



RUSSIA AND BLACK SEA SECURITY

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The security environment in the wider Black Sea region—which brings together the six littoral states (Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine) and a hinterland including the South Caucasus and Moldova—is rapidly changing. It combines protracted conflicts with a significant conventional military build-up that intensified after the events of 2014: Russia's takeover of Crimea and the start of the internationalized civil war in eastern Ukraine.¹ Transnational connections between conflicts across the region and between the Black Sea and the Middle East add further dimensions of insecurity. As a result, there is a blurring of the conditions of peace, crisis and conflict in the region. This has led to an unpredictable and potentially high-risk environment in which military forces with advanced weapons, including nuclear-capable systems, are increasingly active in close proximity to each other.

In this context, there is an urgent need to develop a clearer understanding of the security dynamics and challenges facing the wider Black Sea region, and to explore opportunities for dialogue between the key regional security actors. This background paper on Russia is part of the Black Sea Regional Security Initiative, a project launched by SIPRI in 2017 to provide independent data and analysis on security developments in the region and to promote transparency around military issues.² This paper continues by describing Russia's situation on the Black Sea (section I), it then outlines recent trends in Russia's defence policy, including an overview of Russia's national documents (section II), the structure (section III) and deployment (section IV) of its armed forces, its military spending (section V), and its arms holdings and acquisitions (section VI), with a specific focus on their relations with

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¹ Russia gained control over Crimea in March 2014 after a referendum in Crimea favoured secession from Ukraine to join Russia. Russia and a few other countries claim this to be a legal accession. However, Ukraine and most other countries call the referendum and accession to Russia an illegal annexation of Ukrainian territory. This paper uses the term 'takeover' to mark only the factual change of control of Crimea.

² As well as background papers mapping the developments in each of the 6 Black Sea littoral states, the project will publish a paper covering the various conflicts in the region: Klimenko, E., 'Protracted armed conflicts in the post-Soviet space and their impact on Black Sea security', SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security no. 2018/8, Dec. 2018, and a longer paper on the challenges in the region: Melvin, N. J., *Rebuilding Collective Security in the Black Sea Region*, SIPRI Policy Paper no. 50 (SIPRI: Stockholm, Dec. 2018). The Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs provided funding for the project.

SUMMARY

● The Black Sea region is experiencing a changing military balance. The six littoral states (Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine) intensified their efforts to build up their military potential after Russia's takeover of Crimea and the start of the internationalized civil war in eastern Ukraine in 2014.

With large armed forces around the Black Sea, Russia plays an important role in the security of the Black Sea region. Russia sees the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) expansion eastwards as a threat to its security. To keep strategic balance with NATO, Russia has responded by enhancing its military forces, including in the Black Sea region. Russia also sees the Black Sea as its access point to the Mediterranean region, where Russia's role has been growing significantly in recent years.



by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) led to an increase in regional tensions. The events of 2014 dramatically worsened the security environment and escalated tensions and insecurity in the Black Sea region. Russia's takeover of Crimea (and the ongoing conflict in Eastern Ukraine) had a devastating impact on Russia's relations with the five other Black Sea littoral states and led to a new confrontation with NATO.³ Russia acquired a base for a previously planned expansion of its Black Sea Fleet from which it could control most of the Black Sea to counter what Russia perceived as anti-Russian activities by NATO and the latter's expansion in the region. In addition, to ensure its regional power and contend with security challenges that increased after the events of 2014, Russia has focused on strengthening its military forces around the Black Sea including modernizing the Black Sea Fleet and enhancing its military forces in Crimea. Russia's stronger presence in the Black Sea region has also reinforced its ability to project power towards other regions including the Mediterranean. Therefore, as well as indicating the importance of the Black Sea region itself, the strengthening of the capabilities of the Black Sea Fleet may also link to security questions in other regions, especially the Middle East and North Africa.

Geographically, Russia straddles Europe and Asia and, with an area of 17 million square kilometres, is the largest country in the world (see figure 1). Most Russian territory is in Asia, but even the European part is larger than any other European country and, for example, the distance between the north coast of European Russia and the Black Sea coast is over 2600 km. Russia's total coastline is 38 000 km, of which only 1171 km is on the Black Sea (see table 1). The original Russian Black Sea coastline extended for around 500 km from the Kerch Strait opposite Crimea to the border with Abkhazia—the takeover of Crimea in 2014 added 750 km of coastline.⁴

II. Defence policy

Security challenges in the Black Sea region posed by Russia's takeover of Crimea in 2014 have brought substantial changes in the defence policies of all the countries in the region.⁵ Russia, in turn, had to reassess its security and defence policy to strengthen its position in the region and counter perceived external threats. Russia revised and updated its national documents to take into account its pre-existing threat perceptions and potential new threats in the wake of the events of 2014. The content of the updated documents reflected the deterioration in Russia's relationship with the West and, therefore, intensified military modernization as well as policy reorientation towards other regions. Analyses of the main policy documents provide an

³ Melvin (note 2).

⁴ Stanchev, H. et al., 'Determination of the Black Sea area and coastline length using GIS methods and Landsat 7 satellite images', *Geo-Eco-Marina*, no. 17 (2011); and Russian Geographical Society, 'Study of the Crimea coastal zone', 21 Aug. 2014.

⁵ See Wezeman, S. T. and Kuimova, A., 'Bulgaria and Black Sea security', SIPRI Background Paper, Dec. 2018; Kuimova, A. and Wezeman, S. T., 'Georgia and Black Sea security', SIPRI Background Paper, Dec. 2018; Wezeman, S. T. and Kuimova, A., 'Romania and Black Sea security', SIPRI Background Paper, Dec. 2018; Wezeman, S. T. and Kuimova, A., 'Turkey and Black Sea security', SIPRI Background Paper, Dec. 2018; and Wezeman, S. T. and Kuimova, A., 'Ukraine and Black Sea security', SIPRI Background Paper, Dec. 2018 (note 2).

