

MARITIME STRATEGIC EVALUATION FOR ISRAEL 2020/21

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The Russian Navy – Main Trends in 2020 and their Implications for the Middle East

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Background

The year 2020 was characterized by the spread of the Corona pandemic, a slowdown in economic activity and a drop in international trade. The global economic crisis did not pass over Russia. The rising level of infection (despite the Russian reports of the development of the Sputnik-V vaccine) and the overall economic slowdown have had an impact on a variety of its global maritime activities, including those of the Russian navy. However the key maritime geo strategic goals continued to develop in the North Arctic region and consistently in the Middle east, i.e. East Mediterranean Syrian coast footholds, the Libyan coast and a Red sea planned logistic facilities as mentioned (16th November 2020) in Port Sudan. Russia's hegemony aims to export & supply energy with emphasis on fossil fuels and particularly natural gas, refers to the Eastern Mediterranean arena as well, in spite of the global crisis fall in demand, prices and production of these energy products. The decline in this field of activities effected the income of the Russian economy, since energy products constitute one of Russia's largest export sectors. The regional impact of the crisis in the Eastern Mediterranean is liable to hinder Russian involvement in the development of offshore energy projects, such as in Lebanon, Libya, etc., as well as its sea transportation.

Nonetheless, naval activities during the past year aspired to meet the basic planning, as was directed on June 1st, 2020 by Admiral Nikolai Evmenov, the commander of the Russian navy (see Figure 1)¹

This year, Russia is marking the 237th anniversary of the founding of the Black Sea Fleet (on May 13th). At the event, Admiral Evmenov stressed the important role played by this fleet affecting the Russian navy's operational capabilities in the Mediterranean "Permanent Operational Formation of the Russian Navy in the Mediterranean Sea."²The operational experience partly is an outcome of the fighting against the terrorist targets since 2014 in Syria.

- 1 The Russian Ministry of Defense site – The Navy; June 6th, 2020. http://xn--d1acaykgvdf0he1a.xn--90anlfbebar6i.xn--p1ai/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12295177@egNews
- 2 From the Russian Ministry of Defense site, May 13th 2020 – Greetings from Admiral Nikolai Evmenov, the commander of the Russian navy on the anniversary of the fleet which was founded in 1783. http://xn--d1acaykgvdf0he1a.xn--90anlfbebar6i.xn--p1ai/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12291947@egNews



Figure 1: Admiral Nikolai Evmenov, the commander of the Russian navy¹

Another event marked this year was the 75th anniversary of victory over Nazi Germany as part of 'The Great Patriotic War' on June 24th, 2020 (deferred from May 9th as a result of the Corona pandemic). The event included all Russian fleets, including the Black Sea one. Simultaneously, a Kilo-class submarine sailed (above the surface, as by the convention) in a southbound direction through the Turkish straits from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean. A possible added value to this passage could have symbolized a "show of the flag" daylight expression by a Russian strategic vessel, with relations to the festive national memorial event (Figure 2).³



Figure 2: A Russian Kilo-class submarine passing through the Turkish straits on June 24th 2020³

3 From the Forbes site, June 24th, 2020. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/hisutton/2020/06/23/image-shows-russian-submarine-appearing-to-break-international-treaty/?sh=74aee2157b82>

Additional projection of power this year included Naval day which was marked at various bases, including the Syrian coast, on July 26th.⁴ The annual 'Caucasus 2020' exercise, under the command of the Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov, took place during September 21–26, 2020 in the Southern Theater. Some 20 vessels from the Black Sea Fleet took part as well as from the Caspian Sea naval squadron. In addition, missiles as other weapons were fired as President Putin observed.⁵ In late September, the Russian navy held a joint exercise with the Indian navy. This joint maritime cooperation between the two navies has various geostrategic implications, primarily with respect to China (see below). On November 17-24, four Egyptian combat Naval vessels participated in the "Friendship Bridge-III -2020" great maneuver held for the first time in the Black sea region⁶

The rest of the activities, subject to the Corona policy imposed by the Russian navy, included the activities of the various fleets. In the East Mediterranean, in addition to the navy's routine activities, a large-scale joint exercise held with the Syrian navy (on August 21st 2020).⁷ Like many other activities of the Russian navy in the shadow of the Corona virus, warship' crews were isolated, following the experience of other foreign warships since April 2020, within the USN 'Theodore Roosevelt' and the French 'Charles de Gaulle' aircraft carriers.

