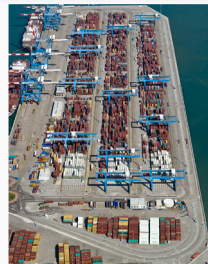
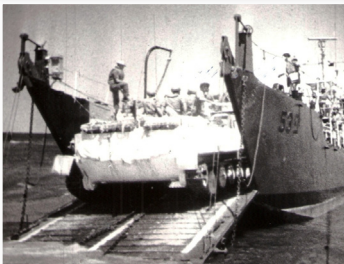


MARITIME STRATEGIC EVALUATION FOR ISRAEL 2019/20

Chief editor: **Prof. Shaul Chorev**

Edited and produced by: **Ehud Gonen**



The Russian navy – central trends in 2019 and their implication in the Middle East

Ido Gilad

Background

During 2019 Russia continued to deepen its hold on the Middle East, expanding arms distribution and extending its presence in various points of interest. Syria continued to serve as a prominent Russian base, by the support of both Iran and Turkey. Russian maritime presence was evident in the Persian Gulf as well, either with Iran, or by links developed with other regional states, led by Saudi Arabia. In North Africa, Russia's involvement was highlighted in Libya. Together with key partners as Egypt and Saudi Arabia all supported the opposition forces led by general Khalifa Haftar, whose forces were already close to the capital Tripoli – the stronghold of Libyan Islamist consent government. The UN as West counties supported this government, significantly by Turkey. The two rival Libyan parties agreed to participate in Russia's led of the 'Africa Summit' in Sochi in October 2019. President Putin pointed over the need to prevent movements of Islamic terrorists from Idlib in north Syria to Libya, to take part in the decisive battles over Tripoli. This argument could serve among the reasons for Russia to justify its involvement in Libya, delivering also the Europeans a note, with the hazard by the terroristic potential advantage to get closer to Europe.¹ North African coast, allowed Russia also to tighten its relations with Egypt and Algerian governments. In the global arena, Russian collaborations with China has expanded, perhaps towards a potential alliance between these superpowers. In case of such a realization, impacts would affect the region, as its maritime sphere.²

These trends were reflected by the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's speech in the Valday Conference (October 3, 2019), held in Sochi. He attributed also to the key denominator that characterizes the Middle East now times, and evidentially is linked to the US's constant departure from the region.³

General naval trends in the maritime sphere

The maritime sphere represented along 2019 the Russian diplomacy at its best. Russian 'flag display' dimension, demonstrated its political power as a tool to create relationships with fellow countries as cooperation with other navies.

1 Putin / Press Conference at the BRICS summit in Brazil from November 14, 2018 in: <http://rt.com>

2 See footnote 4 below about joint trainings between the two navies.

3 Russian foreign ministry website, from October 2, 2019. https://www.mid.ru/en/web/guest/foreign_policy/international_safety/conflicts/-/asset_publisher/xIEMTQ3OvzcA/content/id/3826083

These activities allowed Russia to project military power, naval and regional security, and even a sense of a significant responds towards existing or potential natural disasters, or manmade ones (as if terrorism, piracy, save and rescue measures, provide a welfare to immigrants and more). Russian navy ships illustrated such dimensions within presence and visits over various ports, in some maneuvers and trainings with the host fleets took place. Among the cruises held along 2019, two significantly represent this approach. One led by the command of "Marshal Ustinov" missiles cruiser from the Northern fleet; the other by the command of "Yaroslav Mudry" frigate from the Baltic fleet.

1. The "Marshall Ustinov" cruiser force (Figure 1) a "Slava" model sailed away from home port in Severomorsk escorted by two auxiliary vessels in early July 2019. After participating in the Russian Naval day, the force proceeded sail towards the Mediterranean. Visits held in ports of Algeria, Egypt, Turkey, Greece and Cyprus. Then through the Atlantic Ocean the flotilla stopped in various ports in West Africa before the arrival to South Africa's port of Cape Town, where, for the first time, a joint maneuver with the local host navy and the Chinese Navy took place. The Russian force resumed northbound the Suez Canal over the Black Sea to Sevastopol port on December 25, 2019 and was integrate in a maneuver held there in early January 2020.



Figure 1: "Marshal Ustinov" cruiser, Slava class⁴

4 Russian news agency TASS, October.

2. From the Baltic fleet, the frigate "Yaroslav Modri" a "Nosratshimi" model class led two other auxiliary vessels, departed on October 1, 2019 from Baltiysk port in Kaliningrad region. First sail destination was the Mediterranean, in where visits occurred in Tartus, Pireaus and Limassol ports. Then the force continued southbound in the Suez Canal for a participation in the "Indra" maneuver held by the Indian navy and occurred for the first time in the Indian Ocean (December 10-19, 2019). Chabahar port in Iran was the next destination as it hosted the first four days naval maneuver joined by the Chinese navy, as well as the Iranian host navy (December 27-30, 2019).⁵ Maneuvers held in the Gulf of Oman, and the eastern access to the Straits of Hormuz. Thus, in fact, the event demonstrated a great oppositional power towards President Trump's intentions to set up a US-led coalition in the region (was initiated first 6 months earlier).

Russian navy has been prioritizing by president Putin, its equipment and procurement planning in the upcoming decade .The president promoted the military and defense industries, as well as Russian shipyards, to produce and supply marine platforms with preferred 3M22 Zircon supersonic marine missiles systems. The minister of defense had commented (December 24, 2019),⁶ that the missiles integration will be focused on five new sea crafts, to be operated during 2020. Other systems should become upgraded too in Naval existing platforms.⁷ In general, Putin views these technological projects as the heart of the navy's future development, and as a catalysator to the entire Russia's developmental and scientific achievements as well as contribution to the nation's economy, either militarily or civilian. These industry bodies (military, civilian and shipyards) serve Russian needs as happens frequently in other countries, too.

