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Created:	20241511			Status:	Live
Title	AMBREY THREAT CIRCULAR – 15/11/2024				



# AMBREY THREAT CIRCULAR: TRUMP RE-ELECTION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR BLACK SEA MARITIME SECURITY

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**A. Executive Summary**

- The incoming administration will likely seek to review/revise US policy toward Ukraine and Russia.
- Ambrey has considered the implications for shipping if there were to be a cessation of hostilities.
- Recognition of Russia’s illegal annexation of occupied Ukraine remains unlikely, and sectoral sanctions are unlikely to be lifted wholesale.
- Subject to the shape of an overarching agreement, specific permissions, and surveys, there could be relief to blocked shipping.
- There would be enduring risks of sea mines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) in the Black Sea.
- Direct attacks on merchant shipping would likely be suspended but covert operations and sabotage could continue.
- The current Russian administration cannot be trusted to adhere to its commitments. Some shipping and insurance companies will likely be cautious about calling Ukraine.

**B. Situation**

Donald Trump is scheduled to be inaugurated on 20 January 2025. His administration is expected to advocate for a ceasefire or peace agreement in Ukraine. This proposed “peace plan” will likely make concessions on sanctions for Russia in exchange for security assurances for Ukraine. However, the Kremlin’s history as a treaty signatory raises significant concerns about the reliability and longevity of any such agreements. Russia has a proven tendency to sign agreements and renege on them when expedient.

If the conflict were to reignite following an agreement, it would pose a significant threat to ships in Ukrainian ports, potentially trapping many vessels in a repeat of February 2022. A ceasefire in the Black Sea will lower the immediate risks of physical damage to vessels operating in the region. However, it would not address enduring threats, such as sea mines and UXO. Additionally, it is unlikely that a ceasefire would result in a complete cessation of hostilities. Russia would likely continue to engage in subversive and covert military activities aimed at destabilizing Ukraine and undermining its economy. This could include further deployment of sea mines and acts of sabotage targeting maritime infrastructure.

Trump’s key security and military would-be appointees, including Marco Rubio for Secretary of State, Tulsi Gabbard for Director of National Intelligence, and Mike Waltz for National Security Advisor, alongside Kristi Noem for Homeland Security Secretary, signal a strategic pivot towards viewing China as the primary economic and military adversary. This shift suggests an intention to swiftly “resolve” the conflict with Russia to refocus U.S. efforts on China. However, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov recently stated that the start of Trump’s presidency would not fundamentally change the US position on Ukraine and that any proposals to freeze the frontline are “even worse” than the Russia-favourable Minsk Agreements, which Russia broke, that followed Russia’s invasion of 2014.

Europe’s capacity to support Ukraine independently appears limited by both political will and industrial capability. Both Ukrainian and Russian leaders will likely seek to negotiate from positions of strength, possibly escalating military operations in the interim to gain leverage. The exact terms of any peace, the security implications, and the actions of all stakeholders in the lead-up to and following any agreement will not assuage the regional security uncertainties for a foreseeable future.

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**C. Threat update**

Until an agreement is reached, the threat of a direct Russian attack on merchant shipping and collateral damage to vessels remains heightened. This is because Russia will likely attempt to strengthen its negotiating position by targeting alleged weapons shipments, deterring shipping from calling Ukraine, and strategic port infrastructure.

Once there is a cessation of hostilities, there will remain several risks to shipping. For shipping already blocked in the Dnipro-Bugsky Estuary, the re-opening depends on de-mining and the operational capacity, degraded during the conflict. Ukrainian private enterprises have already taken steps to commence demining and dredging, the latter likely required due to the destruction of the Kakhovka Dam. There is a credible risk that Russia will violate the terms of an agreement, risking blocking and trapping scenarios once more. Given the potential for further Russian aggression, it is a realistic possibility that some Ukrainian minefields will remain in place. Therefore, the threat posed by sea mines and UXO could persist in Ukrainian waters. This could also mean ongoing risk outside of Ukraine’s waters. However, a deal would likely enable NATO Black Sea countries to expand their minesweeping operations, reducing the risk in Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey. Even with an official ceasefire, Russia is expected to persist in conducting covert, and plausibly deniable operations. These could include sabotage and the deployment of additional sea mines.

Unless part of an agreement, Ukraine will likely continue to arrest vessels linked to companies that call Russia-occupied Ukrainian ports. This is because Ukrainian and international policy will highly likely continue to reject the recognition of Russian-‘annexed’ eastern Ukraine and Crimea. These policies are subject to the upcoming elections in Ukraine. Unless Russia withdraws from occupied parts of Ukraine, which is assessed to be highly unlikely, some international sanctions on Russia, including LNG and crude oil exports will remain in place.

**D. Mitigation**

- It is advised to conduct comprehensive and dynamic voyage risk assessments.
- Ships scheduled to call at Ukrainian, Georgian and Russian Black Sea ports must maintain continuous communication with their security providers for timely and regular updates on political developments that could influence national policies toward shipping and port operations.
- It is recommended that vessel operators require their security providers to deliver relevant, near real-time, and actionable intelligence alerts.
- Develop multiple contingency plans for various scenarios, including likely port closures and restart of the conflict. Establish clear thresholds and indicators that, if breached, would necessitate the immediate departure of vessels from the port.
- Operators with a history of calling at ports in Russia-occupied Ukrainian territories should be aware of potential legal implications, including the risk of vessel seizures by Ukrainian authorities.
- Deploy additional onboard lookouts to heighten vigilance for sea mines and UXO, especially when navigating or anchoring in high-risk areas.
- Ensure crew members receive specialized training to recognize suspicious floating objects and activities and understand the protocols for responding effectively to potential threats. Ambrey provides client vessels operating in the Black Sea with an Ordnance Identification Sheet.
- Stay informed on the current sanctions landscape, including ongoing restrictions related to Russian LNG and crude oil.

**E. Contact information**

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