The buildup of power, development of weaponry, and procurement of the Russian navy continued this year, even though it could have possibly slowed due to the pandemic impacts. In these contexts, there were reports about weaponry tests and some missiles launches, It including the "Tsirkon" Hypersonic Missile, with the speed of Mach 8, from a surface vessel (October 7th 2020, see Figure 3).⁸ In addition, on November 3rd, 2020, an R-30 "Bulava" intercontinental ballistic missile had been launched from a Borei-class submarine, project 995.⁹ A number of

4 From Tass News Agency, May 20th 2020. <https://tass.com/defense/1158531>. The preparations could be seen starting about two days earlier and included the participation of a variety of vessels and aircraft. See the Sputnik site in Arabic, July 24th 2020. <https://arabic.sputniknews.com/military/202007241046090817>

5 From the Tass News Agency, September 24th, 2020. <https://tass.com/defense/1204499>

6 From YouTube, November 14th, 2020. www.youtube.com/watch?v=F649m_Lg32Y&feature=emb_logo Film shows the northbound passage of the Dardanelles over Novorssisk port. According to the mentioned publication Vessels in participation were: Frigate Frame, Frigate OHP class, Corvette Gowind, and Ambassador-III missile boat.

7 From Izvestia, August 21st 2020. <https://iz.ru/1050910/2020-08-21/voennye-rf-i-flot-sirii-proveli-sovmestnye-ucheniia-v-tartuse>

8 Tass News Agency, October 7th 2020. <https://tass.com/defense/1209579>. See Figure 3.

9 Tass News Agency, November 3rd 2020. <https://tass.com/defense/1219491>. See Figure 4.

reports during the year, indicated about some deliveries of new vessels to the navy. President Putin in person participated the ceremony of a new icebreaker held on beginning of November 2020 in the St. Petersburg shipyards. Vessel named 'Viktor Chernomyrdin'¹⁰ of project 22600 (not the atomic propulsion ice breaker 22220 which is still under construction). The attendance in the event of President Putin emphasizes the importance that he attributes to the development of the Northern Arctic region and the development of the Russian ice breakers fleet.



Figure 3: Test launch of the Tsirkon hypersonic missile, October 7th, 2020



Figure 4: Test launch of an R-30 Bulava ballistic missile from a Borei-class submarine, November 3rd 2020

Visits and joint maneuvers in order to show the flag

A force composed by two 'Udaloy' destroyers class 'Admiral Vinogradov' & the 'Admiral Tributs' accompanied by a tanker, left Vladivostok, home port of the Pacific Fleet to participated in the 'Indra' naval exercise together with the Indian navy (September 4–5, 2020). The joint naval exercise took place in the Strait of Malacca, delivering apparently a political mutual message towards China, emphasizing the tightened relations between the two countries. The exercise was preceded by a visit of the Indian Minister of Defense to Moscow, where he met with his Russian counterpart, Sergei Shoigu.¹¹

Another group from the Northern Fleet, led by another Udaloy class anti-submarine destroyer, 'Admiral Kulakov' accompanied by a tanker & tugboat sailed (September-October 2020) over the Mediterranean and visited ports in Algeria, Cyprus, Syria and Greece /Piraeus port.¹² Another joint maneuver between the Russian and Egyptian

10 Tass News Agency, November 3rd 2020. <https://tass.com/society/1219653>.

11 The Economic Times, September 4th, 2020. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/quad-in-action-india-us-japan-australia-navies-begin-first-phase-of-malabar-naval-exercises/videoshow/79047994.cm>.