5 The Russian news agency TASS, about the Ustinov cruiser, December 1, 2019, <https://tass.com/defense/1094465> , as well as December 25 2019, <https://tass.com/defense/1103407> . The Russian news agency about the frigate Mudri, December 25 2019: <https://tas.com/defense/1103441> . Joint maritime maneuver for Russia, China and Iran- from Chabahar port in the Gulf of Oman and the Straits of Hormuz's exit: see a video from Ruptly from December 27, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NUsjvch2GQc>

6 Statement by the minister of defense Shoygu, December 24, 2019, <https://tass.com/defense/1103059>

7 The missile is for the range of up to 1,000 km, with a speed of about 8 mach, and can be launched from surface sea crafts and submarines and can be armed with nuclear weapon. In the annual state of the nation speech in 1.3.2018, Putin mentioned the Zircon missile as one of six weaponry system with a nuclear potential, including supersonic torpedo. These missiles are intended for hitting coastal and maritime targets and will be incorporated in operational activities, probably in the upcoming decade, and will express a development and intensification of the "Caliber" missiles that have long been deployed against targets in Syria by the Russian navy.



Figure 2: from the Russian navy development forum⁸

Putin empowered navy's historically important role and the contribution of it to maintain Russia's security as global interests.⁹ He also added¹⁰ that during 2019 a variety of Russian marine operations took place and included 111 cruises. Some related to shipping protection as piracy as terror prevention missions. These operations contained 70 surface battle ships, 27 auxiliary ships and 15 submarines (on different missions). All were held in the world different oceans and operational arenas. Among them President named the South China Sea, the Gulf of Eden, the Strait of Malacca and Singapore, as well as the Caribbean.¹¹ But the first arena mentioned by Putin, as he vastly described

8 Preview YouTube video: Putin's New Plan for Russian Navy: Upgrade New Russian Frigates with Unstoppable Hypersonic Zircon

9 This dimension is anchored in a document signed by Putin: "Russia's policy foundations in the field of maritime military operations by the year 2030", for details see Zvi Mirkin at Shaul Horev and Ehud Gonen (editors), Greater Maritime Strategic Assessment 2017/18 (page 122), 2018/19 (page 114), Maritime Policy and Strategy Research Center, University of Haifa.

10 Putin as head of the minister of defense Shoygu's forum and with his office's senior executives, army and navy commanders, heads of military industries and shipyards, December 3, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eVywF3qinGM>

11 The Russian response to the competition in the international arenas, in fighting terrorism and in the conflict over the production and transport of marine resources, encompasses a broad deployment of economic, technological, media, political-diplomatic and legal capabilities, while the military capability remains dominant in the Russian perception aimed at maintaining its sovereignty. For more see Connolly Richard (2019), NATO DEFENCE COLLEGE, Fundamentals of the state policy of the Russian Federation in the field of naval activities for the period until 2030. <http://www.ndc.nato.int/research/research.php?icode=574>

the navy's activities during 2019 was the 'near' east (means in Russian terminology the 'south sea', i.e. Black and Mediterranean seas). East med. Arena includes of course the Syrian coast. He views the Naval demonstration in Syrian coast within high abilities and performances to fight against terrorist targets. Optimal coordination was held between the Navy and its headquarters, as well as among the Coordination Directorate in Syria, air force, coastal and naval teams. Putin also emphasized the importance of the port in Tartus for the Russian naval task force as a permanent port, referring to it as: "Our on-shore naval base at the port of Tartus." This port allows Russia to keep an overall control ability all over the eastern Mediterranean now days as hence forward.¹²

The northern Strategy

Another geographical region which the Russian president mentioned is the Arctic Ocean. The northern Arctic strategy led by Putin, might impact on other arenas as well, as the Middle east, too. Mainly the amount of sailing movements through the Suez Canal, that serves Egypt's key economical and maritime assets. A possible reduction in shipping traffic volume by the canal – despite huge financial investments laid down in recent years to expand the capacity of the project. The development of a possible alternative north route navigation might impact Egypt's economy, as well as the entire scope of sea vessels traffic in the region. It may also include the Chinese activities in this channel of their 'Belt and Road Initiative'. In the northern region Russia has been launching various operations with regard to the maritime sphere there. Some on the coast, and some over the continental shelf. All these are in the light of expected global warming changes, especially in the Arctic. The melt of the ice dome over the North Pole would probably allow to open shipping routes, as well as easier accesses to natural resources. Putin is aware to the importance of such developments for Russia's interests in that region, which already raised a global competition due to others significant interests there. Thus, Putin aims to possess Russia as a key ruler in the northern region, an initiator as leader for these developments, to realize maximum economic benefits. Russia's aim to set its EEZ- (Exclusive Economic Zone) within 350 marine miles from the continent, In order to fully utilize the natural resources over the continental shelf, instead of a limited distance of only 200 miles, as was assigned by the virtue of UNCLOS (1982, section 35). This issue has raised controversies with other competitors, especially the US (around Alaska's waterways), that required to formulate its policy there.¹³ Russia has been establishing stages of action in order to gain its

12 Ibid

13 Rodman, I. I. (2019). ICEBERG DEAD AHEAD! DECONSTRUCTING THE PENTAGON'S ARCTIC STRATEGIE. IN https://flipboard.com/topic/arctic/iceberg-dead-ahead-deconstructing-the-pentagon%E2%80%99s-arctic-strategies---war-on-the/a-eqSk_fW8Q2KQqay4LILBMQ%3Aa%3A27092465-7fc1e65f44%2Fwarontherocks.com

access to the strategic resources of the Arctic region. Beginning with a study of the region's geophysical infrastructures, then formulating the borders and legal aspects and definitions. Now times key implementations concern the security and protection measures, as well as the establishments of command, control and communication measures under the Fifth District of the Russian military (founded in 2014).

