

**LBRIS**

We know  
books

# **BLACK SWANS IN THE BLACK SEA**

*coord. Lt. Gen. (ret.) Ben Hodges & George Scutaru*

*This project was carried out with the support of Leviatan Group*

The logo for Leviatan Group features a stylized red wave above the word "Leviatan" in a bold, black, sans-serif font, with the word "GROUP" in a smaller, black, sans-serif font underneath.

**Leviatan**  
GROUP

The logo for Tritonic Books consists of a large, bold, black lowercase letter 't' followed by three small black squares. Below this graphic, the word "TRITONIC" is written in a bold, black, sans-serif font, and "Tritonic Books" is written in a smaller, black, sans-serif font.

**t...**  
**TRITONIC**  
Tritonic Books

București | 2026

**Black Swans in the Black Sea**

coord. Lt. Gen. (ret.) Ben Hodges &amp; George Scutaru

Copyright © Autori

Copyright © TRITONIC 2026 pentru ediția prezentă.

Toate drepturile rezervate, inclusiv dreptul de a reproduce fragmente din carte.

## TRITONIC

Str. Coacăzelor nr. 5, București  
e-mail: editura@tritoninc.ro  
www.tritoninc.roTritonic București apare la poziția 18 în lista cu Edituri de prestigiu recunoscut în domeniul științelor sociale (lista A2) (CNATDCU):  
[http://www.cnatdcu.ro/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/A2\\_Panel41.xls](http://www.cnatdcu.ro/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/A2_Panel41.xls)

Colecția New Strategy Center.

**Descrierea CIP a Bibliotecii Naționale a României****Black swans in the Black Sea** / coord.: Ben Hodges &  
George Scutaru. - București : Tritonic Books, 2026  
Conține bibliografie  
ISBN 978-606-749-896-7

I. Hodges, Ben (coord.)

II. Scutaru, George (coord.)

327

Coperta: Alexandra Bardan  
DTP: Ioan Dorel Radu  
Editor: Rebeca Cojocaru  
Comanda nr. NSC01/2026  
Bun de tipar: Aprilie 2026  
Tipărit în România

Orice reproducere, totală sau parțială, a acestei lucrări, fără acordul scris al editorului, este strict interzisă și se pedepsește conform Legii dreptului de autor.

**CUPRINS****INTRODUCTION***Lt. Gen. (ret.) Ben Hodges, George Scutaru* .....7**BLACK SWANS IN THE BLACK SEA REGION:  
WARFIGHTING READINESS***General (ret.) Sir James Everard KCB CBE* ..... 11**BLACK SEA SECURITY IN A CONTESTED GEOPOLITICAL  
LANDSCAPE***Ambassador Tacan Ildem* ..... 21**WHAT NIGHTMARES FOR FRANCE IN THE BLACK SEA  
REGION?***Cyrille Bret, PhD* .....39**A NUCLEAR BLACK SEA?***Colonel (ret.) Robert E. Hamilton* ..... 49**CHALLENGING CONVENTIONAL WISDOM IN ASSESSING  
A FUTURE BLACK SEA REGION***Phillip A. Petersen, Ph.D* ..... 65**THINKING THE UNTHINKABLE: A TSUNAMI IN THE  
BLACK SEA***Dr. Antonia Colibasanu* ..... 83**THE BLACK SEA SECURITY DILEMMA: ESCALATION  
RISKS IN A FRAGMENTED STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT***Yordan Bozhilov* .....99

**FROZEN WAR, FLUID INSTABILITY: HOW AN UNJUST  
PEACE IN UKRAINE WOULD BECOME A BLACK SWAN  
FOR MOLDOVA AND THE BLACK SEA**