Table 1. Basic facts about Russia and the Black Sea

| | |
|--|---|
| Area ^a | 17 125 191 km ² |
| Black Sea coastline | 1 171 km |
| Waters claimed in the Black Sea | |
| Territorial waters | 12 nautical miles (22 km) |
| Exclusive economic zone | 200 nautical miles (370 km) |
| Neighbouring countries | |
| Land borders ^b | Azerbaijan, Belarus, China, Estonia, Finland, Georgiaa, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Mongolia, North Korea, Norway, Poland, Ukraine Russia, Turkey |
| Maritime borders only | Japan, United States |
| Maritime borders in the Black Sea ^b | Georgia ^b , Romania (EEZ only) ^c , Turkey (EEZ only), Ukraine |
| Population (2018) ^a | 146 million |
| GDP (2017) | |
| Total (current US\$) | \$1 527 billion |
| Per capita | \$10 608 |
| Membership | |
| NATO | Not a member |
| European Union | Not a member |
| Military spending (2017) | |
| Total (current US\$) | \$66 335 million |
| As a share of GDP | 4.3% |

EEZ = exclusive economic zone; GDP = gross domestic product; NATO = North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

^a These figures include the territory of Crimea now controlled by Russia, with an area of 26 100 km², a coastline of 750 km and a population of 2.3 million.

^b Russia also has land and maritime borders with Abkhazia and a land border with South Ossetia. The de jure maritime border with Georgia is entirely made up of the de facto maritime border with Abkhazia.

^c The maritime border with Romania is in waters surrounding Crimea claimed by Russia.

Sources: International Monetary Fund, World Economic Outlook Database, Apr. 2018; SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, May 2018; Stanchev, H. et al., 'Determination of the Black Sea area and coastline length using GIS methods and Landsat 7 satellite images', *Geo-Eco-Marina*, no. 17 (2011); Russian Geographical Society, 'Study of the Crimea coastal zone', 21 Aug. 2014; and Oral, N., 'Summary of EEZ zones in the Black Sea', Commission on the Protection of the Black Sea Against Pollution, [n.d.].

overview of the transformation of threats and priorities of Russia's foreign and defence policy in relation to the Black Sea region.

Since the early 2000s Russia has identified one of the major 'external dangers' to its security to be the increase in NATO's military capabilities and membership—in particular, NATO's enlargement and potential further enlargement in Central and Eastern Europe, which Russia views as expansion towards its borders. The threat that NATO represents is mentioned clearly in the main Russian strategic planning documents: the national security strategy adopted in May 2009 and revised in December 2015 and the military doctrine adopted in February 2010 and revised in December 2014.⁶ Territorial claims against Russia and its allies as well as foreign military deployments in countries neighbouring Russia and its allies and in waters adjacent to Russia are also identified as external threats to Russian security.⁷

⁶ President of Russia, 'Стратегия национальной безопасности Российской Федерации до 2020 года' [National security strategy of the Russian Federation until 2020], 13 May 2009; President of Russia, 'Стратегия национальной безопасности Российской Федерации' [National security strategy of the Russian Federation], 31 Dec. 2015; President of Russia, 'Военная доктрина Российской Федерации' [Military doctrine of the Russian Federation], 5 Feb. 2010; and President of Russia, 'Военная доктрина Российской Федерации' [Military doctrine of the Russian Federation], 19 Dec. 2014.

⁷ President of Russia, [Military doctrine of the Russian Federation], Dec. 2014 (note 6), para. 12(в).



The Black Sea region is not identified explicitly in these documents, unlike for instance the Arctic region and Asia. However, several important issues directly related to the Black Sea itself and the Black Sea littoral states are referenced. The national security strategy as revised in 2015 mentions the conflict in Ukraine against the background of the foreign policy interests of the United States and the European Union while also emphasizing the negative implication of the instability in Ukraine on Russia's security:

the position of the West, aimed at countering the integration processes and creating hotbeds of tension in the Eurasian region, has a negative impact on the realization of Russian national interests. The support of the United States and the European Union of the anti-constitutional coup in Ukraine led to a deep split in Ukrainian society and the emergence of armed conflict.⁸

Russia's foreign policy concept of November 2016 mentions some potential developments in Russian–Georgian relations. According to that document, 'Russia is interested in normalizing relations with Georgia in areas where the Georgian side is willing to do the same, with due consideration for the current political environment in the South Caucasus'.⁹

At the same time, all documents identify strengthening Russia's partnership with Abkhazia and South Ossetia as a key area of its foreign policy and one of the new priorities for its strategic cooperation to ensure joint defence and security.¹⁰ In addition, among the regional priorities of Russian foreign policy, all the documents highlight the development of relationships with other members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

The Black Sea is explicitly mentioned in documents that focus on naval policies and doctrines. The principles of the state policy on naval operations, approved in July 2017, identify the Black Sea as a strategically important area along with the Arctic, the Mediterranean Sea and the Caspian Sea.¹¹ It mentions enhancement of the defence capabilities of the Black Sea Fleet by developing 'a combined group of the armed forces' in Crimea as one of the tools for 'conflict prevention and strategic deterrence'.¹² The link between the Black Sea and the wider Mediterranean region, the Middle East and North Africa and even the central Atlantic is outlined in Russia's naval doctrine of 2015.¹³

⁸ President of Russia, [National security strategy of the Russian Federation], Dec. 2015 (note 6), para. 17.

⁹ Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Концепция внешней политики Российской Федерации' [Foreign policy concept of the Russian Federation], 30 Nov. 2016, para. 59.

¹⁰ Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (note 9); President of Russia, [National security strategy of the Russian Federation], Dec. 2015 (note 6), para. 89; and President of Russia, [Military doctrine of the Russian Federation], Dec. 2014 (note 6), para. 21(3). See also Klimenko (note 2).

¹¹ President of Russia, Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 20.07.2017 г. № 327 об утверждении Основ государственной политики Российской Федерации в области военно-морской деятельности на период до 2030 года [Decree of the President of the Russian Federation no. 327 of 20 July 2017 on approval of the principles of the state policy of the Russian Federation in the field of naval activities for the period until 2030], 20 July 2017; and Interfax, 'Путин утвердил основы госполитики РФ в военно-морской деятельности до 2030 года' [Putin approved the principles of the state policy of the Russian Federation in the field of naval activities for the period until 2030], 20 July 2017.

¹² President of Russia (note 11), para. 38.

¹³ President of Russia, 'Морская доктрина Российской Федерации' [Maritime doctrine of the Russian Federation], July 2015; and Jones, S. and Hille, K., 'Russia's military ambitions make waves in the Black Sea', *Financial Times*, 13 May 2016.

