

Military Thought

© East View Press

<http://www.eastviewpress.com/Journals/MilitaryThought.aspx>



The Naval Might of Russia in Today's Geopolitical Situation

Rear Admiral O.V. ALYOSHIN (Res.),

Candidate of Military Sciences

Capt. 1st Rank A.N. POPOV (Ret.),

Doctor of Military Sciences

Capt. 1st Rank V.V. PUCHNIN (Ret.),

Doctor of Military Sciences

Abstract. The authors examine geopolitical changes and military threats to the Russian Federation at sea, showing the role and place of the Navy in the strategic nuclear and nonnuclear deterrence, as well as in countering the U.S. so-called prompt global strike, and formulate the principal development priorities for the Navy until 2025.

Keywords: the Ocean, naval presence, sea-based high-precision long-range weapons, strategic nuclear and nonnuclear deterrence.

The current military and political situation in the world is prognosticated as *unstable* and is characterized by increasingly fierce global competition; growing tension in various areas of interstate and interregional interaction; rivalry between world power centers and key members of the world community; unstable political and economic developments occurring on the global and regional levels while international relations get more complicated; intensifying struggle for natural resources in the Arctic Zone, and increasingly active transnational terrorist groupings.

Besides, there is evidence of sea territorial disputes snowballing and of sea trade increasingly under threat, especially with regard to energy resources.

One of the major sources of instability is now the **struggle between countries for access to and development of marine natural resources** (hydrocarbons, biological marine products, etc.) and also establishing control over sea transportation communications. Problems will continue to build up as the leading states of the world enhance their naval might.

In the long term, the importance of the high seas for humanity will be steadily on the up under the impact of the expected climate changes, depleting dry land

resources, migration of masses of people, and other processes as yet not very obvious. As a result, interstate and intercoalition rivalry for access to the high seas, possession of its resources, and use of seawater area and communications will get even keener.

World powers with considerable naval potential at their disposal and a well-developed system of bases to rely on, are further stepping up their presence in the chief areas of the high seas, including in those immediately bordering the territory of the Russian Federation.

Improving ability of Russia to consolidate its influence in the international arena and potential creation of conditions in the medium term to stay among the economic leaders of the world dictate the need to maintain Russia's great maritime power status, an independent and equal participant in man's activity in the high seas.

While conducting active national maritime policies in the high seas the Russian Federation can accelerate the establishment of its economy, strengthen its defensive might, and ensure efficient progress in the scientific, economic, and social spheres.

Regrettably, at present the situation in the high seas remains tense, and *new threats to the national (military) security of the Russian Federation* continue to emerge. The principal among those are:

- certain states and their coalitions seeking to attain total domination in the high seas, including in the Arctic Zone, and also to reach overwhelming naval superiority;
- foreign naval groupings, strategic nonnuclear high-precision weapon systems, and military infrastructure facilities being deployed (built up) in strategically important parts of the high seas adjacent to the territory of the Russian Federation;
- growing numbers of states in possession of powerful and combat-worthy navies, including equipped with nuclear weapons, dissemination of weapons of mass destruction, missiles and missile technologies;
- creation and deployment of strategic antimissile defense systems, including the naval constituent, that undermine global stability and disrupt the established alignment of forces in the nuclear-missile sphere;
- presence and escalation of armed conflict hotbeds in territories of states and regions with access to the high seas that are important to the Russian Federation and its allies;
- increasing scales of international (transnational) terrorism, pirating, poaching, environmental disasters, illegal transportation of weapons, drugs, fissionable substances and materials by sea.

In the circumstances, in order to contain potential adversaries and promptly respond to crises, and also in the interests of Russia's influence on the interna-

tional situation in the world and protection of the national interests we should name ***strategically important areas of the high seas where Russia's naval presence has to be ensured***. Included among these areas should be the Arctic Zone, the Caspian basin, the water areas of seas adjacent to the Middle East where international competition for energy resources is getting increasingly fierce; the Mediterranean, given the situation in the Near and Middle East, and also in Libya; the Gulf of Guinea, parts of the Indian Ocean and water areas of the seas adjacent to Southeast Asia, owing to the increasing pirate activity; any other areas of the high seas where the military and political situation is likely to worsen, and new regional and interstate conflicts may blow up.

The main purposes of the naval presence are the following.

- Prevention of military conflicts by strategic deterrence in the interests of military security of the Russian Federation in the high seas;
- creation and maintenance of a favorable situation in the high seas that would provide the necessary level of national security of the Russian Federation in the economic and technological spheres;
- maintenance of strategic stability and an equal strategic partnership in the high seas;
- discovery, preemption, and curbing of terrorist, pirate, extremist acts, and other kinds of criminal encroachment on human rights and liberties, as well as property, of the Russian Federation and its nationals in the high seas.