Two major events which occurred in December 2019 well represent Russia's interests in the region:

1. The activation of the "Akademik Lomonosov" nuclear energy rig. As the first of its kind world widely generator for electricity (Figure 3), had been towed at sea along three months over its station near the city of Pevek in the east Arctic region. Russia is occupied with further build of additional floating reactor units, some of which will be stationed also in the Arctic region.



Figure 3: "Akademik Lomonosov" nuclear energy rig

2. Additionally, on December 3, 2019, the Russian ice-breakers fleet marked the historical 60th anniversary of the incorporation of nuclear-powered ice-breakers. Three new-generation nuclear-powered "Arktika" model ice breakers (Project 22220) are in the final stages of their building, and two more are still being built.¹⁴ The sixtieth year sheds a light on the importance the Russians attach to the opening of the Northern Sea route to merchant ships traffic throughout the year (figure 4).

14 Russian Icebreaker Fleet Celebrates 60th Anniversary, Storied History of Arctic Exploration, Vesti News, 15 December 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0G6V5UMcn-I>

Using ice breakers will allow Russia to exhaust local natural resource – meaning to break through passages in the ice, at a time when it has not yet been melted by the warming climate. This is an intermediate stage for the commercial initiative that will allow sailing in the northern route throughout the year.



Figure 4: Russian icebreaker 'Arktika' LK-60Ya at the final stages of its construction at the "Baltic" shipyards in St. Petersburg. Expected to be delivered in May 2020¹⁵

Russian formulated legislations subject to the region's developmental processes, towards the target of some 80 million tons of maritime transportation through the northern route by the year of 2025. President Putin chaired the International Arctic Forum, initiated by Russia and held in St. Petersburg in April 2019. The President addressed that the northern project has the potential for an extensive international cooperation.¹⁶ His intentions were most likely sent for the promotion of the project above all together with China – whose president Xi attended the forum. The shipping potential by using this route could reduce about one third of the inputs compared with to the current sail between Asia and the Atlantic Ocean, using the shipping route through Suez Canal and the Mediterranean. Thus, a realization of the northern passage is expected to have implications for our region, as estimated reduction of the volume of traffic in the Egyptian Suez Canal.

15 *ibid.*

16 Law for "Russia's Socio-Economic Development in the Arctic region" was enacted in Kremlin about six years ago (Feb 2014) and referred to the period up to the year 2020. An update to this law was extended in Aug 2017 and was attributed to up until the year 2025. see: the approval of the state program of the Russian Federation "Socio-economic development of the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation for the period until 2020", Presidential Library, April 21, 2014, <https://www.prlib.ru/en/node/468341> and also regarding resolution number 366 (and its update from august 31): <http://static.government.ru/media/files/GGu3GTtv8bvV8gZxSEAS1R7XmzloK6a>

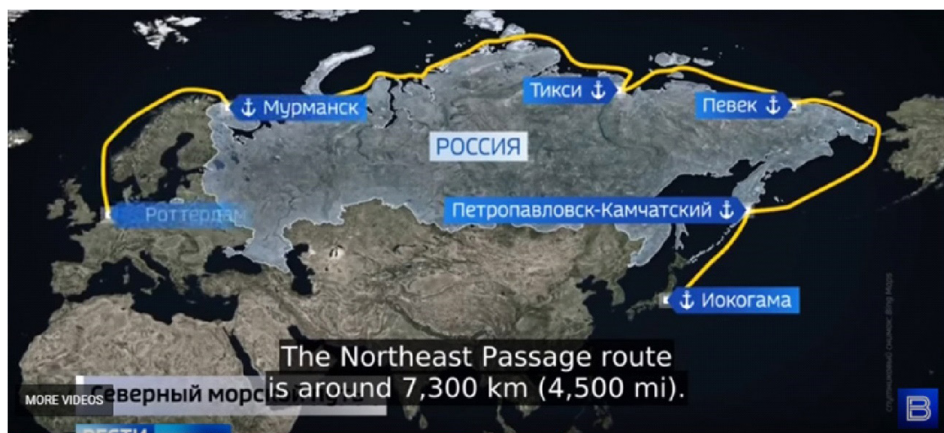


Figure 5: The 4,500 nautical miles long voyage from Japan's Yokohama port to Rotterdam in the Netherlands. From President Putin's speech at the International Arctic Forum held in St. Petersburg on April 9-10, 2019¹⁷

The Near East: Syria – Continued Consolidation

The scope of Russian infrastructures at Tartus Port has continued to expand within the last year and is expected to continue over (at least) for the next four years. These developments as Russians declared, would allocate the scope of about half a milliard dollars of investments in the port's infrastructures according to Russian Deputy Prime Minister Yuri Borisov (December 17 2019).¹⁸ Borisov, emphasized that plans should renew the port by advancing its marine and vessels capabilities, as well as integrate a coastal rail transport corridor into the port. The land corridor shall connect the port of Tartus, Iraq and the entire Persian Gulf. It should be mentioned that Iranians too influence the Syrian regime to achieve their objectives being involved in the Syrian Port of Latakia operation, and mainly to open a land transport corridor by using this port as an approach to the entire Mediterranean region. An Iranian railroad route is also expected, through passing the city of Basra in Iraq (under Iranian influence). This issue joins some other conflicts between Russia and Iran concerning the establish of control in Syria and the development measures especially economical ones, after the Syria's

17 How climate change benefits Russia, CaspianReport, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SQY7VOQF8sY&t=40s>

18 Russia in a race against Iran to take over economic projects in Syria, Meir Bar, December 18, 2019, <https://nziv.net/38239>

rehabilitation.¹⁹ A certain sense of mutual use of the rail infrastructure facilities along the way over the Persian Gulf is assumed.

