen as a rule-breaker. In this case, principles clashed with the element of power as the former did not promote U.S. national interests. The U.S. had no option but to keep a large naval power in the Eastern Mediterranean to monitor Soviet activities in the Black Sea. In this plan, the famous Sixth Fleet would visit Turkish ports in the Straits and would carry out activities to control the Black Sea.

The Soviet reaction to the U.S. demonstration of power in the Black Sea region came only after Stalin's death in 1953. A note sent by the new Communist Party Secretary-General Khrushchev to Ankara did not lift the Soviet demands on the Straits and revision of Montreux, but it used gentle wording of reconciliation.<sup>38</sup> In the meantime, the Soviets systematically complained about the U.S. presence around the Black Sea and American naval visits to Turkish

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effective facilities than the U.S. in the Mediterranean. All in all, the U.S. ambitions in the Black Sea region triggered more active Soviet policies in the Mediterranean and the power balance between the parties did not significantly change during the rest of the Cold War.

These early Cold War policies around the Black Sea show that power was the most critical element in U.S. foreign policy towards the region. The objective of prosperity lost momentum during these years as the countries around the Black Sea, except for Turkey and Greece, were controlled by a communist power that did not believe in the value of free trade. Principles such as democracy and human rights were proposed by U.S. policymakers to weaken the Soviet regime, but not too passionately as preserving the balance of power between the two blocs was the main priority. Likewise, when formulating Cold War policies, U.S. officials stated their intentions of bringing global peace, but first, the Soviet regime had to be removed to accomplish that, which made power more important than peace. This power-oriented outlook would be significantly transformed when the Soviet regime ended in 1991.

### **All Ps Together: American Black Sea Policies after the Cold War**

The collapse of the Soviet Empire initiated a unipolar moment in which the U.S. found itself as the only superpower in the world. While the victory undoubtedly created unprecedented excitement as the 'end of history' arguments demonstrated,<sup>41</sup> the new period also opened every issue and every region to U.S. interests. The Black Sea region was no exception and U.S. policymakers could not limit their regional interests with certain priorities as happened in the past. Indeed, in the early 1990s, the main priority of the U.S. in the Black Sea region was to help peaceful transition from the communist rule to a democratic political system and a market-oriented economy. Then President George

ports in the Straits.<sup>39</sup> The Soviets also strengthened their Black Sea and Eastern Mediterranean naval power, known as *Eskadra*, while developing missile and naval technology, especially after the 1960s, to balance U.S. power in the region.<sup>40</sup> Soviet naval activities passing in both ways through the Straits sharply increased as the *Eskadra* started using Egypt's North Alexandria, Port Said, and Sallum ports. Technically *Eskadra* was weaker than the Sixth Fleet but it had more

H. W. Bush was fully aware that if the U.S. had attempted to exploit its advantageous position in its relations with the Gorbachev Government, especially when two leaders were discussing a nuclear weapons issue, it would have only backfired. By focusing on peace, the Bush Administration promised not to recognize the independence of Black Sea countries, especially Ukraine, until Russia did; cooperated with Russia on dismantling nuclear weapons in the former Soviet republics; and did not exploit the power competition between Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin by choosing a side.<sup>42</sup> The U.S. priority in the Black Sea was not ambitious and quite clear: preventing a political and nuclear catastrophe in the former Soviet territories.

Starting in 1994, U.S. interests in the Black Sea took a more diversified and complicated form. This policy shifted for a number of reasons. First, the 'modest' transition from communism to a market-oriented democratic system did not produce the desired changes in Russia and its neighborhood. Western-based reforms could not solve the problems of corruption and poverty in Russia and those pro-Western politicians were blamed for representing Western interests.<sup>43</sup> Economic and political problems increased the power of nationalists and Eurasianists in the country and Yeltsin was forced to adopt more assertive policies in the Russian neighborhood. The early draft of the Russian Military Doctrine of 1993 adopted a highly critical tone about the American presence in the Russian neighborhood, in that it complained about the introduction of foreign troops in contiguous states and near Russian borders.<sup>44</sup> In the same year, the Russian government announced the 'Near Abroad Doctrine' which clarified that "the entire area of the former Soviet Union is one of Russia's vitally important interests."<sup>45</sup> With the return of the realpolitik mindset, the U.S. once more linked the objective of peace with power by entering a competition of influence with Russia in the Black Sea region.