*Iulian Groza*.....115

**THE TRANSNISTRIAN GAMBIT: A NEW FRONT IN THE  
BLACK SEA REGION**

*Radu Burduja*.....127

**BLACK SEA BLACK SWANS – Georgia: not at a crossroads  
but permanently in Russia’s domain**

*Maia Otarashvili*.....145

**BLACK SWAN OVER THE BLACK SEA – The worst-case  
scenario: Russia’s aggression toward Armenia**

*Major General (ret.) Vakhtang Kapanadze* .....169

**RUSSIAN BLACK SWANS IN THE BLACK SEA**

*Admiral (ret.) Ihor Kabanenko*.....185

**ONLY BLACK SWANS IN THE CLUB**

*Mykhailo Samus*.....197

**THE LAKE OF BLACK SWANS**

*Rear Admiral (ret.) Iuri-Alexandru Covaleov*.....207

**RUSSIA’S NEXT BLACK SWAN: ROMANIA’S CAMPIA  
TURZII AIR BASE**

*Glen E. Howard*.....223

**RUSSIA’S EXPANSION IN THE SOUTH: GEOPOLITICAL  
AND SECURITY RELATED CHALLENGES IN THE BLACK  
SEA REGION IN THE LIGHT OF RUSSIA’S WAR OF  
AGGRESSION AGAINST UKRAINE**

*Wilfried Jilge*.....249

**THE BLACK SWAN ON THE SNAKE ISLAND**

*George Scutaru and Ion Cristea*.....271

## INTRODUCTION

*Lt. Gen. (ret.) Ben Hodges,  
George Scutaru*

The volume “Black Swans in the Black Sea” is a new project of the New Strategy Center through which we aim to contribute to the identification of scenarios that could have a severe impact on the security and stability of the Black Sea region, with implications for European security as well. We have engaged experts from several countries, with diverse professional backgrounds, precisely in order to stimulate creativity and the discovery of possible events, and to evaluate from different perspectives various processes and developments that may influence the fate of the Black Sea region, with continental and global impact.

At the same time, this collection of essays is an effort aimed at achieving a better understanding of the current realities and potential threats in the Black Sea region, as well as the security needs of the states in this space marked by conflicts and by the competition of great powers. The war in Ukraine undeniably influences the security of the region. The aggressiveness and militarism of the Russian Federation, which triggered the war in Georgia in 2008, the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas in 2014, and the large-scale invasion of Ukraine launched in February 2022, affect the security of the Black Sea region, with destabilizing effects at the European and global levels. For Russia, the stakes of the war in Ukraine are far greater, as Moscow seeks to redraw

publish this collective volume under very good conditions. A special word of deep gratitude goes to Cătălin Podaru and Leviatan Group, who supported this book project and who have also stood by us in other projects carried out by the New Strategy Center both in Romania and abroad. This represents a concrete example of cooperation between the independent expertise community and the Romanian business environment, which understands the interdependence between security and prosperity, and between foreign policy and economic development.

A large part of the print run of this volume will be donated to cadets and students from military and civilian universities in Romania, as well as from other states in the Black Sea region, thus contributing to the growth of security culture and to a better understanding of the risks and opportunities in this strategic space.

Ultimately, the volume “Black Swans in the Black Sea” is a tool made available to decision-makers, experts from institutions and the independent analytical community, universities and think tanks, as well as representatives of the business environment, with the aim of helping to avoid strategic surprises that could affect the security of the Black Sea region and beyond. We hope that, in this way, we will contribute to decisions that will make the Black Sea region a safer and more prosperous area.

*Lt. Gen. (ret.) Ben Hodges is Member of the International Consultative Board of the New Strategy Center, former Commander of US Army Europe, USA*

*George Scutaru is the CEO of New Strategy Center, former national security advisor to the President, Romania*

## **BLACK SWANS IN THE BLACK SEA REGION: WARFIGHTING READINESS**

*General (ret.) Sir James Everard KCB CBE\**

*‘History is littered with the wars which everybody knew  
would never happen’.*

Enoch Powell, in a speech to the Conservative Party  
Conference, 19 October 1967.