Table 2. Russian armed forces, selected years 1992–2017

| | 1992 | 2002 | 2007 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 |
|----------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| <i>Personnel</i> | | | | | | | | |
| Active personnel | 3 420 000 | 1 010 600 | 1 027 000 | 845 000 | 791 000 | 818 000 | 851 000 | 900 000 |
| Army | 1 400 000 | 321 000 | 360 000 | 250 000 | 230 000 | 240 000 | 270 000 | 280 000 |
| Air Force | 631 000 | 146 600 | 160 000 | 150 000 | 148 000 | 145 000 | 165 000 | 165 000 |
| Navy | 308 000 | 144 000 | 142 000 | 130 000 | 130 000 | 148 000 | 150 000 | 150 000 |
| Strategic Deterrent Forces | 181 000 | 149 000 | 80 000 | 80 000 | 80 000 | 80 000 | 50 000 | 50 000 |
| Airborne | .. ^a | .. ^a | 35 000 | 35 000 | 32 000 | 34 000 | 45 000 | 45 000 |
| Special Operations Forces | .. ^a | .. ^a | .. ^a | .. ^a | 1 000 | 1 000 | 1 000 | 1 000 |
| Command and support ^b | 900 000 | 250 000 | 250 000 | 200 000 | 170 000 | 170 000 | 170 000 | 209 000 |
| Reserves | 3 000 000 | 2 400 000 ^c | 2 000 000 ^c | 2 000 000 ^c | 2 000 000 ^c | 2 000 000 ^c | 2 000 000 ^c | 2 000 000 ^c |
| Paramilitary ^d | 520 000 | 359 100 | 418 000 | 519 000 | 469 000 | 469 000 | 639 000 | 554 000 |
| <i>Equipment</i> | | | | | | | | |
| Tanks | 52 660 | 22 599 | 23 669 | 20 759 | 20 309 | 20 459 | 20 450 | 13 290 |
| Other armour | 64 300 | 32 365 | 31 420 | 37 570 | 33 500 | 34 194 | 34 294 | 34 377 |
| Artillery over 100 mm | 44 656 | 22 464 | 27 503 | 29 445 | 37 761 | 29 779 | 27 287 | 29 783 |
| Combat aircraft | 7 997 | 2 283 | 2 009 | 1 493 | 1 415 | 1 276 | 1 327 | 1 387 |
| Helicopters | 3 831 | 2 014 | 1 853 | 1 324 | 1 357 | 1 114 | 1 207 | 1 269 |
| Major warships ^e | 437 | 92 | 136 | 97 | 97 | 98 | 98 | 96 |
| Minor warships ^e | 157 | 98 | 85 | 82 | 77 | 67 | 69 | 69 |

.. = no data available.

Notes: Definitions and available information may not be consistent for all years—changes may be partly due to differences in definition or available information. Equipment in storage is included but not all equipment may be operational.

^a Airborne and special operations forces for these years are included in army personnel.

^b Command and support personnel includes railway troops.

^c These figures include only those reserves who have done military service within the previous 5 years; there is a reserve obligation up to age 50, but the majority of these personnel are not included in these figures.

^d The paramilitary forces are the Federal Border Guard Service (under the president's office), the Federal Agency for Special Construction, the Federal Communications and Information Agency, the Federal Protection Service, the Federal Security Service, the Internal Troops of Russia (until 2016), and from 2016 the National Guard (under the president's office).

^e Major warships are combat ships of 1250 tonnes or more standard displacement; minor warships are combat ships of less than 1250 tonnes standard displacement.

Sources: International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance*, various editions; Russian Ministry of Defence; and media sources.

Link with the Mediterranean

Russia has strong interests in the Mediterranean Sea, where it has good relations with Syria and several countries in North Africa. During the Soviet period a substantive fleet was stationed in the Mediterranean Sea, using mainly bases and ports in the Black Sea, Syria and, until the mid-1970s, Egypt. The Mediterranean fleet withdrew soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union, but a small naval logistics support facility remained in Tartus, Syria (see figure 1).

Russia re-established the 'fleet' in 2013 as the Permanent Operational Formation of the Russian Navy in the Mediterranean Sea to carry out missions in the Mediterranean region.¹⁴ While ships for the new Mediterranean force may come, on temporary deployment, from any of the Russian fleets, almost all of its 10–15 warships and support ships normally come from the Black Sea

¹⁴ Smirnov, A., 'Russia returns to the Mediterranean: Fifth Soviet Navy Squadron is back?', *Russia Beyond*, 26 Feb. 2013.



Fleet.¹⁵ The link between the Mediterranean force and the Black Sea Fleet is further emphasized by the Mediterranean force's command and support structure: it is led by the commander of the Black Sea Fleet and it depends logistically mainly on bases of the Black Sea Fleet.¹⁶

Through the Mediterranean the Black Sea Fleet has an exit to the open ocean. A naval presence in the Mediterranean also gives Russia the opportunity to further expand its presence and influence in the strategically important regions of the Middle East and North Africa. In addition, such a presence could be seen as a forward defence of Russia's Black Sea borders from NATO naval threats.

Russia's military intervention since 2015 in the Syrian civil war in support of the Syrian Government and its stronger interest and engagement with the Middle East in general have enhanced the importance of the Black Sea as the main logistical support base for a fleet stationed in the Mediterranean Sea.¹⁷ Simultaneously, the Black Sea bases and the Black Sea Fleet have become the main elements of the logistical lifeline for Russian troops in Syria and Syrian Government troops—known as the 'Syrian Express'.¹⁸ It connects the Black Sea bases (Novorossiysk and Sevastopol) and the Russian naval facility in Tartus.¹⁹ In January 2017 Russia and Syria signed an agreement, to be valid for 49 years, to expand the Tartus facility with a view to improving the support of the Russian Mediterranean 'fleet'.²⁰

III. Armed forces structure

When the Russian armed forces were established in 1992, they inherited most of the inventory, troops and structure of the Soviet Union. The Russian armed forces are currently among the largest in the world in terms of personnel and heavy weapons and have the largest arsenals of nuclear weapons.²¹

The number of personnel serving in the armed forces has increased significantly since 2014 (see table 2). A presidential decree of January 2018 specified the number of military personnel as more than 1 million (1 013 628 personnel).²² The armed forces are staffed by both professional (career and contract) soldiers and conscripts. Following trends in many

¹⁵ Russian Ministry of Defence, 'Operational formation of the Russian Navy in the Mediterranean Sea will receive the Smetlivy guard ship of the Black Sea Fleet', 22 May 2017; and RIA Novosti, 'Число кораблей ВМФ России в Средиземном море увеличилось до 15' [The number of Russian Navy ships in the Mediterranean increased to 15], 1 June 2017.