Russian navy's activity in Syria continued constantly this year, and symbolically displayed at the demonstration of honor on the Russian Naval Day, on July 28, 2019, held officially for the third time in Syria. Few training sessions took place along the passing year as well on the Syrian coast region, three of them towards the end of the year. The trainings were led by Russian maritime and air forces and partly involved Syrian naval forces as well. A major training held in the Tartus region on December 16-19, 2019, and included contra terror scenarios, including aerial measures versus drones, that were sent to attacks Russian bases in Syria as Khmeimim. This training was defined as the first joint one for both navies. A prior training in the Syrian coastline was conducted on November 4, 2019 under Russian coordination and, at least at the initial phase, defensive aspects were emphasized.²⁰

The major Russian airport on the Syrian center coast – Khmeimim Air Base, contains apparently air-sea combat measures as platforms deployed there throughout the year. Secondary to it, Russian air force is deploying since November 2019 in another airport in Syria's north-east zone in Qamishli. A main reason is to counter Turkey, that is striving to change the demographic balance in the Kurdish enclave, and in light of US forces withdrawal from the region, in light of President Trump's policy.²¹

Russia – Turkey relations

Turkey under President Erdoğan continues to destabilize its depth relations with the West, including the extent partnership in NATO forces. On the other hand, Turks continue to strengthen their relationships with Russia, even increasing them by depending on the need to coordinate operationally in Syria. In order to define a buffer zone against the Kurds. The recent need to integrate Russian's S-400 aerial defense system which was supplied to Turkey in the last year. On the civilian field – Turkey continued its reliance on Russian gas, transporting it by pipelines over Turkey and through its soil. In spite the dual collaborations between the two states, disagreements

19 The issue arose during president Assad's visit to Tehran (early 2019), when it was decided to form a Syrian team led by the port of Latakia's director Amjad Suleiman, in order to negotiate with Iran on the operation of the port or the cargo terminals management. According to reports published regarding this matter in Al-Arab newspaper and "The Syria Report" ,see February 6, 2019 <https://www.enabbaladi.net/archives/280668>

20 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TycVHfP0iRE> 20 and news agency TASS <https://tass.com/defense/1100893>: from December 19, 2019, from Mediterranean Sea: Russian Navy and Air Force perform joint drills Copied from page <https://ruptly.tv/en/videos/20191104-027>

21 See www.aljazeera.net/news/politics/2019/11/14 from November 2019

between them have been revealed as well, such as in Syria, regarding the continental buffer in the Kurdish enclave; In Libya, regarding Russian support of General Haftar's forces, who also operate from the port cities of Tobruk and Benghazi against the Libyan Consent Government – deeply supported by Turkey. Russian aid patterns include the use of private forces (Russian strategy known also from the confrontation in Crimea peninsula, see below). The Islamist consent Government receives massive assistance from Turkey (as mentioned), has rewarded Erdoğan with the signature (November 27, 2019) on a maritime agreement that establishes the Mediterranean border between the two countries and delimits their activities within it. Some other security agreements between them were agreed upon as well, The Libyan navy commander Farag el-Mahdawi, who is subordinate to General Haftar, stated that he was instructed to sink any Turkish vessel that would approach the Libyan coasts, in case of being affiliated to the above agreement. He even declared a siege on Misurata Port (with a Greek coordination) to prevent any Turkish military supplies to Libya by sea.²² In addition, the Turks are challenging Russia regarding the Exclusive economic zone (EEZ) delimitation which they claim in the north of Cyprus island maritime territory, That contradicts with those maritime territories of Greece and Cyprus, and even as violation against the rights of other countries, as Egypt, Israel, and other participants in the regional East Mediterranean, especially those who participate in the Gas and Energy Forum. This forum also examines the transfer of natural gas to Europe through Italy in an underwater pipeline. But these pipes shall pass in territories which Erdoğan from Ankara and Fayez al-Sarraj from the Tripoli government took without consideration of any other party.

Coordination with Israel

The mutual coordination continued during the past year, intending to prevent any accidental and harm to any of the two sides during any regional operation. The last event occurred about a year and a half ago with the fall of the Russian 'il-20' aircraft west to the Syrian coast. The mutual coordination is also supposed to become a restraining effect on Russia towards Iran. Even though Iran constantly strive to deepen its hold on the Syrian region and to intensify its activity against Israel. Same from the Lebanese territory through Hezbollah and/or of Gaza Strip, mainly through the Islamic Jihad.

22 In: <https://almarsad.co/en/2019/12/11/al-mahdawi-we-have-orders-to-sink-any-hostile-turkish-naval-vessel-entering-libyan-territorial-waters> December 11, 2019, <https://almarsad.co/en/2019/12/14/lna-warns-civilian-ships-and-cargo-aircraft-against-transporting-military-equipment>, December 14, 2019.

Russia's and China's navies

Chinese Experts analysis indicates that throughout 2019, China has positioned itself as a major naval force with even a greater naval power in comparison with the Russia's one²³ Mainly due to the large scope of investments which led the Chinese Navy to be equipped with a large number of platforms and marine infrastructures. Even though the Chinese Naval forces still need to gain further practices as force building processes. Thus far, Russian Navy has supported the Chinese maritime force building, also by sharing a few maneuvers for both navies. Lately such maneuvers took place in South Africa and in Iran (see below). Iran was mentioned together with Syria and North Korea, as one of their inter-state dialogues and a common subject matter topic. The two nations develop their joint cooperation, even towards a possible strategic partnership. Russia however most likely watches carefully the Chinese military buildup, from the Naval part too, continues this mutual approach as part of a broader and more inclusive political, security-defense and trade relations. Among the pertained elements of the joint strategy a substantive one refers to counter the West coalition as if in the Persian Gulf, forming common interests in the Arctic and in the northern route, as others. A possible deeper alliance between the parties was mentioned too.²⁴