Second, the role of prosperity in shaping American policies in the Black Sea region increased more than ever after the Clinton Administration showed interest in the rich energy sources of the newly independent states in Central Asia and Caucasia. Azerbaijan and Georgia, especially, which were deeply worried about Russia's Near Abroad Doctrine, attempted to keep out of Russia's orbit by using a 'pipeline diplomacy,' which proposed control on energy resources and routes in return for U.S. political support in regional issues.<sup>46</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, the former National Security Adviser in the Carter Administration, played a particularly significant role in directing President Clinton's attention to the importance of the Caucasus and Central Asia. Brzezinski saw the Eurasian landmass as a critical geostrategic area, the 'chessboard' as he defined, "on which the struggle for global primacy continues to be played."<sup>47</sup> Combined with his professional interests as a consultant to Amoco oil company, the strategic importance of the region pushed Brzezinski to warn the Clinton Administration that it would be a strategic mistake to ignore the en-

Georgia's Foreign Minister Zalkaliani and Ukraine's Foreign Minister Kuleba attended a session of a NATO Foreign Ministers meeting with Georgia and Ukraine on December 1, 2021 in Riga, Latvia. Kuleba called on NATO for a 'deterrence package' to stop Russia launching an invasion of his country.

GINTS IVUSKANS /  
AFP via Getty Images



ergy interests in the region.<sup>48</sup> Through the Brzezinski channel, the Clinton Administration tried to convince the Azerbaijani leadership to carry Azeri oil through Turkey, in other words, bypassing Russian territory.<sup>49</sup> When Georgia joined this U.S.-led project, an oil block that resisted Russian regional influence emerged and it made the Black Sea region a critical hot spot in the U.S.-Russia energy competition.

Finally, principles entered the U.S. formulation of national interests as power and economic competition with Russia intensified in the mid-1990s. Although democratic reforms failed in Russia, the emphasis on democratization did not lose its value in this period as, in accordance with popular democratic peace theory, it was believed that when newly independent countries adopted democratic systems, the conflict within and between them would diminish and there would be order and stability in former Soviet regions. Democratization demands targeted the Black Sea countries such as Ukraine and Georgia, in particular, as their stability was critical for European security. When the power competition arose between the U.S. and Russia, the democratization of these countries also became essential to U.S. national interests as their inclusion in a Western world turned into a critical element in neo-containment policies. Therefore, U.S. officials started voicing their support for Ukraine and Georgia's membership in Western institutions such as NATO and the EU to introduce democracy and a free market into these countries. Democratic development of the Black Sea countries became an important driver of U.S. involvement in the region as funding and technical assistance to sustain civil society insti-

tutions and promote democracy in Black Sea countries were adopted by the State Department in the mid-1990s.<sup>50</sup>

This multi-dimensional focus on the Black Sea region in the post-Cold War period was problematic for two reasons, one external and the other internal. The external problem was the elusiveness of the unipolar moment. After al Qaeda

attacked the World Trade Center on 9/11 2001, the Bush Administration mistakenly believed that unlimited U.S. power would provide the U.S. with the luxury of acting unilaterally in international affairs. Yet, when the Afghanistan and Iraq operations quickly turned into a quagmire, American officials realized that they needed to balance American interests in distant geographies. To ease the military operations in Afghanistan, the Bush Administration needed to cooperate with Putin's Russia in Central Asia, a policy that automatically diminished aggressive anti-Russian policies in the Black Sea. Although President Bush gave vocal support to the color revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia and backed these countries' membership in NATO,<sup>51</sup> his reluctance to confront Russia in the Black Sea encouraged Putin to attack Georgia in the summer of 2008. The same dilemma was also seen in the Obama Administration as Washington's other foreign policy interests – such as withdrawal from Afghanistan or the necessity to coordinate policies with Russia over the nuclear negotiations with Iran – caused U.S. retrenchment from the Black Sea region.<sup>52</sup> When Russia annexed Crimea and Russian paramilitary forces started conflicts in Eastern Ukraine, Washington remained passive against Russian militarist attempt to enlarge its sphere of influence in the Black Sea. Finally, when an untraditional president, Donald Trump, came to power and adopted 'the doctrine of patriotism' instead of 'the ideology of globalism,'<sup>53</sup> Clinton's pivot in the Black Sea simply disappeared. Trump's nationalist preferences focused on reorganizing U.S. foreign policy commitments instead of multiplying them due to alliance relations with regional countries.