While active in the high seas, the Russian Federation should bear in mind that since the end of the 20th century and for a long time to come ***the role of struggle in the ocean and sea sectors has been growing considerably within the overall efforts of the armed forces***, and in certain conditions these sectors may well become the principal ones. At the moment, the navies of the world's leading states are capable of changing the course and outcome of armed struggle by their actions from the sea even at continental theaters of operations, and can influence the result of the war as such.

This is borne out by the active realization of the *prompt global strike concept* by the U.S. armed forces, which is a new challenge to Russia and constitutes the main threat to its military security in the 21st century.¹ This threat is characterized by suddenness of attack in the shortest possible time from various points in distant areas located beyond the range of our ground-based firing facilities (parts of Western and Central Atlantic, the Indian Ocean, and the central part of the Pacific, the Arctic Ocean Zone); extensive use of surface warships and submarines of the U.S. Navy (their share in the global strike is no less than 70%). The U.S. Navy groupings can simultaneously launch up to 3,000 long-range cruise missiles against the RF territory, and by 2025, the number will have risen to 6,000. Besides, the actions by shock forces will be supported by deployment of the forces and weapons of the marine component of the U.S. national antimissile defense system (AMD).

The assessment of the current military strategic situation suggests that, given the development of the global strike forces and assets, the United States at present is ahead of the Russian Federation in terms of conventional arms amounts. This state of affairs is unacceptable, is a source of strategic instability in the world, and constitutes an immediate threat to Russia's military security.

The scale of the threat calls for adequate defensive and offensive measures on the part of the Armed Forces that would achieve *deterrence* (in peacetime) and *preemption* (in wartime) falling back on political, diplomatic, economic, information, and other actions.

In countering the global strike a prominent place is held by the Navy, the most efficient politics instrument in the Russian Federation in the area of strategic nuclear and nonnuclear deterrence. This is so because the Navy is universal; because it has naval strategic nuclear forces (NSNF) and general-purpose naval forces (GPNF); because it can display its might in virtually any area of the high seas; because the Navy task forces groupings can speedily achieve operational deployment into the area of conflict situations and stand by on high alert among other things, to attack the critically important ground-based facilities of the adversary, without violating, until a certain moment, its national sovereignty.

New types of armaments have enabled the Navy to tackle a qualitatively different task, i.e. **crush the military economic potential of the adversary by directly impacting their vital centers from the sea using sea-based long-range high-precision weapons (LRHPW) with standard equipment**. A vivid example of this is attacks by Caliber cruise missiles launched from the Navy warships and submarines against terrorist facilities on Syrian territory.

As part of countering the global strike, the renewed Navy of the Russian Federation will be able to solve the following basic problems.

In peacetime, take part in strategic nuclear and nonnuclear deterrence on the basis of forward naval presence by creating a threat of inflicting unacceptable damage on the potential adversary with nuclear missiles and LRHPW;

in wartime, destroy critically important ground-based facilities of the adversary and marine carriers that are the global strike assets before these can move to the line of weapon employment, and also the marine components of the U.S. national AMD system in the shortest possible time. Once decision has been taken to use nuclear weapons, attack with nuclear missiles. Equipping Russian warships with *antimissile defense units* will help efficiently repulse the global strike outside the territory of Russia or its allies.

Today, virtually all warships, submarines, and ground troop formations of general-purpose naval forces are equipped with LRHPW. In this connection, their use considerably enhances the guarantee that the strategic deterrence mission will be accomplished, and will help prevent an aggression against Russia and its allies. As the Navy has sufficient quantities of LRHPW and can use them in a variety of ways (in a massive attack or selectively against individual targets), this will help control the impact on the military and political leadership of the

aggressor country and thus raise the threshold of using nuclear arms for the purpose of deterring large-scale hostilities against this country.

The priority of using sea-based LRHPW relative to other nonnuclear weapons is due to their ability to *hit major targets of the adversary selectively* with a minimum of forces (weapons), including without their carriers entering the area of active adversary counteraction, and also because LRHPW can be used *in any weather*.

Yet, the growing role of LRHPW notwithstanding, it should be stressed that **the central place in strategic deterrence still belongs to nuclear deterrence**.

The main assets of *strategic nuclear deterrence* remain the strategic naval nuclear forces that consist of nuclear-powered deep-water craft (NPDWC). The high degree of combat stability of these submarines deployed in the sea, the chance of choosing optimum routes for combat units to reach their targets (thanks to using weapons from the vast areas of the Ocean), and ensuring that they spend a minimum of arrival time and efficiently overcome AMD, ability to securely hit protected elements of the adversary economic and military facilities inflicting on them unacceptable damage with even a limited strength of the forces, make them the least vulnerable and an important component of the RF strategic nuclear forces.