12 Tass News Agency, October 22nd 2020. <https://tass.com/defense/1215151> (report of the visits to Greece).

navies (above mentioned) held in the Black Sea at late Nov.2020. As the Egyptian force passed through the Turkish straits forth and back, it could be viewed as a political message directed toward Turkey.¹³ It is worthwhile at this point to describe the rivalry between Egypt and Turkey in recent years, after the regime of Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi during 2012–13. Morsi's regime was ideologically based on the Moslem Brotherhood movement in Egypt and that was the reason to create a close accord of relationship with Ankara, despite some historical tensions between the two countries. Both sought for the leadership over the Sunni Muslim world. Morsi's removal from power soured the relations between the two countries, hence both sides had put efforts competing the other, combining huge interests in developing their maritime capabilities, emphasizing their navies. In Turkey the maritime dimension had been developed towards a new doctrine which is called: nation's 'Blue Homeland' ('Mavi Vatan' in Turkish).¹⁴ The rivalry over ideological-religious hegemony of the Muslim-Sunni world reached geo-economic and geo-energetic elements too, with deep attention to the production of fossil fuels in the Eastern Mediterranean. The East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) established in Cairo (January 2020) is dedicated to advance the coordinated exploitation of these resources and the possibility of implementing an EastMed gas pipeline to connect EastMed with south Italy. The Forum members include the neighboring countries: Israel, Greece, Cyprus, Jordan, the Palestinian Authority and Italy. France has asked to join while the US serves as an observer, while Turkey is excluded. Both Turkey & Egypt have been attempted to accelerate their maritime development in other means too, in order to achieve the status of a 'regional power'. Among various frictions being held between the two countries, rivalry in the Libyan front has recently reached the point of a true conflict, and there is a danger of escalation. As Turks support the forces of the Tripoli government (GNA) headed by Fayez al-Sarraj, while Egypt supports the Eastern faction (LNA) led by Khalifa Haftar, together with Russia, France, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and the Gulf Emirates.

Russia attempts to stay away from the Turkish-Egyptian rivalry, even though its involvement in the Libyan complex as others tenses its relations with Turkey. The relations between Russia and Egypt are also complexed. As aforementioned the two share the same side in the Libyan arena, both have shared (end of November 2020) a first mutual naval maneuver in the Black sea for the first time. They share trade also of arms supply to Egypt; Russia constructs infrastructure assets in Egypt, among

13 Tass News Agency, October 11th, 2020; Tass, October 11th, 2020. <https://tass.com/defense/1210889>; and October 8th, 2020. <https://tass.com/defense/1210037>.

14 For a full survey of the Blue Homeland policy, see the chapter by Omri Eilat and Ayal Hayut Mann.

them a nuclear energy reactor in El Dabaa, on the coast, west of Alexandria, close to a water desalination plants ; the creation of a commercial-industrial zone east of Port Said, etc.

The expected impact of Russian activity with respect to the US

During the Obama presidency, the US adopted a policy of reducing its presence in the Middle East, preferring other regions with priority of global focal points, among them China is first within an emphasis to East Asia, by a motto called "Pivot to Asia". Nonetheless, Russia continues to be a leading focus of interest for the US and "*Russia will be high on America's foreign policy agenda, including the Mediterranean basin*".¹⁵ US attention continues to be focused on the Russian presence in Syria, Its' developed role in Libya during the past year and in North Africa. In recent days another arena has risen in the Red sea, with the intent to gain a "logistic facility" at Port Sudan. According to Lesser(2020) ¹⁴every American government will continue to show interest in the Mediterranean region, however US would prefer to be part of an efforts led by the EU rather than leading a direct accord under its dominance activity in the Mediterranean arena.