The internal problem that diminished the value of Clinton's focus on the Black Sea region was the growing partisanship in U.S. politics. For decades, the Cold War dynamics helped U.S. politicians to create bipartisan foreign policymaking. Yet, when the Soviet Union disappeared, there was little motivation to encourage cooperation between political blocs. While growing partisanship manifested in different forms, in terms of foreign policy it has led all presidents to follow the opposite policies of their predecessors. As the presidency has changed hands between the Republicans and Democrats in the post-Cold War

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period, every president has come to power with the motto, ‘anything but [just name the former president],’ and this has brought constant shifts in U.S. foreign policy, as each president started his presidency with different objectives. Therefore, George W. Bush was not really interested in following Clinton’s multidimensional Black Sea policies against Russia given that his focus was the Middle East, not the Black Sea region. Even before 9/11, Bush believed that he could have trustworthy relations with Putin as he “got a sense of [Putin]’s soul” after looking him in the eye.<sup>54</sup> When American-Russian relations deteriorated in the Black Sea because of Russia’s attack against Georgia in the last year of the Bush presidency, Barack Obama tried to “reset” relations with Russia because the U.S. had “many important strategic and security interests, and we need to make progress where we can,” as Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated.<sup>55</sup> And when the Russian invasion of Crimea hardened the Obama Administration’s position against Russia, Trump changed U.S. regional policies in the Black Sea once more by adopting a soft stance against Moscow’s militarist policies. In short, growing partisanship in U.S. domestic politics and constant shifts of the presidency between Democrats and Republicans in the post-Cold War period prevented the formation of stable and continuous policy preferences in the Black Sea region.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the U.S. enlarged its Black Sea policies not only in geographical terms but also in terms of interests. Prosperity and principles especially entered into the policy calculations as U.S. officials believed that they could follow multiple objectives in distant geographies. When they understood the fact that the unipolar moment was an illusion, they tried to balance interests in the Black Sea region which only increased ambiguity and insecurity in the region. When Ukraine and Georgia exaggerated their values in terms of American prosperity and principles and challenged the regional influence of Russia, their leaderships simply found themselves deserted as Russia responded with military actions. All in all, when the U.S. tried to follow all 4 Ps at the same time, it not only failed but also risked the security of several regional allies in the region.

## Conclusion

This paper attempts to explain American foreign policy objectives in the Black Sea region by adopting Jentleson’s 4 Ps framework in the historical process. The analysis first found that historically American administrations focused on certain objectives and avoided complex policies in the region. Before the Cold War Washington’s main regional priority was to follow economic relations and foster free trade in the region. Although the economic relations with the regional countries did not develop as much as U.S. officials desired, the open status of the Straits was important for the principle of free trade. Yet,

disinterest in the region was quite clear as the U.S. did not participate in regional agreements and did not show interest in the power balance in the region. With the beginning of the Cold War, power turned into the most important U.S. national interest in the Black Sea. The U.S. attempts to contain the Soviet Union started in the Black Sea as it worked with Turkey to keep Russia

from spreading into the Middle East, Balkans, and Eastern Mediterranean. By keeping the Sixth Fleet in the Eastern Mediterranean, the U.S. attempted to control and monitor Soviet activities in the Black Sea. During these two periods, the U.S. Black Sea policy was limited, stable, and not ambitious. This policy framework did not dramatically change with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Although George H. W. Bush and early Clinton Administrations shifted policy priority from power to peace, the American Black Sea policy remained non-expansive.

The main transformative period was the mid-1990s when the Black Sea turned into a critical region in American foreign policy as the U.S. aggressively backed energy projects and promoted democratization. What Clinton attempted to do in the Black Sea was to follow all national interests –power, peace, prosperity, and principles– at the same time. While this policy shift was revolutionary in terms of Black Sea policies, it was problematic for two reasons. First, U.S. foreign policy objectives after 9/11 exceeded the power capacities of the country and with the failures in Afghanistan and Iraq, the U.S. had to prioritize certain regions and objectives over others. When the Bush, Obama, and Trump Administrations focused on the Middle East, Far East, and no region respectively, the Black Sea lost its prominence in foreign policy calculations. Second, growing polarization in U.S. domestic politics made it difficult to follow stable and continuous foreign policies in the Black Sea, which offered an opportunity for Russia to spread its influence in the Black Sea. Bush wanted to change Clinton's foreign policies by cooperating with Russia but at the end of his presidency, Russia took advantage of it and attacked Georgia. When Obama came to power, he dreamt of resetting relations with Russia, but he too was facing Russian aggression, this time against Ukraine, in the Black Sea at the end of his term. Trump, on the other hand, did not value foreign policy commitments while he wanted to develop ties with Russia. Now Moscow has spread its influence in the region by taking another Black Sea country, Turkey, to its side but this time through peaceful means. Twenty-five years after Clinton initiated his Black Sea pivot, the U.S. seems to be losing the Black Sea region to Russia piece by piece.