¹⁶ Interfax, 'Плавмастерская ЧФ отправится в сирийский Тартус' [Floating workshop of the Black Sea Fleet will go to Syrian Tartus], 28 Sep. 2015.

¹⁷ Rumer, E., 'A world order reshaped by Vladimir Putin's ambition', *Financial Times*, 6 Apr. 2016.

¹⁸ Jones and Hille (note 13).

¹⁹ Tsvetkova, M., 'Exclusive: Russia, despite draw down, shipping more to Syria than removing', Reuters, 30 Mar. 2016.

²⁰ Соглашение между Российской Федерацией и Сирийской Арабской Республикой о расширении территории пункта материально-технического обеспечения Военно-Морского Флота Российской Федерации в районе порта Тартус и захода военных кораблей Российской Федерации в территориальное море, внутренние воды и порты Сирийской Арабской Республики [Agreement between the Russian Federation and the Syrian Arab Republic on expanding the territory of the Russian Navy logistics centre in the port of Tartus and on the arrival of Russian ships in the territorial sea, national waters and ports of the Syrian Arab Republic], 18 Jan. 2017.

²¹ Kile, S. N. and Kristensen, H. M., 'World nuclear forces: overview', *SIPRI Yearbook 2018: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2018).

²² President of Russia, Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 17.11.2017 № 555 об установлении штатной численности Вооруженных Сил Российской Федерации [Decree of the



developed countries, Russia has put more emphasis on long-serving career soldiers and less on short-term conscripts. The number of professional personnel has been increasing since 2012: between 2012 and 2017 their number more than doubled, from 162 000 to 384 000.²³ The Ministry of Defence has announced plans for a further increase in the number of professional soldiers, to up to 500 000 in 2018.²⁴ Since 2016, conscripts and reservists have been given the opportunity to serve, after their normal service period, on the basis of a short-term contract (less than a year) in order to participate in Russian peacekeeping and counterterrorism operations abroad, including naval missions.²⁵

The Southern Military District

The Black Sea region falls under Russia's Southern Military District, one of five main regional commands of the Russian armed forces.²⁶ The Southern Military District is the smallest in area of the five commands. It covers south-western Russia, including the North Caucasus, the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea and, since April 2014, also Crimea.

The armed conflict in eastern Ukraine and NATO's growing presence near the Russian border since 2014 has led to some changes in the functioning of the Russian armed forces in the Southern Military District (including Crimea). Along with the modernization of the Black Sea Fleet, the Russian Government has allocated funding to modernize facilities of the Black Sea bases and upgrade the defence infrastructure in Crimea.²⁷ By 2017 Russia had deployed 28 000 troops in Crimea.²⁸ Many of these are naval personnel with the Black Sea Fleet.

The Black Sea Fleet has historically been a strategically important part of the Russian Navy

President of the Russian Federation no. 555 of 17 Nov. 2017 on the establishment of the strength of the armed forces of the Russian Federation], 17 Nov. 2017.

²³ President of Russia, 'Расширенное заседание коллегии Министерства обороны' [Extended meeting of the board of the Ministry of Defence], 22 Dec. 2016; President of Russia, 'Расширенное заседание коллегии Министерства обороны' [Extended meeting of the board of the Ministry of Defence], 22 Dec. 2017; and Interfax, 'Число контрактников в российской армии превысило количество призывников' [The number of military personnel under contract in the Russian Army exceeded the number of conscripts], 6 Apr. 2017.

²⁴ Russian Ministry of Defence, 'Сегодня Вооружённые Силы России способны решать задачи любой сложности, в том числе далеко за пределами страны' [Today the Russian armed forces are able to solve problems of any complexity, including beyond the country's borders], 7 Nov. 2017.

²⁵ TASS, 'Госдума приняла закон о краткосрочных военных контрактах' [The State Duma passed a law on short-term military contracts], 14 Dec. 2016; and Ivanov, M. and Zatarai A., 'Мест в армии становится все меньше' [The number of positions in the army is falling], Gazeta.ru, 1 Apr. 2017.

²⁶ Since 2014 the other commands are the Western, Central and Eastern Military Districts and the Northern Fleet Command. The Southern Military District was known as the Northern Caucasus Military District until Dec. 2010. The Russian Ministry of Defence website also sometimes refers to it as the South Eastern Military District. President of Russia, 'Dmitry Medvedev signed Executive Order on reform of military administrative division of the Russian Federation and establishment of new military districts', 21 Dec. 2010; and Russian Ministry of Defence, 'Южный военный округ' [Southern Military District].

²⁷ Safronov, S., 'Касатонов назвал сроки строительства Новороссийской базы ЧФ' [Kasatonov named the terms of construction of the Novorossiysk base of the Black Sea Fleet], RIA Novosti, 28 July 2016; and Zakvasin, A., 'Принять самолёты любого класса: как Россия модернизирует аэродром Бельбек в Крыму' ['Take planes of any class': how Russia modernizes the Belbek airfield in Crimea], RT, 24 Nov. 2018.

²⁸ International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2018* (Routledge: Abingdon, 2018), p. 206.



The Black Sea Fleet

The Black Sea Fleet has historically been a strategically important part of the Russian Navy, ensuring Russia's military security in the Black Sea and Mediterranean Sea regions. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia inherited a large part of the Soviet Black Sea Fleet and it also leased most of the ships claimed by Ukraine under bilateral agreements of 1997 and 2010.²⁹ The main port for the fleet remained at Sevastopol, Crimea, under an agreement with Ukraine. The other main base was Novorossiysk in Russia.³⁰

After Russia took over Crimea on 18 March 2014, it gained full control of the Sevastopol base. On 2 April 2014 Russia cancelled the 2010 fleet agreement, leaving it in full control of the Black Sea ships.³¹ On the same day Crimea and Sevastopol were added to Russia's Southern Military District.³²

By 2017 the number of personnel serving in the Black Sea Fleet was over 25 000, of a total of 150 000 in the Russian Navy (see table 2).³³ Included in the fleet is a small marine force for amphibious operations, which by 2018 was reported to have expanded.³⁴ By early 2018, the Black Sea Fleet consisted of an estimated 21 major surface combat ships and 7 submarines, located primarily in Sevastopol (80 per cent of the fleet tonnage), and also at smaller bases in Feodosiya (also in Crimea) and Novorossiysk. In addition, there were over 200 support vessels.³⁵

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Land and air forces in Crimea

In November 2017 the Chief of the General Staff of the Russian armed forces, General Valery Gerasimov, claimed that Russia had installed in Crimea an autonomous military formation consisting of a naval base, an army corps and aviation and air defence forces.³⁶ The 22nd Army Corps formed in February 2017 is the basis for commanding land forces for coastal defence of the Crimean Peninsula.³⁷ It consists of different types of forces including two coastal defence brigades and an artillery regiment. An aviation division and an air defence division, as part of the Fourth Air and Air Defence Forces Army

²⁹ Schneider, A., 'Russia's Black Sea Fleet buildup', *Maritime Executive*, 29 Mar. 2017.