The growing presence on the Syrian coast

In late May 2020, President Putin ordered an expansion of the Russian presence on the Syrian coast. Two months later (on July 30th), a directive issued by the Kremlin went into effect in order to reinforce Russia's foothold in the logistic maritime center at the port of Tartus, and the better define of the airspace west of the Khmeimim airbase (in central Syrian coast), serves also as main headquarters of the Russian forces in Syria. This directive also expands the foothold on the coast in the Latakia district, in the vicinity of the northern border with Turkey, area that is called Kesab.¹⁶

The publication date of the directive marked five years of Russian involvement and fighting in Syria. The permanent presence in Syria was officially approved by Minister of Defense Shoigu on September 30th, 2020. He stated that along the 5 years

15 Lesser I.O.(2020). "The United States and the Mediterranean in an Age of Shocks," in: Euro-Mediterranean policy observatory (IEMed.) Year Book 2020. Pp.248-250. www.iemed.org/observatori/arees-danalisi/arxiu-adjunts/anuari/med.2020/US_policy_Mediterranean_lan_Lesser_IEMed_YearBook2020.pdf

16 From the official site for legislation of the Russian Federation, August 19th 2020. <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202008190057?index=3&rangeSize=1> This document is an extension of the directive of August 2nd, 2015. Also: the Tass News Agency, May 29th 2020. <https://tass.com/defense/1161849> ; the Al-Arabiya Network, August 21st, 2020. <https://www.alarabiya.net/ar/arab-aworld/syria/2020/08/20>.

period "air strikes and cruise missiles (assumed that also 'Caliber' naval missiles are involved-I.G.) were used to destroy 133,542 terrorist targets, including 400 unlawful refineries and about four thousand refueling facilities. A large number of opposition fighters were killed, including 865 commanders and 4,500 Muslim militia members from former CIS countries"¹⁷

The five years of activity in Syria have kept the Assad regime in power, as President Assad compensated the Russians by giving them a desired permanent foothold in Syria. The official agreement upon was signed in the summer of 2017 and as mentioned was expanded last summer (2020). This includes the leasing of the ports at Tartus and the Khmeimim Air Base, including the coastal strips adjoining these assets. The period of the Russian lease was specified as 49 years (until 2066) with a possibility of a 25-year extension (to the year 2091, almost till the end of the present century). It appears therefore that Russia does not intend to give up its presence in the theater any time soon. Furthermore, the directive issued in the summer of 2020 allows Russia to address its permanence status in Syria, as a message towards the US, as to other players as the regional active powers, in particular Iran, Turkey and even Israel. To other foreign players and potential investors in the region such as China, Eu, the Persian Gulf countries and others. Russia continues currently in propping up Assad's regime despite the lack of political and economical solution to the enormous damages caused by the war, and even more, its costs in terms of the victims & the population from a demographic upheaval that resulted from the massive migration within the country and the immigration abroad. In addition, there has been a significant damage to the country's infrastructure and uncertainty has risen even more due to the Corona crisis. Local incidents in the Syrian coastal area included repeated attempts to attack the Russian bases by the local opposition and terrorist forces by means of drones and various other methods. There also were large-scale fires in October 2020 in the areas under Alawite control on the Syrian coast. In order to protect their bases in Syria, the Russians have employed various methods. Among the protective measures in the port of Tartus, there had been a deployment of sea mammals (which occurred at least two years ago) for the defense of underwater targets (see Figure 5, comment 18).

