

## BOOK REVIEW

**Maritime power in the Black Sea**, Deborah Sanders, London, Ashgate, 2014, 256 pp., US \$116.89, ISBN 1409452964, 978-1409452966

*Maritime Power in the Black Sea* was released at a time when the Black Sea region was in the limelight due to the events unfolding in Ukraine and annexation of the Crimea by Russia in 2014. These developments had a profound effect on maritime power in the region. The Black Sea occupies a geopolitically important space. It is located between Europe, Asia and the Middle East, and is situated in the heart of vital hydrocarbon assets and important passage for future energy reserves. Since the Black Sea littoral countries have geographical contiguity, and share common history and maritime security threats, this area is considered an important region.

The region has emerged as the battleground to exert influence in the Black Sea. It has many frozen conflicts and is increasingly facing non-traditional security threats, and the region is “recognised as a source of instability and insecurity” (p. 3). Considering the dilemma in defining the boundary of the region, this book restricts itself to an in-depth analysis of the maritime power of the six littoral countries of the Black Sea. They are: Ukraine in the north, Russia and Georgia in the east, Romania and Bulgaria in the west and Turkey in the south of the Black Sea. Assessing the maritime power of the state is the focus of the book and it provides a good insight into the interests and objectives of the six littoral states of this region.

The book begins with defining the concept of maritime power and how to measure it effectively. With it, this book contributes to the scholarly discourse on maritime power while giving a holistic approach to the concept. The author takes three parameters to offer a comprehensive and comparative framework to analyse the ability of the six countries sharing their borders with the Black Sea. These criteria are: quantitative factors, qualitative factors and the context in which these countries operate.

The quantitative factor deals with the assessment of maritime resources of the littorals of the Black Sea, which includes both military and non-military seagoing assets. The qualitative factors assesses the ability of a state to transform its military, economic and human resources into maritime power. The third criterion provides a detailed and subjective analysis of each littoral’s objectives and capabilities. It includes foreign relations between the actors in the region as well as the actors outside the region, and how these aspects influence regional and international security.

The author deals with the chapter on “Russia as a maritime power” extensively. The domestic aspects including economic and politics as well as the foreign policy give the reader a good background and understanding of the Russian stakes in the Black Sea and the present Russian conflict with Ukraine. However, the book does not look at Russia-China relations, which have become stronger, especially with the Ukrainian crisis. China has emerged as saviour for Russia since the West has imposed sanctions on Russia. Recently, Russia hosted Chinese ships in the Black sea base of Novorossiysk, which indicates their growing partnership.

Turkey, having the largest coastline in the Black Sea, has a greater stake in the region, and the author traces its increasing maritime power. Turkey has undertaken various initiatives

such as the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organisation, Black Sea Naval Force (BLACK-SEAFOR) and Black Sea Harmony Operation. However, Turkish aspirations of being a maritime power in the region are threatened by factors such as poor civil-military relations and troubled relations with the US and Israel, especially after the *Mavi Marmara* incident in 2010, which in turn affect the strategic balance in the Middle East. The book only reflects the brighter side of Turkey-Russia relations and thus does not conform to current developments, which have recently come under much strain after Turkey's fighter jets shot down a Russian warplane which was claimed to violate Turkey's airspace.

Apart from accessing the maritime power of the big stakeholders of the Black Sea, this book also gives equal importance to the small navies like Ukraine, Georgia, Romania and Bulgaria, which have been largely overlooked in literature on the subject. The chapter on Ukraine maritime power has become quite irrelevant since the Ukraine crisis of 2014; however, the epilogue covers up for what was lacking. Sanders mentions that the current crisis has made Black Sea littoral states inclined towards the West, especially the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), and the region has become a zone of confrontation between Russia and the West. By bringing in various factors, the author has attempted to present the complex dynamics of the region in a very simple manner.

The author has also highlighted how the political transition from communism to post communism has influenced these states in building their maritime power. It also covers the economic factors that have affected these states and their investments in the maritime domain. The book highlights that the Georgian economy suffered a severe jolt in the 1990s after the collapse of communism, and thus there was a decline in its defence spending, affecting its maritime power. Further, the Georgian-Russian war in 2008 worsened the case. The book also gives a broad overview of domestic imperatives that shaped the maritime power of these countries.

The book interestingly brings out European Union (EU) and NATO factors that have played an important role in influencing the security dynamics of the region. Romania and Bulgaria are a part of the EU as well as of NATO, while Georgia and Ukraine are also inclined towards the EU. The EU has launched many initiatives for the region such as Black Sea Synergy, Eastern Partnership, etc. The increasing influence of the EU in the region after the recent Ukraine crisis has increased the friction between the EU and Russia. Further, the author highlights that the EU's attempt to break Russia's gas monopoly has also strained EU-Russia relations. Thus, the EU and NATO's conflict brings complexity to the region. The book also deals with the growing engagement and interest of the US in the region which is an extraregional power. This growing presence of the US in, particularly, "the promotion of democracy, its support for Georgian and Ukrainian membership of NATO and the military bases in Bulgaria and Romania" (p. 8) has come in conflict with the strategic interests and influence of Russia in the region. Beside these, US and Russian relations are also strained over Ukraine crisis since 2014.

Perhaps, since the book focuses on a small region comprising only six countries including four small countries, it has been successful in doing justice to each country. However, the way the author has presented each case, including the internal and external as well as intra- and interregional dynamics, in a simple and lucid style is remarkable. This comparative study leads to a deeper understanding of the maritime dynamics of the Black Sea.

Since the book deals with the domestic as well as the foreign policy factors of each littoral state, these enable the reader with a comprehensive understanding of the region. Hence, the book is an asset to the literature on maritime power and is an essential read for scholars

interested in the geopolitics of the area, as well as recommended to a layperson who would like to learn more about the maritime dynamics in the region.

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