³⁰ Schneider (note 29).

³¹ President of Russia, Федеральный закон от 02.04.2014 г. № 38-ФЗ О прекращении действия соглашений, касающихся пребывания Черноморского флота Российской Федерации на территории Украины [Federal Law no. 38-FZ of 2 Apr. 2014 on termination of the agreements governing the presence of the Black Sea Fleet of the Russian Federation on the territory of Ukraine], 2 Apr. 2014.

³² President of Russia, Указ президента Российской Федерации О внесении изменения в Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 20 сентября 2010 г. N 1144 'О военно-административном делении Российской Федерации [Decree of the President of the Russian Federation on amendments to Presidential Decree no. 1144 of 20 Sep. 2010 'On the military-administrative division of the Russian Federation], 2 Apr. 2014.

³³ TASS, 'День Черноморского флота. Досье' [The Black Sea Fleet day—dossier], 11 May 2017.

³⁴ Russian Ministry of Defence, 'Командующий войсками ЮВО прибыл в соединение морской пехоты Черноморского флота' [The commander of the troops of the Southern Military District arrived in the Black Sea Fleet Marine Corps], 13 Mar. 2018.

³⁵ TASS, 'Боевые корабли ВМФ России: Черноморский Флот' [Combat ships of the Russian Navy: Black Sea Fleet], May 2018; and TASS (note 33).

³⁶ Russian Ministry of Defence, 'Remarks by Chief of General Staff of the Russian Federation General of the Army Valery Gerasimov at the Russian Defence Ministry's board session', 7 Nov. 2017.

³⁷ RIA Novosti, 'В Крыму сформирован 22-й армейский корпус Черноморского флота' [22nd Army Corps of the Black Sea Fleet formed in Crimea], 10 Feb. 2017.

Box 1. Armed forces of Abkhazia and South Ossetia

Abkhazia and South Ossetia were autonomous regions of Georgia at the time of the latter's independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. Both declared independence almost immediately and are now de facto states with their own governments, judicial systems, armed forces and other trappings of statehood. Since 2008 their independence has been recognized by a handful of other states, including Russia. Their de jure status remains unclear as Georgia continues to consider both to be part of Georgia and the vast majority of other states do not recognize their independence.^a

Armed forces of Abkhazia^b

The Abkhazian armed forces consist of 2200 active personnel (from a population of around 450 000). There are three military districts: Eastern (Ochamchira), Central (Sukhumi), Western (Pitsunda). The larger part of the personnel serves in the land forces. The army has several tanks and hundreds of armoured vehicles. The air force is equipped with five aircraft, including three trainer aircraft, and six helicopters. The navy includes two divisions of small boats based in Sukhumi and Ochamchira.

Armed forces of South Ossetia^c

The armed forces of South Ossetia consist of 800–3000 personnel. The number of personnel and equipment decreased after the fighting in August 2008.

^a Klimenko, E., 'Protracted armed conflicts in the post-Soviet space and their impact on Black Sea security', SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security no. 2018/8, Dec. 2018.

^b Vzglyad, 'Вооруженные силы Абхазии' [Abkhazian Armed Forces], 7 Aug. 2013.

^c Menabde, G., 'Russian military absorbs "Army of South Ossetia"', Eurasia Daily Monitor, 21 Mar. 2017; Kucera, J., 'South Ossetia keeps its military, for now', Eurasianet, 19 Jan. 2017; and Lenta.ru, 'Расстановка сил' [The alignment of forces], 8 Aug. 2008.

of the South Military District, are deployed in Sevastopol and Feodosiya, and at the airfields in Belbek, Guards and Dzhankoy.³⁸

The most important land-based weapons deployed in Crimea are long-range coastal- and air-defence missile systems. The coastal systems include the Bal system with Kh-35U missiles with a range of 120 km.³⁹ In 2015 Russian President Vladimir Putin claimed that the much more capable Bastion system has also been deployed but, according to other Russian sources, this is only planned by 2020.⁴⁰ With a range of up to 450 km, the Bastion coastal-defence missile system would cover most of the Black Sea from Crimea.⁴¹ An S-400 surface-to-air missile (SAM) system was deployed in Crimea in 2016, followed by a second by early 2018.⁴² The S-400 is the most advanced SAM system currently in service in Russia and, with a range of up to 400 km, covers most of the Black Sea from Crimea. In addition to the missile systems, Russia has also deployed Su-24 and Su-30SM combat aircraft and Ka-27/29 helicopters to Crimea.⁴³

³⁸ Yuferev, S., 'Крым: один из самых защищённых регионов России' [Crimea is one of the most protected regions of Russia], *Voyennoye Obozreniye*, 26 June 2018.

³⁹ Russian Ministry of Defence, 'The Commander of the troops of the South-Eastern Military District checked the coastal missile division of the Black Sea Fleet', 13 Mar. 2018.

⁴⁰ *Der Spiegel*, 'Putin wollte russische Atomwaffe aktivieren' [Putin wanted to activate Russian nuclear weapons], 15 Mar. 2015; and Interfax, 'В Крыму восстановлена боеготовность шахтного берегового ракетного комплекса "Утес"' [In Crimea the combat readiness of the mine coastal missile complex 'Cliff' was restored], 18 Nov. 2016.

⁴¹ *Der Spiegel* (note 40); and Sputnik, 'Bal and Bastion: meet two coastal defense systems Russia deployed to Kurils', 22 Nov. 2016.

⁴² Interfax, 'Военные показали в Крыму С-400 и "Панцирь"' [The military showed S-400 and 'Pantsir' systems in Crimea], 19 Nov. 2016; and Merkulova, M., 'Мирное небо: зачем России второй дивизион С-400 в Крыму' [The peaceful sky: why does Russia need the second division of S-400 in Crimea], RIA Novosti, 10 Jan. 2018.