Efforts to find a solution to the crisis in Syria and the surrounding regions will require a multidimensional approach, on both: the military level and the socioeconomic, political and diplomatic levels. The Russian maritime presence in Syria is based upon a

17 From Tass, September 30, 2020 (the fifth anniversary of Russian involvement in the fighting). <https://tass.com/world/1206679>.

basic policy document for Russian naval strategy up to 2030 (published in July 2017).¹⁸ The document describes the Russian navy as "one of the effective deterrents in the maintenance of Russian strategy" and is intended to ensure the permanent presence of the Russian navy in the Mediterranean and at essential maritime passages.¹⁹ The fighting in Syria is mentioned in the document as an important international arena, with the potential to endanger Russian strategic interests.²⁰



Figure 5: Sea mammal pens on the pier in the port of Tartus²¹

The importance of the port of Tartus for Russia

The Syrian port of Tartus has served as an important stronghold for the Russian navy in the Mediterranean since 1971, when an agreement was reached with President Hafez Assad for the use of the port by the Soviet Union. The agreement was expanded in 1974 following the 'Yom Kippur War' (October war 1973). The Russian presence in the port has therefore been maintained for about 50 years so far and has been expanded in recent years, as mentioned above. In late 2019 and prior to the Corona

18 The Kremlin site, July 20th, 2017: Document 55127 signed by President Putin. Fundamentals of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Field of Naval Operations Period Until 2030. It is worth mentioning that it extends previous documents published in 2001 and 2015.

19 *ibid.*, Fundamentals of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Field of Naval Operations Period Until 2030, Chapter 4, paragraphs 32 and 38 g.

20 *ibid.*, Chapter 2, paragraph 27.

21 From <http://www.hisutton.com/Russian-Navy-In-Tartus-Syria.html> June 24th 2020: Russian Navy Deployed Marine Mammals to Defend Base in Syria. The identification is attributed to at least as early as September-December 2018.

pandemic, Russia addressed its intention to invest about half a billion dollars in the port in order to expand its infrastructure.²² Russia's motives for such expansion could increase its powerful presence as a counterweight to other European superpowers and other players in the Middle East, in order to "*modify its military activity*".²³ The Russian presence in the port of Tartus is illustrated in Figures 6 and 7.



Figure 6: The deployment of first-line ships in the port of Tartus; two Kilo-class submarines and the Admiral Grigorovich-class frigate (October 11th, 2020)²⁴



Figure 7: Deployment of Russian vessels in the port of Tartus (July 2nd, 2020)²⁵

- 22 Foy in the Financial Times, December 3th, 2019. <https://www.ft.com/content/f52bdde6-20cc-11ea-b8a1-584213ee7b2b>
- 23 Svetlova, K. (September 24, 2020). "Russia Marks Five Years of Presence in Syria: Challenges vs. Achievements." The Institute for Policy and Strategy (IPS), Spotlight on Russia in the Middle East. <https://www.idc.ac.il/en/research/ips/pages/russia-middleeast/russia-11-10-20.aspx>
- 24 From <http://www.hisutton.com/Russian-Navy-Base-in-Tartus-Syria.html>; accessed on October 11th, 2020.
- 25 From <http://www.hisutton.com/Russian-Navy-Base-in-Tartus-Syria.html>; accessed on October 7th, 2020. The photograph itself is from July 2nd, 2020.

It appears that the reinforcement of its foothold in Syria and the port of Tartus has provided Russia with stability to continue and proceed the geographic exploitation in deploying over other regions of the Middle East, relatively distant from the Russian homeland, too. Another foothold achieved by Russia during the last year is in Libya, being supportive as mentioned to the forces of the Libyan National Army (LNA) under command of General Khalifa Haftar who fights the the Government National Accord in Tripoli (GNA). The Russian activity is part of a coalition together with other foreign participants. Russia is working as well to expand its cooperation with other countries in North Africa, including Egypt and Algeria. Another arena of interest for Russia refers to east Africa's continent in Sudan, in where it was agreed recently to deploy a naval facility. These geopolitical advantages for Russia, should increase its influence in the near east region, even if the importance of these new posts would not gain the same equivalence to the "*duplicating the Russian activity in the waters off the coast of Syria*".²⁶