The joint trainings of the Chinese and Russian navies symbolize the important aspects and areas of mutual interests, in where they share the growing cooperation between them. In some cases, third sides were involved too, mainly the host fleets as for the South African one (November 2019), or the Iranian fleet and Naval forces (in late December 2019). The last mentioned joint maneuver with Iran was refereed to by Foreign Minister Lavrov,²⁵ who noted that it displays Russia's efforts to establish security mechanisms in the Persian Gulf, as jointly planned and shared together with the Chinese and Iranian states' navies. The trainings contained officially some counter terror and piracy activities over that region of the Indian Ocean. The Iranian Navy Commander – Admiral Hossein Khanzadi has announced on his part that the trainings held in late December 2019 deliver a message to the world, herald the deep cooperation between the three countries, who currently share a significant strategic point in their

23 China 'has overtaken Russia' as a maritime power, boosted by joint naval drills, Kristin Huang, 16 June 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3014659/china-has-overtaken-russia-maritime-power-boosted-joint-naval>

24 Is China and Russia's 'marriage of convenience' Donald Trump's worst strategic blunder?, Shi Jiangtao, 8 June 2019, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3013614/china-and-russias-marriage-convenience-donald-trumps-worst>

25 See footnote 3.

relations (Figure 6, by the Iranian news agency INDUS).²⁶ During the maneuver itself, the Iranian Coordinating Force Commander (December 29, 2019) stated that it is his country's intention to conduct further joint naval trainings with the participation of the three navies in the future.²⁷



Figure 6: The joint maneuvers for China, Russia and Iran²⁸

Another joint training for the Russian and Chinese navies held (in end of November – early December 2019) in Cape Town South Africa, for the first time in this area (Figure 7). The event was a co-operation with the South African host navy. It displays the shared power of the two Asian powers in this region as well and highlighting the significance both of them pay over the importance of the African continent. In where both invest promote and establish development and investments, using the maritime middleware between Africa and Asia.²⁹ These activities were most likely coordinated between Russia and China also in a summit held between them regarding the Middle East and Africa issues in Moscow on October 11, 2019.³⁰

26 The joint naval military exercises of China Iran and Russia are "a message to the world", Abraham Tamaker, November 29, 2019.

27 The Russian news agency TASS, Iran plans to hold more joint military drills with Russia, China, 29 December 2019, <https://tass.com/defense/1104591>

28 Ibid.

29 China, Russia: Countries Deploy Naval Assets for Joint Exercise off South African Coast, 27 November 2019. <https://worldview.stratfor.com/situation-report/china-russia-countriesdeploy-naval-assets-joint-exercise-south-african-coast>

30 From TASS – in continuation to a joint conference on October 11, 2019 in Moscow, WORLD11 OCT, Russian-Chinese consultations on situation in Middle East held in Moscow. 18:37 <https://tass.com/world/1082760>.

A certain dimension of cooperation between the two powers are also evident in the Russian Arctic strategy, as China is seen as to have interests and also beneficiaries out of that initiative. Maybe even the major beneficiary, as well as a probable key partner (an investor?) – in the developments on the northern shipping route, and infrastructures involved in the Arctic region's developments. It should be mentioned in this context that both presidents Putin and Xi have attended in two forums: one led by Russia- regarding the Arctic issue in St. Petersburg, and the other led by China as a part of the 'Belt-and-Road Initiative' (BRI) in Beijing, where the Realization of the Northern Maritime route for Chinese use was discussed as well.



Figure 7: Cape Town, South Africa – Visiting missile cruisers from Russia and China during which a triple training with the South African Navy was conducted³¹

Saudi Arabia, Russia, China

After the attacks on Saudi oil refineries on September 14, 2019, attributed to Iran, President Putin arrived for the first time since a decade to visit Riyadh, for a meeting with Prince al Salman. This visit was might have been arranged already before the above mentioned attacks ; however the attack results were probably a catalysator to accelerate contacts between the two countries, regarding the subjects of security

31 Chinese News Agency Xinhua, November 26, 2019.

as well as Saudi procurement from Russia, including S-400 air defense systems. The various scopes of trade were focused on the development of the energy sector, especially some coordination on the production of various oil products and its pricing. The different projects and procurement that were published referred by estimations for about two billion dollars. A key valuable benefit for Russia can refer to the relations with the host, who represents the Sunni Islamic world, as at the same time Russian enjoys the relationships to the Shi'ite world thanks to it tied relations with Iran.³² Russia may therefore play a mediating role between the parties; including leading a coordination between Saudi Arabia and their other neighbors, e.g. the Houthis in Yemen,³³ and even some other countries in the Arabian Gulf.

It can be added that Saudi Arabia operated a first naval maneuver in cooperation with the Chinese navy, whose ships visited Jeddah port in the Red Sea in late November 2019.³⁴ The maneuver was aimed against terrorism and piracy. Even though it was the Chinese and not the Russian navy, the proximity and overlap of these training arrangements with those of which the two fleets operated among themselves as also other parties earlier, i.e. the Iranian and South African naval forces in December 2019,³⁵ may indicate for a Russian involvement, albeit a passive one, in the training in Jeddah, too. That is given the strengthening of Russia-China relations and their mutual interests in the Middle East arena.

The Persian Gulf³⁶

The escalation in the Persian Gulf, which has intensified since spring 2019 between Iran and the United States leading coalition states as some Persian Gulf countries, evoked Iranian apply to Russia for sorts of assistance. Russia's willingness to comply and to cooperate with Iran in the Persian Gulf- allowed her in return to establish its position in that region and probably also in the international arena. The impact for the Iranian naval forces would emphasize mainly on the chokepoints i.e. Strait of Hormuz and Bab El-Mandeb (by the Houthis in Yemen). An expression to the cooperation between the parties was demonstrated as the Iranian navy commander Admiral Hussein Hanzadi

32 <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20191014-saudi-visit-showcases-putins-growing-middle-east-influence> from October 14, 2019

33 Foreign Minister Lavrov on the need for diplomatic settlement of the Yemeni conflict TASS, October 2, 2019, <https://tass.com/politics/1080990>

34 <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20191118-saudi-arabia-china-launch-joint-naval-exercise-in-red-sea> from November 18, 2019