In the dark ages the powerful, and those who sought power, valued the supernatural insights offered by prophets, witches, seers, and sibyls. We still dream of superior anticipation and greater foresight to increase our competitive and comparative advantage. We like the idea of precognition. We want a political and military edge. We hope to avoid pitfalls. We want to manage risks. Today think-tanks, intelligence practitioners, professional analysts and risk managers have replaced the charlatans. These subject matter experts hunt down, absorb and filter the latest information – much of it AI-informed open source (a modern form of magic) – offering prompt, exact, relevant, refined, and actionable assessment, and intelligence. They also model potential futures to find opportunities and risks, allowing decision-makers to move beyond prediction towards shaping outcomes. But any forecasts are inevitably

*\* General (ret.) Sir James Everard is Honorary Chairman of the International Consultative Board of New Strategy Center, former Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe, UK*

the result of objective judgement and are never perfect, even less so in this era of profound geopolitical and operational environment change; there is no alchemy that guarantees total knowledge: we will be surprised again. And the trends in the wider Black Sea Region suggest that the biggest thunderbolts may occur here, in what has always been a complicated seascape, and geopolitical, economic military shatter-belt.

In this short essay the New Strategy Centre asked me to identify a negative 'black swan' scenario, originating in the Black Sea Region, yet with impact at both a regional and European level. Not easy. A black swan event is an outlier, a true anomaly and cannot be predicted despite the extreme negative – and just occasionally positive – consequences of our inability to do so. It may be a hard truth, but strategic shocks are politically painful, economically costly and militarily difficult to manage because our leaders are blindsided by events, and it takes time to shift from reactive shock to proactive, strategic action. Having faced a seemingly endless series of strategic shocks this century, including 9–11, the global financial crisis, the pandemic and the Russian intervention in, and subsequent full-scale invasion of Ukraine, we understand the dangers. In response to the Russian threat the Alliance slowly adapted, finally recognising Russia as a direct threat, dropping the long-held desire to form a strategic partnership with Russia (a keystone of the 2010 Strategic Concept: 'Active Engagement, Modern Defence'). Instead, the Alliance strategically redesigned its approach to deterrence and defence, with a new concept, posture, plans, command and control framework, and force models. This in turn energised and energises Alliance peacetime activities, guides military responses in crisis to deter aggression, and military operations in conflict at the strategic, operational and the tactical levels. We assess that to be fully effective this requires the integration of mutually reinforcing, robust, multi-domain effects on an operational-strategic scale

across the totality of the Alliance Area, with the stated intent of defending every inch of Alliance territory. This represented a return to an overarching, Alliance-wide force employment strategy and remains both a positive step and a call to arms. But it is not easy, given the challenges of command, connectivity, collaboration, coherence, and ownership – all in a potentially degraded and contested battlespace – and escalating costs. We should rightly celebrate the adoption of this new approach to deterrence and defence by our leaders, and the gradual implementation by Allies. However, after eight years in NATO (as the Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe, and then Lead Senior Mentor Allied Command Operations) I worry less about black swans and much, much more about black elephants. These are risks that are widely acknowledged and familiar – the elephants in the room – yet even when we have identified them, and decided what needs to be done, we take no action or act too slowly. In this case the risk is to the implementation of the Alliance's Concept for the Deterrence and Defence of the Euro Atlantic Area and related Family of Plans, a challenge best illustrated by the slow pace at which we are building theatre-wide warfighting readiness, including stress-testing our command and control networks, the joint fires kill-chain (a synchronised, multi-domain sensor-to-shooter network) and the Regional Plans developed by the Joint Force Commands. Our collective failure to expeditiously implement these plans, underpinned by a viable and validated theory of success and ready forces that works at every level of command and for every Ally, would be the biggest danger to the security of the Black Sea Region and Europe. This is not unimaginable. Despite increased defence spending, a much strengthened eastern flank, and significant progress in the development of strategic and operational plans, there is still a long way to go as we seek to build, test, scale and validate the warfighting readiness of the Alliance's Collective

Defence system, with too many unknown unknowns and a lack of coherence, particularly at the tactical level. More so, given maturing drone and robotic technologies which have (for now) transformed modern conflict, and the close battle.