The ports of call by Russian vessels in the Mediterranean mean various interests. Among others those in Cyprus and especially in Greece (September-October 2020) are interesting, as they might reflect over Russia's future potential intention to gain a foothold in the port of Alexandroupolis which is located in the northern Aegean Sea and is near the Dardanelles Strait in Turkey. De Palo (2020) describes the competition between Russia, the US and China for the concession to use this port facilities in view of its highly strategic location: at the junction of maritime traffic to and from the Black Sea, at the point where the Trans-Anatolian pipeline and the Trans-Adriatic pipelines branch cross its destinations; at the sea-land seam leading to the Balkans; and its close proximity to the passages between Asia and Europe, including the routes for immigration from Asia over Europe.²⁷

Sino-Russian Relations

The mentioned competition over a potential concession in the Port of Alexandroupolis is definitely not the only one between these two superpowers. Other topics as well as maritime disagreements are parts of a larger scale. A major one considers the control of the Arctic Northern Sea and the ownership of the natural resources under the melting ice cap in that huge and rich region. Another issue would be the

26 Krasik, T. (2018) "Implications and Policy Recommendations" in: Krasik, T. & Blank, S. (eds.) Russia in the Middle East. The Jamestown Foundation, Wa DC. PP. 414–440

27 De Palo, Francesco (28.10.2020) "The three-way derby between China, Russia and the USA for the Greek port of Alexandropolis." In: Formiche.net. <https://formiche.net/2020/10/gas-geopolitica-alexandroupolis>

increasingly close relationship between Russia and India, were manifested at the joint Russian Indian naval exercise in the Malacca Strait in early September 2020. An event which carried a message directed primarily to China (see Figure 8). The Russo-Indo relations include a purchase of Russian arms as well—not limited to naval arm, and joint development of weaponry. The supply of arms to India began already during the Soviet era.



Figure 8: The commanders of the joint 'Indra' naval maneuver (September 2020) on the deck of the command ship²⁸

Russian vessels began their journey from their homeport of Vladivostok on the Pacific Ocean. With a probable connection, China has complained to Russia that its possession of Vladivostok (since 1860) is unlawful since it was taken from China after its defeat by Britain and France and transferred to Russia.²⁹ The Russian-Indian exercise preceded meetings on the defense ministers level to achieve coordination between the two navies, their professional levels of delegations from the two navies. The exercise was preceded by another naval maneuver in which the Russian navy took part, together with the navies of China and Pakistan²⁶. It appears that the joint naval activity with India, which was widely reported mainly in India, illuminates a certain amount of tension in the relations between Russia and China. Among all other matters, there are foci of disagreement also in the Northern Arctic Ocean. The over-all Sino-Russian relations might have changed compared to a year ago, as lights casted the attitude towards a deeper sense of a strategic mutual partnership. A clear expression of this change can be found in the announcement by President Putin (Tass, October 22nd) which quotes "*there is no (further) need for a military alliance with China*" unless the US attacks them simultaneously.³⁰

28 From a clip on YouTube, September 6th, 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aUrpdTJjuk>

29 From a clip on YouTube, September 19th, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iy4b6fmzags>

30 From Tass News Agency. <https://tass.com/defense/1218485>, October 30th, 2020.



Figure 9: Russian President Putin and Indian Prime Minister Modi and opposite them Chinese President Xi²⁶

Putin did not ignore the need to continue the primary forms of cooperation and the need to consist of joint maneuvers on land and at sea, as well as the exchange of technologies for military development. In the former December 2019, the Russian navy took part in a three-day naval maneuver in Iran which included the Russian navy, the Chinese navy and the host navy, that involved also the naval forces of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards. This year, there has been no report of such a three-way exercise and it is unclear whether this is related to the tightening relations between Russia and India or due to the affection of the expected growth of Chinese investment in Iran, which means a decrease in the influence of Russia over the rest two other players Russia and Iran.