35 See footnotes 27, 29.

36 The emphasis in this chapter will focus on Iran, though Russia has maintained contacts and coordination with other states in the Gulf, including Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and more.

visited Moscow and St. Petersburg – the Russian navy's home port at the end of July 2019, and brought the parties to agree upon the joint maneuver as was executed in the Northern Indian Ocean by the end of 2019. Thus, frigate *Mudri* (Figure 8) realized its arrival at Iranian Chahbahar Port in Oman Bay on December 27, 2019. This port is located close to the Straits of Hormuz but towards the ocean, out of the Persian Gulf (Figure 9).³⁷ The docks in this port are operated by an Indian company (India Ports Global Private Limited – IPGPL). It can be noted that India hosted the Russian frigate pre to its arrival in Iran, for a joint naval training with the Indian Navy.³⁸



Figure 8: The frigate *Yaroslav Mudri*, in a joint visit and maneuver with China's and Iran's fleets, December 27-30, 2019



Figure 9: Iranian Chahbahar port in the Gulf of Oman near the straits of Hormuz

Russia's willingness to operate in the Persian Gulf, either based on its own initiative or as a response to an Iranian invitation, will strengthen its status as a global power, and carry weight on that other regional Middle Eastern focal point. This arena joins to Russians already marked presence in the east Mediterranean since it began operate in Syria in 2015. This move let Russia two years later (2017) to establish its permanent outpost at the Tartus maritime port and the airport of 'Khmeimim'. Another Russian activity center is identified in Libya, allowing a huger grasp on the North African spatial in the Middle East.

The Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif who also visited Moscow (September 2, 2019) referred in advance to the joint naval maneuvers and highlighted

37 The Russian Ministry of Defense website, The Baltic Fleet detachment of warships made a call to the Iranian port of Chabahar, December 27, 2019.

https://eng.mil.ru/en/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12268635@egNews

38 The Russian news agency (TASS), Russian Baltic Fleet warships set off for Iran after joint drills with Indian Navy, 20 December 2019, <https://tass.com/defense/1101663>

its contribution to the security in the region and the cooperation as synergy between Iran, Russia and possibly other neighboring countries too.³⁹ Putin too (in September 5, 2019)⁴⁰ related to the Russian readiness to advance its maritime operations in the gulf region, together with Iran, or even as a part of multinational efforts of neighboring states as other stakeholders, especially the key powers including China, India, and possibly the US.

It is worth to mention that these powers competing with each other for a control on the main trade routes in the region, using also footholds in foreign ports, located within proximity to these routes.⁴¹ The Chinese navy actually integrated into the maneuver, as with a question mark whether the Indian Navy, with which Russian navy drilled just a week earlier, was at least aware of its existence.

Yemen

South Yemen locates by the chokepoint of Bab El-Mandeb Straits on the way to the Red Sea, Suez Canal, and the oceanic crossroads which connects Asia, Africa and Europe. The location was seized by the Houthi rebels who established and held from this coastal arena a marine front, to influence and express pressure on the vast maritime traffic of the Global trade in that region. Also using of 'asymmetrical' warfare as 'sub state' characteristics. Iran serves as a supporter that provides the Houthis with weapons. Russians, due to their awareness to the threat, have tried throughout the year to settle the domestic conflict in Yemen between the Houthis and the country's governing entities.

Settlement of the marine event that occurred about a year ago in Crimea

This issue is raised as an aftermath to an event that was reported in the HMS annual maritime assessment for 2018-2019. Incident held in the Kerch Strait where Russia by using naval police forces seized three Ukrainian navy vessels on Nov. 25th 2018. The event continues Russian annexation (in practice) of the Crimea Peninsula since 2014. The three Ukrainian vessels were arrested as they sailed in the Kerch strait, northbound over the Sea of Azov, due to Russian claim of penetration into the Russian territorial waters. Vessels and crews were detained and prisoned in Russia. After a

39 The Russian news agency (TASS), Iran and Russia to hold joint military drills in Indian Ocean, September 2, 2019, <https://tass.com/defense/1076082>

40 The Russian news agency (TASS), Putin says special organization may be created to address problems in Strait of Hormuz, 5 September 2019, <https://tass.com/politics/1076711>

41 Guzanski and Horowitz, "The ports race in the Arabian sea: International and regional competition for control of trade routes", INSS, August 5, 2019.

year the crews were released and brought back to Kyiv, and the vessels were returned to the Ukraine (on November 18, 2019). These developments mean a step towards the softening of the relations between the two countries, as was also planned during the "Normandy" summit aiming a reconciliation between Russia and Ukraine, including the issue of Crimea Peninsula. This summit took place in Paris on December 8, 2019 and was mediated by France and Germany.⁴²

Russia expanding its activity in Africa

Russia's key interest in the continent of Africa revolves economic as political interests. The utilization of the continent's Natural resources created the involvement by investing and developing of infrastructures in the various countries of the continent.⁴³ Foreign Minister Lavrov held (in early 2018) a tour in the Central continent countries (Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Ethiopia). The Maritime aspect concerns the relationships with the rim coastal countries such as Sudan in the Red Sea, South Africa, or in North Africa in the Mediterranean Egypt, Algeria and Libya. Other expression of the development process as headed by Russia with the continental states of Africa includes Russia's Initiative of the Russia-Africa Forum, (was first held in October 2019 in Sochi). One among the elements that Russia uses also in Africa in keeping of its interests, includes the private mercenary groups, as an effective tool serving of the Kremlin.⁴⁴

One of the forum's sessions was chaired by Putin and assigned for Russian exports of civilian nuclear energy reactors by 'Rosatom Corporation' to African countries. It has been reported that guests have shown interest in such a proposal, as some have already signed memos for its promotion in their countries.⁴⁵ The maritime context concerning such a possible move, lays in the light of the first floating reactor for Russia's own use. The project was activated operatively in December 2019 (see the paragraph about the Northern Strategy). A success of the reactor's integration process in the Northern Sea may subsequently serve as a catalysator that would affect the marketing