Along with the NPDWC, the units tasked with *nonstrategic nuclear deterrence* are the general-purpose naval forces equipped with tactical nuclear weapons – most of the surface warships and flying apparatus, as well as submarines. In conditions of escalating military conflicts the measures of demonstration, including those amply covered by the media, that show the determination of the Navy to use tactical nuclear arms, can, therefore, be an effective deterring factor for the aggressor.

Besides directly taking part in strategic deterrence, the role of the Navy in **countering the U.S. marine component of strategic AMD in the interests of preserving the combat potential of the Russian strategic nuclear forces** is likewise on the increase. Given the current and prospective scope of the U.S. AMD Navy ships their combat designation areas can be located up to a thousand km and more from our coast, i.e. beyond the active defense zone of our forces (troops). In these conditions, coming to the fore in the business of combating AMD marine facilities are warships and submarines armed with antiship missiles (including advanced hypersonic ones), which can hunt and track adversary AMD ships ready to destroy the latter.

Given the tasks listed above, it is necessary to outline the main priorities of constructing the Navy. The negative developments in the 1990s notwithstanding, this country's Navy remains the world's second (after the United States) in terms of combat potential. The growing role of the Navy in ensuring the country's military security, and solving the problem of strategic deterrence requires Russia to prevent exclusive U.S. superiority in naval might today and in the long term.

As a great maritime power, the Russian Federation has to possess powerful and well-balanced fleets in every strategic sector; these should consist of warships for the ocean, long-range, and short-range sea areas, as well as naval aviation and coast guard equipped with modern attack weapons, and also a well-developed system of basing, efficient operational (combat), and logistic support. All the groupings of Navy forces in the making are to be able to confront successfully the high-tech adversary armed with the latest weapon systems, including with LRHPW carriers, before these can reach the line of missile launching.

The main construction task for the Russian Navy until 2025 is to ***create a qualitatively new image of the general-purpose naval forces relying on fundamentally new arms and military hardware, and maintain their permanent combat and technological readiness, as well as regular renovation.***

The **chief priorities** in Navy buildup are as follows.

- Maintain the Navy strategic nuclear naval force grouping in the required strength;
- set up and improve groupings of general-purpose naval forces in order to give them the potential of strategic nonnuclear deterrence based on creating a threat to use LRHPW against critically important ground facilities of the prospective adversary;
- build up their combat potential for gaining and keeping superiority in the areas operationally important to us, including in the interests of ensuring combat stability of strategic naval nuclear forces.

Calculating the required fighting strength of these groupings in various strategic sectors should proceed from the assumption that the main threat to Russia's military security will come from the U.S. Navy, given its involvement in a system of treaties and agreements with various countries of the regions.

Given the geopolitical position of Russia, the issue of the role and place of the Navy within the Armed Forces has always been a subject for discussion. Debates still rage on. The reason is the continental mindset of some military figures and statesmen in this country, and also the fact that the Russian Navy has always suffered from considerable geographical inconvenience and the need to keep four fleets in various strategic sectors plus a flotilla in the Caspian Sea, which resulted in the fragmentation of its forces and considerable expenses.

Meanwhile, history convincingly teaches us that Russia invariably rose to the top of hierarchy among maritime powers and received an impetus to development when its Navy was strong and capable of defending the country's interests way beyond its boundaries, supporting the actions of allied states and nations. And whenever its Navy weakened due to neglect things worked in the opposite way.

The case in point is events in the second half of the 19th century, when the marine strength was underrated (the 1853-1856 Crimean War and the 1877-1878

Russo-Turkish War), and also today's successful actions by the RF and Syrian Armed Forces, not least thanks to the Navy.

The challenges and the volatile geopolitical situation in the world are convincing proof that **without a strong Navy Russia cannot hope to lead in the 21st century**. That is why considerable efforts of the country to build the Navy, equip it on a mass scale with LRHPW and other high-tech, including robotized arms systems, are not excessive but *absolutely necessary* in the interests of maximum provision of national security of Russia in this turbulent world, both today and in the future.

And last but not least. The emergence in 2014-2015 of new conceptual documents, including the *National Security Strategy*, the *Military and Maritime Doctrines of the Russian Federation*, and also expanding the scope of the Navy in "working" the coast with LRHPW, cry for a *serious revision and renovation* of the *2012 Fundamentals of National Policies of the Russian Federation in the Area of Maritime Activity until 2020*, which is practically Russia's long-term naval strategy.

NOTE:

1. *Voyennaya doktrina Rossiyskoy Federatsiyi* [the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation], *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, December 30, 2014, Article 12.

Translated by Margarita Kvartskhava