⁴³ Army Recognition, 'S-400 Triumf 5P85TE2 SA-21 Growler surface-to-air defense missile', 10 May 2018; and Yuferev (note 38).



In 2015, statements by Russian officials that Russia has a right to place nuclear weapons, such as the nuclear-capable bomber aircraft (the Tu-22M3), in any region in Russia, including Crimea, raised concerns, particularly in NATO and Ukraine.⁴⁴ Russia's deployment of nuclear-capable submarines, frigates and corvettes in Crimea reinforced these concerns.⁴⁵ However, as yet there have been no clear indicators that nuclear warheads for these systems have been or will be deployed.

IV. Armed forces deployment

In 2017 Russia's forces were on a number of overseas deployments. As well as small numbers deployed as United Nations peacekeepers, much larger forces—about 9000—were deployed in allied states as part of long-standing basing agreements, including in Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.⁴⁶ About 1500 Russian troops are also deployed in Trans-Dniester, a breakaway region of Moldova.⁴⁷ In the Black Sea region, Russian forces were deployed to protect Abkhazia and South Ossetia—the two breakaway regions of Georgia—and in Ukraine, where it is estimated that 3000–7000 regular Russian troops have supported rebel forces in Donetsk and Luhansk since 2014 in their armed conflict with the Ukrainian Government.⁴⁸

Since 2013, Russian naval forces have been permanently based in the Mediterranean Sea and Russian land and air forces have also been active in Syria, supporting the Syrian Government against a variety of rebel forces. The Mediterranean and Syrian deployments are strongly dependent on Russian Black Sea bases and the Black Sea Fleet. No foreign forces are based in Russia.

Abkhazia and South Ossetia

Immediately after the end of the fighting between Georgia and Russia in South Ossetia in August 2008, Russia recognized the independence of both South Ossetia and Abkhazia (see box 1).⁴⁹ Russia has maintained strong strategic partnerships with the de facto states since 2009. In 2009 Russia signed agreements on military cooperation with Abkhazia and South Ossetia allow-

⁴⁴ RIA Novosti, 'МИД РФ: Россия имеет право разместить ядерное оружие в Крыму' [Russian Foreign Ministry: Russia has the right to deploy nuclear weapons in Crimea], 1 June. 2015.

⁴⁵ UNIAN, 'Russia amasses 32,000 troops, Iskander and S400 systems in Crimea: Ukraine', 24 Apr. 2018.

⁴⁶ SIPRI Multilateral Peace Operations Database, June 2018; and International Institute for Strategic Studies (note 28), p. 206.

⁴⁷ International Institute for Strategic Studies (note 28), p. 206.

⁴⁸ Facon, I., *Russian Military Presence in the Eastern Partnership Countries* (European Parliament, Directorate General for External Policies: Brussels, July 2016), p. 8; International Institute for Strategic Studies (note 28), p. 207; Interfax-Ukraine, 'Kyiv says there are about 6,000 Russian soldiers, 40,000 separatists in Donbas', *Kyiv Post*, 11 Sep. 2017; and Johnson, R. F., 'Russian forces "now 11,000 strong in the Donbass"', *IHS Jane's Defence Weekly*, 6 Oct. 2017.

⁴⁹ RIA Novosti, 'Признание независимости Абхазии и Южной Осетии' [Recognition of independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia], 26 Aug. 2012. See also Klimenko (note 2).



ing Russia to build military bases in their territories.⁵⁰ By 2017, 7000 Russian troops were deployed at the bases in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.⁵¹

In November 2015 Abkhazia and Russia signed an agreement on establishing a joint armed forces group, which came into force in December 2016.⁵² In September 2017 Abkhazia received the first batch of ‘military property’ from Russia under the agreement.⁵³ However, no details of what this ‘military property’ was were revealed.

In March 2017 Russia and South Ossetia signed a similar agreement on inclusion of ‘certain’ units of the South Ossetian Army in the Russian armed forces.⁵⁴ The agreement was approved and ratified by the Russian Duma, the lower house of the Russian Federal Assembly, in February 2018.⁵⁵ The agreement gives Russia greater control of the South Ossetian armed forces and means that South Ossetian troops can be included in the military training system of Russia’s Southern Military District.⁵⁶ Georgia, in turn, views Russia’s agreements with Abkhazia and South Ossetia as the continuation of Russia’s ‘aggressive policy’.⁵⁷

Operations and major exercises

Every year Russia conducts a large number of military exercises of varying sizes. These include large joint-service exercises with foreign partners, staff war games, exercises of specific services and combat readiness inspections.⁵⁸ Russia has held more than 10 000 military exercises since 2014. However, almost all of these were of limited size: for instance, between January 2015 and August 2017 only 124 exercises included 1500 or more troops.⁵⁹

Since 2014 a significant number of military exercises have been held in the Southern Military District, including military training on the territories of

⁵⁰ RIA Novosti, ‘Военные базы РФ за границей. Справка’ [Russian military bases abroad—factsheet], 15 Feb. 2010.

⁵¹ International Institute for Strategic Studies (note 28), p. 206.

⁵² Соглашение между Российской Федерацией и Республикой Абхазия об объединенной группировке войск (сил) вооруженных сил Российской Федерации и вооруженных сил Республики Абхазия [Agreement between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Abkhazia on a joint group of armed forces of the Russian Federation and of the Republic of Abkhazia], 21 Nov. 2015.

⁵³ Sputnik, ‘Россия передала Абхазии партию военного имущества’ [Russia has transferred the military property to Abkhazia], 21 Sep. 2017.

⁵⁴ TASS, ‘Подписано соглашение о вхождении части подразделений армии Южной Осетии в ВС РФ’ [An agreement was signed on the accession of part of the units of the South Ossetian Army to the Russian Armed Forces], 31 Mar. 2017.

⁵⁵ President of Russia, Федеральный закон от 05.02.2018 № 2-ФЗ о ратификации Соглашения между Российской Федерацией и Республикой Южная Осетия о порядке вхождения отдельных подразделений Вооруженных Сил Республики Южная Осетия в состав Вооруженных Сил Российской Федерации [Federal Law no. 2-FZ of 5 Feb. 2018 on ratification of the agreement between the Russian Federation and the Republic of South Ossetia on the procedure for the inclusion of certain units of the armed forces of the Republic of South Ossetia into the armed forces of the Russian Federation], 5 Feb. 2018.