## **The U.S. attempts to contain the Soviet Union started in the Black Sea as it worked with Turkey to keep Russia from spreading into the Middle East, Balkans, and Eastern Mediterranean**

## **When Russian military forces attacked Ukrainian territory in February-March 2022, the hesitation of the Biden Administration to send military force to help the Ukrainian Government and its refraining from going beyond economic sanctions showed the limits of what the U.S. can accomplish in the Black Sea region**

The problem of overextension is continuing in American Black Sea policies. Similar to his predecessors, Joe Biden came to the presidency with expansive policy objectives by emphasizing America's global leadership role while showing an aggressive stance towards Russia. In the pre-election process, Biden's rhetoric focused more on peace, prosperity, and principles; as he pointed out the necessity to "mobilize global action on global threats," to "succeed in a global economy with a foreign policy for the middle class," and to cooperate with "the coalition of democracies." Nevertheless, in the end, all these objectives simply meant to serve the renewal of the American global leadership and/or power.<sup>56</sup> Biden believed that as "no nation has [the required] capacity" and "no other nation is built on [the] idea [of liberty]," "it falls to the United States to lead the [world]." And he saw Putin's Russia as one of the main threats against American primacy. He argued that Russia was afraid of a strong NATO and to counter Russian aggression, the U.S. and its allies should keep the military capabilities sharp while expanding the Alliance's capacity to fight against nontraditional threats such as cyber-attacks and disinformation campaigns. Biden also urged to impose costs on Russia's violations of international norms and backing those in Russian society fighting against "Putin's kleptocratic authoritarian system."<sup>57</sup>

Similar in the past, words were sharper than deeds and if this rhetoric encouraged anti-Russian forces in the Black Sea region, they were simply disappointed in the first year of the Biden Administration. To see Biden's resolution, Putin's Russia occasionally tested America's Alliance commitments in the region; but Biden, in general, refrained from engaging with Russia and seemed focused more on domestic problems rather than following an active leadership policy in the Black Sea region. For example, only four days after Biden came to power, it is reported that Russia violated the truce in Ukraine by shelling the Pivdenne region of that country and continued this kind of truce violation throughout 2021. It is even argued that Russia was planning to invade the Donbas region of Ukraine in the spring of that year by using paramilitary forces and other possible means, involving the largest Russian deployment near the Ukrainian border since 2014, according to the Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby.<sup>58</sup> Biden's reaction to these developments was the announcement of sending two warships to the Black Sea and then a subsequent cancellation of this deployment to prevent a military crisis with Russia

over Ukraine.<sup>59</sup> When a similar lack of a resolution was showed by the Biden Administration during a military confrontation in the Black Sea two months later, America's regional allies started worrying that Biden would pull back from the Black Sea and cut military aid to Ukraine to start a 'beautiful friendship' with Russia.<sup>60</sup> At the end of the year, once more U.S. and Russian warships confronted each other in the Black Sea and both parties issued warnings and threats against each other, but at the end, Biden declared that he will not send U.S. troops to Ukraine to deter the Russian threat,<sup>61</sup> which showed Putin that the U.S. was talking but not acting in the face of Russia's determination in the close neighborhood. Finally, when Russian military forces attacked Ukrainian territory in February-March 2022, the hesitation of the Biden Administration to send military force to help the Ukrainian Government and its refraining from going beyond economic sanctions showed the limits of what the U.S. can accomplish in the Black Sea region.

What the U.S. administrations should do –and what they could not manage to do since the end of the Cold War– is to decide what they want. The 'unilateral moment' created an illusion among the U.S. policymakers that they can reach all their objectives, namely power, peace, prosperity, and principles, without any difficulty. It has been proven in the last two decades that even the strongest country in the world has neither the capacity nor the will to achieve all these objectives at the same time as they fundamentally clash with each other. Power-seeking policies often contradicted the interests of other regional powers which created instability in several regions including the South China Sea, the Middle East, and the Black Sea region. The objective of prosperity could not be realized in the middle of war and conflicts; instead, the result has been the migration flows and increasing inequality among the regional economies. Finally, principles remained merely an 'empty speech' when rhetoric does not turn into action because of national interests. It should be remembered that the U.S. was most successful in its history when U.S. policymakers made a priority list and refrained from foreign policy overextension. In this regard, if the priority is power and peace, the U.S. may follow realist policies as in the Cold War and assume the leadership at most within the 'Western regions' while not interfering in the power dynamics of other regions. If the priority is prosperity, the 19<sup>th</sup> century U.S. foreign policy is a great example that a productive and industrious society can enrich itself by avoiding extensive military commitments and power ambitions. If the priority is the principles, the experience shows that certain political ideas and values are not seen as universal and given. Non-Western countries and societies will resist democracy and liberalism especially when these values are imposed by force; therefore, what the U.S. could do at most is to spread these values by being an 'example' which necessitated an abdication of hegemonic policies. Any of these decisions would lead to a different future not only in the Black Sea region but also in world politics. ■

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