NATO has long assessed Northern Finland and Norway, the Baltic area, and Romania as exposed sectors, with General Gheorghiuță Vlad relentlessly highlighting the Foșcani Gate as 'the most serious weakness in Romania's security architecture'. This lowland corridor lies between the Carpathian Mountains and the Danube Delta, and is some 85 km wide and 60 km deep. The terrain creates difficulties for both attacker and defender, but despite this it remains the most likely axis for a Russian attack, and as such is a very critical point on NATO's eastern flank. Indeed, a Russian attack here would not only trigger NATO's collective defence mechanisms, but transform the Black Sea Region into the central theatre for great-power conflict. NATO would expect its forward defensive forces, both manned and increasingly unmanned, to hold ground, to conduct positional defence and act as delaying / fixing force, while connected to Alliance military multi-domain capabilities held at distance to reinforce in multiple forms, including deep land attack from ships and submarines, long-range precision strike from land-based fires, and air power, for counter air and air attack, all complemented by the actions of NATO Special Operations Forces operating in depth, Cyber operations and military activity in Space (and increasingly important and contested domain). For this reason it is likely that Russia would strike US assets and facilities in the Region as a preliminary operation, to try and restrict the employment and freedom of movement of these forces, given their footprint in the Black Sea Region, and the importance of US all-domain combat power, a capability that currently anchors the Alliance. But if front line forces lacked survivability, connectivity, suitable mass and muscle, or their access to all-domain power was restricted for

any reason, and the defensive line was breached, Bucharest would be vulnerable and may even fall. This could lead to the collapse of the Romania state, a major shift in Europe's security order, with a real risk of nuclear escalation. Russian advances here would also dislocate Moldova, and open up the maritime flank, with the Black Sea once again becoming a spring-board for Russian force projection into the Mediterranean and the Orient. The West has long feared the emergence of the Black Sea as a Russia Lake, and yet this increases in likelihood if Russia ever secures the littoral in Ukraine and Romania. We should also not forget that Romania is on track to become the European Union's largest gas producer, with Black Sea offshore projects removing many of the final dependencies on Russia energy. Russia control of the Black Sea would hinder or stop the exploitation of these resources.

Basil Liddell Hart wrote that the British were 'ostriches' from 1919 to 1938, 'and when their heads were jerked out of the sand in 1939 their eyes became too angrily bloodshot to keep clear sight of the strategy best suited to deal with the situation' (*The Defence of the West*, 1950). Over one hundred years later we again face similar challenges and need to do better – do more in our preparedness – across the NATO Area of Operations including (as a priority) the Black Sea Region. This is a geopolitical frontier, and an active war zone. It also remains decisive ground for both NATO and Russia, and represents one of the most fragile, strategically consequential and contested security environments in the world. Speaking to Allied commanders at the tactical level they can see the power that comes from executability of military activities at scale, and the dilemmas this can create for Russia. Yet, too many civilian and military leaders still struggle to visualise how a multi-axis, multi-speed, multi-domain fight would unfold – with the Joint Force Commands on-point, supported by the five Domain Commanders, and two functional commands,