⁵⁶ Reuters, ‘Moscow moves to absorb rebel Georgian region’s military’, 14 Mar. 2017; and Nikolaev, A., ‘Россия теперь может «не бояться» Грузии» [Russia can now not ‘be afraid’ of Georgia], Rosbalt, 29 Jan. 2018.

⁵⁷ Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ‘საგარეო საქმეთა სამინისტროს განცხადება’ [Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia], 24 Jan. 2018.

⁵⁸ TASS, ‘Какие учения ожидают российскую армию в 2016 году’ [What exercises are expected by the Russian Army in 2016], 29 Jan. 2016.

⁵⁹ Hemicker, L., ‘Russia conducts three times more war games than Nato’, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 23 Aug. 2017.



Abkhazia and South Ossetia.⁶⁰ In addition, hundreds of military personnel and items of military equipment from the different branches of the Russian armed forces regularly participate in exercises carried out in Crimea.⁶¹ These exercises are reported by the Russian authorities to be aimed at strengthening defence capabilities and repelling potential aggression against Russia, including threats to use chemical weapons and electronic warfare.⁶² Overall, more than 250 military exercises are planned to be held in the Southern Military District in 2018.⁶³

The Russian forces in the Black Sea region have been active in exercises and operations and have participated in military exercises and operations in Syria (including the ‘Syrian Express’ supply runs to Syria).

The most significant Russian military exercise held in the Black Sea region so far was Kavkaz-2016 (Caucasus-2016), which was held in September 2016 in the Southern Military District, including in the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea. It was the final stage of a set of military exercises for command staff and military command bodies conducted in 2016. About 120 000 troops reportedly participated in the exercise, but with no more than 12 500 servicemen engaged at any one time.⁶⁴ Up to 60 aircraft, 90 tanks and 15 vessels (including warships) of the Black Sea Fleet and the Caspian Flotilla were involved in the exercise.⁶⁵

Russia’s first joint exercise with another country in the Black Sea region after 2014 was a naval exercise carried out with Turkey in April 2017, in which five vessels of the Russian Black Sea Fleet and the Turkish Navy participated.⁶⁶ The joint exercise gave rise to concern within NATO about Turkey’s rapprochement with Russia.⁶⁷ Closer Russian–Turkish ties could

Russian forces in the Black Sea region have participated in military exercises and operations in Syria

⁶⁰ E.g. RIA Novosti, ‘Российские военные провели учения в Абхазии’ [Russian military conducted exercises in Abkhazia], 12 Dec. 2017; and Lenta.ru, ‘В Южной Осетии начались учения 58-й армии’ [The 58th Army exercises have begun in South Ossetia], 13 June 2017.

⁶¹ E.g. RIA Novosti, ‘В Крыму начались учения по управлению ракетными ударами’ [The exercises on rocket strike control have started in Crimea], 15 Apr. 2016; and Russian Ministry of Defence, ‘Командно-штабное учение ВДВ России в Крыму’ [Command-staff exercise of the Russian Airborne Forces is held in Crimea].

⁶² Russian Ministry of Defence, ‘В Крыму прошло масштабное тактическое учение с мотострелками общевойскового соединения Черноморского флота’ [A large-scale tactical exercise was conducted in Crimea with participation of motor rifle divisions of combined forces of the Black Sea Fleet], 15 Sep. 2017; and RIA Novosti, ‘В Крыму начались учения с комплексами С-400 и “Панцирь”’ [Exercises with the S-400 and ‘Pantsir’ systems began in Crimea], 8 June 2018.

⁶³ RIA Novosti, ‘В войсках ЮВО в 2018 году планируется провести более 250 учений’ [More than 250 military exercises are planned in 2018 in the SMD], 1 Dec. 2017.

⁶⁴ Russian Ministry of Defence, ‘Strategic command-and-staff exercise “Caucasus-2016”’, [n.d.]; BBC News, ‘Какую войну репетируют на учениях “Кавказ-2016”’ [What kind of war does the exercise ‘Caucasus-2016’ rehearse], 5 Sep. 2016; and RIA Novosti, ‘Минобороны во время “Кавказ-2016” учитывало проходящие учения США и Грузии’ [The Ministry of Defence took into account the ongoing exercises of the USA and Georgia during ‘Caucasus-2016’], 14 Sep. 2016.

⁶⁵ Grishchenko, N., ‘Учения “Кавказ” показали, кто в Черном море хозяин’ [The exercise ‘Caucasus’ showed who is the boss of the Black Sea], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 22 Sep. 2016.

⁶⁶ Russian Ministry of Defence, ‘В Черном море прошло совместное учение с кораблями ЧФ России и ВМС Турции’ [A joint exercise was conducted in the Black Sea with ships of the Russian Black Sea Fleet and the Turkish Navy], 5 Apr. 2017; and RIA Novosti, ‘В Черном море прошли совместные учения России и Турции’ [Russia and Turkey held joint drills in the Black Sea], 5 Apr. 2017.

⁶⁷ Majumdar, D., ‘Why are Russia and Turkey holding joint naval exercises in the Black Sea?’, *National Interest*, 5 Apr. 2017.

Table 3. Russian military expenditure, 2007–17

| | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 ^a |
|--|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------------------|
| In national currency (current roubles b.) | 1 114 | 1 396 | 1 636 | 1 783 | 2 064 | 2 513 | 2 813 | 3 251 | 4 047 | 4 645 | 3 869 |
| Annual change (%) | 18.6 | 25.3 | 17.2 | 9.0 | 15.8 | 21.8 | 11.9 | 15.6 | 24.5 | 14.8 | -16.7 |
| In US dollars (constant 2016 US\$ m.) | 36 665 | 40 286 | 42 262 | 43 121 | 46 022 | 53 317 | 55 922 | 59 929 | 64 593 | 69 245 | 55 327 |
| Annual real-terms change (%) | 8.9 | 9.9 | 4.9 | 2.0 | 6.7 | 15.9 | 4.9 | 7.2 | 7.8 | 7.2 | -20.1 |
| As a share of GDP (%) | 3.4 | 3.3 | 4.1 | 3.8 | 3.5 | 3.8 | 3.9 | 4.1 | 4.9 | 5.5 | 4.3 |
| Per capita (current US\$) | 304 | 393 | 360 | 410 | 490 | 568 | 615 | 589 | 462 | 481 | 461 |
| As a share of total government spending (%) | 9.8 | 9.9 | 10.2 | 10.1 | 10.3 | 10.8 | 11.1 | 11.8 | 13.8 | 14.8 | 12.0 |

GDP = gross domestic product.