42 Russia returns seized Ukrainian naval ships, DW News, November 18, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NXnyp_LE_AI

43 Arms and sovereignty are priorities for Russia's return to Africa, Middle east monitor, October 31, 2019, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20191031-arms-and-sovereignty-are-priorities-for-russias-return-to-africa>

44 The involvement of Russian private military companies in Africa is rapidly growing, and with it, their political and economic influence, Sergey Sukhankin, ECFR, November 12, 2018. https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_russias_hired_guns_in_africa

45 Russian news agency TASS, All African leaders at meetings with Putin touched upon cooperation in nuclear power, October 23, 2019, <https://tass.com/world/1084807>

of such floating reactors, whether to Africa or in other regions. Sudan has already been mentioned in this context (see below). The maritime sphere has long been promoted by security as diplomatic articles between Russia and African countries, also by the light of visits and even trainings of Russia naval vessels that have taken place there throughout the year.

States along North Africa's coasts

Libya

The Russian involvement expanding its military and economic influence in the North African continent of the Mediterranean coasts is significantly evident in Libya. Russia is mainly aiding the Libyan National Army (LNA) under the command of General Haftar. This Russian military aid also incorporates a model of operating mercenaries as private 'Wagner Group',⁴⁶ an integration also recognized in other Russian fronts like Ukraine and Syria. The Libyan leader Haftar visited a year ago (November 2018) in Russia where he met with Russian Defense Minister Shuygo and Evgeny Prigozhin, head of the 'Wagner Group'. Haftar recently threatened to damage Turkish sea vessels, after becoming established in the cities of the eastern Libya and their ports, in where he might have captured some 'leftovers' of the former Libyan Navy capabilities. In addition, he also received sponsorship from Russian "hands" as mentioned above, though no concrete evidences for such involvement in the maritime sphere on these manners. However, in general the involvement method of support may potentially include also 'Limited Confrontation' dimensions. Term which refers to the operations of 'small forces', not necessarily military as well as 'fields of information and communication'. These entire purpose means to create instability over the "other side". Russian Chief of Staff Valery Gerasimov's 2020 doctrine sees them as 'effective measures to protect Russian interests'.

The Libyan battle arena would probably affect also the maritime sphere too, as fights occur mainly on the coastline where main Libyan infrastructures are settled as well as maritime assets like ports are located there and so for key land transport routs. Economically, the eastern ports, Tobruk located at the Egyptian border and Benghazi located near the Gulf of Sidra, as rest of the Libyan coast and Tripoli in the west – are also a potential for natural resources, especially oil resources and its transportation. The country's long coast is relatively proximate to Europe requires a special cope with the contexts of refugees and immigration from the continent of Africa. This context

46 Russian Snipers, Missiles and Warplanes Try to Tilt Libyan War, David D. Kirkpatrick, New York Times, 5 November 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/05/world/middleeast/russia-libya-mercenaries.html>

shades which Putin has mentioned, about the possible absorption of terrorists from Syria, or other ISIS members escaping to Libya through its coast. Arrival to Libya as final destination or a temporary one could serve them after words to move further on over Europe. There is fear from Turkey who may aid the development of such a possession. Putin himself mentioned Libya as a destination for terrorists, thus requires action in order to thwart it and its consequences.

In conclusion the consequences of Russian involvement in Libya would impact on Libya's internal future. The regional location may also affect the immigration from Africa mainly to Europe that would be affected also by a possible control on the fossil energy sources and its transportation. The Turkish involvement impacts the already tensed relationship between Libya and Egypt as other players in the complexed Mediterranean arena. Russia could use an advantage being a potential mediator between the parties. A similar status it positioned in in other arenas as in Syria and the Persian Gulf.

Algeria

Russia's increased involvement in Maghreb was evident first and foremost in Algeria, which is a key partner out of seven other African countries who trade with Russia.⁴⁷ Putin met with Algerian leader who latter attended the Russia-Africa Summit in Sochi (October, 2019). Purchase agreements have been discussed, including debt cancellation still since the Soviet period. Meeting were a proceed to a former one from April on foreign ministers' level.⁴⁸ Russian naval ships had visited Algerian's ports this year for joint training with the local navy. Russia is a leading weapon supplier in Algeria, including its maritime sphere. As Algeria has tended maritime cooperation with Russia since Soviet period. Today Russia increases its foothold in Africa and in the Mediterranean, in contrary to the American departure of the region, the continent's economic potential for development, strengthen also Russian interests to deepen its cooperation with Algeria.

On August 29-26, 2019, the 'Marshall Ustinov' Missile Patrol 'Slava' class from the northern fleet visited Algiers. This port was the first foreign port in the Mediterranean that the forces visited, as part of its long journey which also included a visit in South Africa. On November 28, 2019 'Admiral Makarov' missile frigate from the Fifth Black

47 Russian news agency TASS, December 4, 2019, press review: Moscow, Kiev renew oil transit and Africa's opportunities bring back Russia, <https://tass.com/pressreview/1095393>

48 Russian news agency TASS, October 24, 2019, Putin, acting Algerian president discuss military and technical cooperation, <https://tass.com/defense/1085166>

Sea cruiser had a naval maneuver with the Algerian navy.⁴⁹ This vessel completed a 90-day tour in the Mediterranean, and passed (December 23, 2019) in the Turkish Straits on its sail back to the Black Sea.

Egypt

Egypt is also one of the seven African countries who lead the trade with Russia.⁵⁰ The president Abdel Fattah el-Sisi works to diversify the variety sources of weapons supply to the Egyptian army. Russia is a significant source in this regard. The Egyptian president attended the Russia-Africa Forum, furthermore, used the occasion to hold a separated Russian-Egyptian economic summit (October 24, 2019). The Russian minister of defense arrived at Cairo for discussions about two weeks later. These events exposed to president a-Sisi's intentions to appoint his son as the Egyptian military attache' in Moscow.