all under SHAPE as a strategic warfighting headquarters, synchronised with non-military lines of activity. It is complex. It needs to be tested. In his diagnosis of the Franco-Prussian War of 1871 Ernest Renan commented that France's loss was above all intellectual ('what we lacked was not in the heart, but the head') given the failure to think through the war in advance. We must not make the same mistake. Combat has transformed in the 21st Century. Survivability is now the prerequisite for combat power; units that can be seen or detected will be struck, and units that are static will be destroyed. But surviving longer is not enough, and our forces need to see first, decide faster, hit harder and more precisely to impose immediate and lasting costs on our adversaries. It is easy to say that victory will depend on local over-match created with precision command arms integration and by good timing, intelligence and rapid effect, and not by mass. However, numbers still count and very few armies have fully determined how they will fight at the tactical level, to exploit the advantages of the defender, or how they will protect and sustain combat power in and over time. And despite a NATO Defence Planning Process that now cleverly aligns defence and operations planning – and vastly superior economic, financial and technical resources – the Alliance still lacks the depth of sustainable military capabilities for a long war. SACEUR has told us what he needs, set out in his Minimum Capability Requirement, and even prioritised these needs to close out critical gaps more rapidly, but we are still building our forces far too slowly. Time is not on our side: 'jam tomorrow, jam yesterday – but never jam today' (words spoken by the White Queen in *Through the Looking-Glass*, 1871) is an absurdism given the Russian threat. These factors demand scrutiny, resolution, testing and validation now. As Liddell Hart warned us when it comes to generating military capability, Ostrichism is suicidal.

More so now. Reading the carefully judged remarks by the Under Secretary of War for Policy, Elbridge Colby, at the NATO Defence Ministerial in February this year – on NATO 3.0 and the need for Europe to field the preponderance of the forces required to deter and, if necessary defeat conventional aggression in Europe – he was honest about the impact of US reprioritisation: 'for Europe this means moving beyond inputs and intentions towards outputs and capabilities. Defence spending levels matter, and there is no substitute for it. But what matters at the end of the day is what these resources produce: ready forces, usable munitions, resilient logistics and integrated command structures that work at scale under stress.' My deduction? When it comes to measuring fighting power in Europe, we need to be relentlessly empirical. We must deal in facts and data, judging our strength by what can be observed, tracked and, where possible, counted, not a projection of future capability framed by the NATO Defence Planning Process timeline, in which Allies undertake to deliver military capabilities in the short (0–6 years) to medium term (7–19 years). This is another elephant in the room. Yes, we can celebrate the spending surge by non-US Allies – over \$560 billion annually by end-2025 – but it can take years for Allies to procure, receive and integrate new equipment and build war-stock, a challenge compounded by the very necessary support provided to Ukraine, and the very slow delivery (the curse) of some combat capabilities from industry, given the continuing imbalance between demand and supply. Looking at our Forward Land Forces we also need to decide if the American way of war and their pursuit of battlefield dominance based on all-domain convergence is anchored in a realistic theory of success and defeat mechanism for European armed forces. Do European Chiefs of Defence believe that they have prepared land forces for warfare today? The test of an army is its readiness for war. European armies have developed

their own symmetrical and asymmetrical defeat mechanisms for the future of warfare – new ways of winning, often built around the idea of defence dominance – that may represent a more appropriate level of ambition, while still retaining the ability to draw on the US ‘hammer’. It is true that the Multi-Domain Operations concept lacks tactical clarity, and is not a warfighting methodology, and the Alliance should ‘take a hard look at whether Multi-Domain Operations is a feasible, acceptable, suitable, and complete doctrine for the totality of NATO’s 32 member states’ (Multi-domain Operations – The Pursuit of Battlefield Dominance in the 21st Century, Amos C. Fox & Franz-Stefan Gady, 2026). The big idea is solid, with Alliance plans – informed by a series of indicators and warning – aligned with national defence plans, national forces and national operations, with ‘multiple regional activities and defence operations integrated and mutually reinforcing to establish a single strategic-scale defence, under the command of SACEUR’ (NATO’s Concept for the Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area (DDA), Stephen Covington, Strategic and International Affairs Advisor to SACEUR) but this needs to be demonstrated; as recognised by the Alliance to deter requires the unambiguous and demonstrable ability to defend. There are other system weaknesses / bad habits we need to break. Examples would include our failure to exploit unmanned systems and disruptive technology at pace. Here we see Allies making small batch purchases, with the intent of surging production in crisis, but this is unlikely to create the numbers needed given pressures on supply chains and demand as peace turns to crisis. We need to move from just-in-time to just-in-case logistics, and build appropriate levels of war-stock. We should discard whole fleet management models. We must simultaneously improve the connective tissue and clarity of data between allies, and across the strategic, operational and tactical levels of command. We must exploit technology, yet

avoid technological determinism. These are all challenges that are so often hard to do, but urgently need to be addressed.