Conclusion

Despite the outbreak of the Corona pandemic in 2020, the Russian navy consistently attempted to fulfill its missions according to plan. The relationship with the Chinese navy is a part of the wider relations between the two countries. They could be expressed by the statements of President Putin who diminished the need for forming a military alliance between the two countries. On the other hand, there has been measures which indicate the tightening relationship with the Indian navy. However, Russia's aim to expand and strengthen its global and maritime positions as a key player in the various diplomatic and economic arenas remains still, with an emphasis on the Northern Arctic Ocean. Russia continues to advance its projects over the north region by launching ice breakers, deepening its maritime control over the region, deploying various types of military forces to the region, planning and coordinating its legal position in the region. Russia decisively appears in the

Mediterranean, too. These entire activities continue to have domestic implications in Russia and on Putin's administration.

In the Middle East, the main activity referred to Russia's growing presence on the Syrian coast, both: in its maritime facility in Tartus port, and on the northern coast: west to the air base and headquarters in Hmeimim, and in the northern border point with Turkey. Russia has expressed its intention to develop the commercial ports, with emphasis on Tartus.

The Russian activity is also evident in Libya, as part of its intervention in the local civil war. The presence there was expanded along this year from the Libya's eastern border with Egypt - westward toward the capital of Tripoli.

Russia has deepened its naval relationship with Egypt as was realized by the joint two navies exercise held in the Black Sea at late November 2020, first of its kind in that region. The unique passage of the Egyptian naval vessels through the Turkish straits Served as a political sign over the Turkish Erdogan's government, manifesting Egypt and most likely Russia's mutual coordination. Some other operational issues between the two focuses on shore, energetic & infrastructure facilities supported by Russia.



Figure 10: The Russian–Egyptian joint manoeuvres at the black sea, the 'Friendship Bridge-III, November 2020

Russia continues to put efforts in order to strengthen its regional status in the Middle East, maintaining simultaneously numerous of relationships, especially as some players tend rival relations between themselves (e.g., Israel & Iran+ proxies;

Greece + Cyprus & Turkey, Armenia & Azerbaijan etc.). This role allows Russia to increase its influence as of a mediator regionally and Globally.

In the Persian Gulf, a joint Russia-Iranian maneuver hasn't taken place yet, albeit the previous one held there in late December 2019 together with China, ending with a wish statement of the Iranian commander to hold further joint exercises between the three participated navies. The nature of the Russian presence in the Persian Gulf during the past year decreased due to the Corona pandemic as well as from other reasons.

Alongside the development of naval weaponry, Russia is continuing to develop capabilities, focusing on asymmetric as hybrid threats to be projected. However economically civilian national investments, commitments and infrastructure may suffer a shortage, for example in the Syrian ports, also due to the corona pandemic. A solution might be realized by a participation of private Russian companies or investors.

Recommendations

Israel should exploit Russia's unique strength to tend varied relationships with different parties -some in a rival situation. Especially in viewing of Russia's naval longitudinal presence in the arena.

The US trend towards leaving the near east region will apparently continue, despite the replacement of the Trump government. Russia's regional superpower status as a result, and especially as seen in the maritime domain which President Putin emphasizes, increases its presence and influence over the region. The continuity noticeable by Russia's buildup of its footholds in the region, also to the Red Sea. Thus, Israel's interest should create dialogue and coordination with Russia as a leading player and a mediator in the region, should be considered even more vitally.

Potential aspects of dialogue between the State of Israel and Russia as with other players in the region can include joint research activity in the areas of maritime infrastructure, blue energy, desalinization, sea transport, the impact of climate change, i.e., finding solutions to the threat of rising sea levels, development of food from the sea, migration etc.

Another dimension may include a research over the impact of the exploitation of the Northern Sea Route and the possible growing sea traffic through it, as well as its implications on the current traditional traffic through existing shipping lanes in the Red Sea and the Suez Canal.