In the maritime areas as was mentioned, the sale of Bastion-P coastal missile K300-P for launching of Yakhont missiles. Egyptian interest regarded equipping from Russia of aircraft 'Sukhoi 35' was mentioned but caused an American resistance.⁵¹ In the field of civil procurement, Russia offered Egypt to upgrade the shipyards in Suez or even to build a new instead the existing one.⁵² Also mentioned (May 2018) indications about the establishment of an industrial complex zone east to Port Said next to the canal. It has been considered as an axis for a future development mutual relation among all other economical projects. Additionally, it was agreed to establish four energy reactors that will be installed in El Dabaa in the west Egyptian Mediterranean coast, west to Alexandria, the location id next to a water desalination facility located there.

The Russian navy's visits to the levant region and in Egypt were made either to show the flag but also for the need to use the passage mainly of Suez Canal as a needed passage. Visits to be emphasized are the one of the 'Ustinov' cruiser which visited Egypt while touring the Mediterranean.⁵³ Ships from the Black Sea Fifth Cruiser have also conducted visits and even trainings in Egypt during the year⁵⁴

49 Russian news agency TASS, November 28, 2019, Russian missile cruiser wraps up call at Algerian port in long-distance deployment, <https://tass.com/defense/1075604>

50 See footnote 47.

51 TASS, <https://tass.com/politics/1091581> , from November 21, 2019.

52 TASS, <https://tass.com/economy/1088181> , from November 12, 2019.

53 See footnote 4.

54 TASS, <https://tass.com/defense/1093201> , November 27, 2019.

Sudan

Russia and Sudan have signed an agreement allowing the stay and the use of ports in Sudan by the Russian navy. The validity of the agreement, was signed on May 9th, 2019, should be remained even though the former president Omar al-Bashir's government has changed as a part of a revolution held in the country on April 11th, 2019. The agreement's validation is for seven years; however, it will be conditioned due to Sudanese rules to the Russians presence. In the maritime field, the agreement will cover an appendix refers to a joint marine save and rescue activities⁵⁵ Russians important achievement should allow them to receive a permanent foothold base in the Red Sea. Sudan's procurement is based historically on USSR products, and of today's Russia as well also expect to increase it over an extent of about 60 percent. The issue of supplying a possible floating energy reactor from Russia to Sudan came up as well.

Summary

Over the past year 2019, Russia appears to have significantly strengthened its hold over the marine spheres in the Mediterranean region. Its interface with China has deepened and tightened and may even lead to a hence forward alliance between these two powers. Among the factors driven over status is the US. Attitude to leave the Mediterranean region. In contrary, Russia takes the advantage to expand its coastal footholds in various front bases. Russia is permanent present in Tartus port, while its arms are directed towards other spots as in Libya, Sudan and possibly the Persian Gulf. Other approach which was demonstrated during the year were the flotillas abroad over the Mediterranean Region, demonstrating diplomacy at sea, showing the flag. Other manners included also port visits and even marine maneuvers with other parties.

Regionally, the maritime crisis in Crimea that raised up in late 2018 evoked a dispute with Ukraine was decreased towards the end of the current year. Partly it was achieved thanks to the efforts of the 'Normandy' Summit mediated by France and Germany. By this mean, Russia would be able to direct its sources to other areas of interest, emphasized the those in the Syrian coast, i.e. Tartus Port and Khmeimim airport. These interests cover also civilian infrastructures for investments as developments of ports, docks, railroads connecting the ports, nautical linkers and alike.

Putin himself referred to the advantages that Russia receives, given the possible control over the Mediterranean – based on Syria. That foothold allows Russia to foster other spots of interests, as in Libya. Which would allow to monitor movements of Islamist activists from Syria to Libya for example, despite assistance they get for it from Turkey.

55 TASS, <https://tass.com/defense/1059881> , May 24, 2019.

Russia's influence in North Africa has a significance due to its proximity to Europe and the attempt to prevent migration especially of terrorists over Europe. Similar needs refer also to the production and transport of energy resources and its products. Other African coastal states strengthen their relations with Russia like Sudan and South Africa. It's possible that these Russian moves were partially coordinated with China as well.

Russia's partnership with China and the Persian Gulf, perhaps as part of a counter-coalition to the President Trump initiative was well demonstrated during the joint maneuver with China and Iran. Such a maneuver could bring to similar ones hence forward with more and other participants.

The Iranian invitation for the Russians to act in the Iranian coast, reminds of a former invitation for their presence on the Syrian coast, that appeared a few years earlier on 2015, by President Assad. The Iranians acknowledge themselves for the initiative which invited Russia over Syria. Such a move could serve as a possible model of action adopted by the Russians again either in the Persian Gulf or even else like in Libya, next to General Haftar.

Various Front coastal posts in other arenas, including Yemen, Sudan and other countries in Africa followed all, the Syrian model.

Deepening the interfaces with China might scope other dimensions of partnership between the two such as in the Arctic region, or even in Africa.

In parallel to Russian's geographical deployment, president Putin prioritized the Russian naval needs for new procurement on the front.

Russia's rising position combines a naval power which plays an increasing role in the global diplomacy,

especially in those whose order is unstable

Strengthening the Navy for Putin means not only a political tool, but also a tool for developing the economy like in the northern region. The beneficiaries are the technology and military industry but also of civilian shipping.

Recommendations

In view of Russia's prominent strengthening in the maritime sphere, it is recommended that Israel continues to adhere and even deepen the coordination with Russia.

Russia performs a status which could allow its involvement among many if not all sides involved.

Maritime sphere is subjected to global changes as warming.

Developing maritime dialogue subjects with Russia should be done simultaneously on several levels, including the academic- research level, with mapping out potential opportunities for advancement and development of diverse projects and topics in the field.