What are the practical steps that Romania needs to take to demonstrate that they can see the elephant in the room and are building true warfighting readiness? This is a subject worthy of a longer essay, but Romania is the best of Allies – a bastion for NATO on its eastern flank – and the perfect test-bed for the implementation of the Regional Plans, including their coherence with the national defence plans / tactical plans developed by Romania and other Allies, including France who act as framework nation for the NATO Multi-national Brigade in country. These plans must all be in lock-step, and demonstrate that the connection to Alliance military multi-domain capabilities held at distance to reinforce in multiple forms is robust. It is the targeting cycle that must be the rate-defining factor in Romanian operational and tactical tempo. NATO should also expand and test its ability to fight in a degraded environment. Distributed and dispersed command and control is easily said, and less easily done. Allies also need to be able to fight with no connectivity at all, with well understood procedures that kick-in when communications are lost. We believe that future wars will be defined by automation and robotics, with the UK Chief of the General Staff committed to a 20–40 – 40 vision, with only 20% of platforms crewed, 40% attritable and 40% consumable, but we are not experimenting at scale. We need to validate logistics, infrastructure and host-nation support. Allies have also adopted the ‘enhanced resilience objectives’ – and seven baseline requirements – continuity of government and critical services, resilient energy supplies, dealing with the uncontrolled movement of people, resilient food and water resources, handling mass casualties, resilient civil communication systems and resilient transportation systems – that focus on strengthening the ability of Allies to prepare

for, resist, respond to and recover from strategic shocks or more routine destabilising operations conducted by Russia. When it comes to civil preparedness this is a start, and in time we must move beyond resilience to become more anti-fragile, with systems that thrive and improve when exposed to stress, disorder, volatility, and shocks. Romania is again the perfect test-bed for this work to be developed and validated. None of this is easy, but it is certainly not impossible given one key lesson: the more we train, the better we understand, and the more we understand, the more proficient we get and the less bold and treasure we will expend. Above all we all need to challenge our complacency, and remember that, ‘Nothing has aided the persistence of falsehood, and the evils resulting from it, more than the unwillingness of good people to admit the truth when it is disturbing to their comfortable assurance’ (Why We Don’t Learn from History, Basil Liddell Hart, 1944).

## **BLACK SEA SECURITY IN A CONTESTED GEOPOLITICAL LANDSCAPE**

*Ambassador Tacan Ildem\**

### **Abstract**

Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 crystallised a decade-long deterioration in Black Sea security, rooted in the 2008 Russo-Georgian War and the 2014 illegal annexation of Crimea. The conflict has transformed the Black Sea into a core theatre of geopolitical competition, linking NATO’s eastern and southern flanks and exposing limitations in earlier deterrence frameworks. Despite significant degradation of the Russian Black Sea Fleet through Ukrainian asymmetric operations, Moscow’s Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) architecture continues to shape regional balances and enable power projection into the Mediterranean.

This article assesses Black Sea security through the lens of NATO littoral states, with particular emphasis on Türkiye’s role and trilateral cooperation with Bulgaria and Romania. It argues that Black Sea security must be treated as an interconnected theatre; that multi-domain deterrence, spanning land, air, sea, cyber and space, as well as the informational domain, must replace single-domain-focused models; and that a transformed

---

*\* Ambassador Tacan Ildem is the Chairman of the Centre for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies – EDAM, and former Permanent Representative to NATO, Türkiye*