^a Data for 2017 is for budgeted spending; for all other years data is actual spending.

Source: SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, May 2018.

reduce NATO's naval options in the Black Sea as Turkey is the only NATO country in the Black Sea region with a fleet that can compete with Russia's.⁶⁸

An important aspect of Russian military operations is to keep a close eye on the military activities of neighbouring states. Exercises by NATO countries in the Black Sea region are closely monitored by Russian 'spy' ships and aircraft, which are probably used to both gain useful intelligence about NATO weapons and procedures and to show the flag—as a Canadian naval officer said: 'They want us to know this is their area. They are waving the Russian flag.'⁶⁹

V. Military spending

Russia is one of the largest military spenders in the world—it was the fourth largest in 2017. After falling precipitously from 1992 to 1998, Russia's military spending grew in real terms every year between 1999 and 2016; in 2016 it was five times higher than in 1998.

From 2009, Russia's military spending funded an accelerated programme for acquisition of new equipment and for modernization of arms factories. This programme was intended to last until at least 2020 or 2025. However, the Russian economy has suffered a number of setbacks since 2014, including a significant drop in oil export revenues, and government spending has been falling since then. The military budget remained unaffected until 2017, when it fell for the first time since 1998. In 2017 Russian military spending was \$66.3 billion (in current US dollars), a real-terms drop of 20 per cent compared with 2016 (see table 3). It should be noted, however, that the Russian Government made a one-off debt repayment of roughly \$11.8 billion (793 billion roubles) to Russian arms producers in 2016, which raised annual spending above the usual level.⁷⁰

Russia was the world's fourth largest military spender in 2017

⁶⁸ See Wezeman and Kuimova 'Turkey and Black Sea security' (note 5).

⁶⁹ Jones and Hille (note 13).

⁷⁰ Tian, N. et al, 'Global developments in military expenditure', *SIPRI Yearbook 2018* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2018), p. 168.



The decrease in spending in 2017 brought Russia's military burden—military spending as a share of its gross domestic product (GDP)—down to 4.3 per cent of GDP, from 5.5 per cent in 2016.⁷¹ However, this share of GDP was still higher than any other European country had recorded since 2011.

It is impossible to assess what proportion of Russian military spending is dedicated to the military in the Black Sea region: no details are available on the regional focus of spending and only limited information is available on the functional focus by service (see section VI).

VI. Arms holdings and acquisitions

The Russian armed forces are equipped with both new armaments and large numbers of obsolete weapons dating from the Soviet period (see table 2). A lack of funding after the collapse of the Soviet Union left the Russian Army in a crisis up to the early 2000s.⁷² Subsequent attempts to modernize the army were unsuccessful until its failings were exposed by the fighting with Georgia in August 2008. In response, Russia launched a comprehensive modernization programme.⁷³

The modernization programme emphasizes reforming the structure of the armed forces, including procurement of new equipment and modernization of old equipment. In late 2010 the government launched the state armaments programme (gosudarstvennaia programma vooruzhenii, GPV) up to 2020. The main objective of GPV-2020 was to re-equip the Russian armed forces with advanced weapons and boost development of the Russian arms industry. A large part of the total funding of over 20 trillion roubles (\$651 billion) was allocated to the procurement of advanced weapons produced mostly in Russia.⁷⁴

Russia's new state armaments programme prioritizes the development of nuclear deterrence systems

The initial stated objective of GPV-2020 was to ensure that 70 per cent of the army's armaments is 'modern' by 2020. However, no definition of 'modern' is specified. According to official Russian reports, the share of 'modern armaments' in the Russian armed forces increased almost fourfold between 2012 and 2017, reaching 58.9 per cent in 2017.⁷⁵

GPV-2020 prioritized the Strategic Rocket Forces and the Russian Navy.⁷⁶ The Russian Government reported that by 2017 the share of 'modern armaments' in the inventory of the Strategic Rocket Forces was 79 per cent, and in that of the navy was 53 per cent.⁷⁷ Overall, since 2012 the navy has received more than 150 new vessels, including 60 warships.⁷⁸

⁷¹ Tian et al. (note 70).

⁷² Nikolsky, A., 'Эволюция российской системы закупок вооружений и военной техники' [Evolution of the Russian system of procurement of weapons and military equipment], VPK, 29 Nov. 2010.

⁷³ Vesti.ru, 'Медведев: для решения боевых задач нужно развитие пяти факторов' [Medvedev: there is a need to develop five factors to solve military problems], 26 Sep. 2008.

⁷⁴ Lenta.ru, 'Две военных пятилетки' [Two 5-year military plans], 25 Feb. 2011.

⁷⁵ Azanov, R., 'Как обновилась российская армия за пять лет' [How the Russian Army has been upgraded in 5 years], TASS, 11 Dec. 2017.

⁷⁶ BBC News, 'Россия перенесет приоритет на вооружение сухопутной армии' [Russia will shift priority of arms acquisition towards the land forces], 18 May 2017.

⁷⁷ President of Russia, 22 Dec. 2017 (note 23).

⁷⁸ Russian Ministry of Defence (note 36).



On 26 February 2018 President Putin signed the new GPV for 2018–27, before the planned end of GPV-2020.⁷⁹ While the Russian authorities originally indicated that the budget for GPV-2027 would be about 30 trillion roubles (\$520 billion in January 2018 prices), it was reduced to 20 trillion roubles (\$347 billion in January 2018 prices) in 2018 to take into account the weaker economic situation and other government spending.⁸⁰ The new programme prioritizes the development of new nuclear deterrence systems and other advanced weapon systems, but has dropped the naval priority of GPV-2020.⁸¹

The Black Sea Fleet

Shortly after the takeover of Crimea in March 2014 Russia announced measures to implement earlier plans to modernize the Black Sea Fleet, which was largely made up of ships that were at least 25 years old and often badly maintained, outdated and past their design life-span.⁸² While the events of 2014 and the subsequent Russian perception of an increased threat from NATO were probably major drivers of modernization and expansion of the Black Sea Fleet, the new naval presence in the Mediterranean Sea also demanded investments in new ships for the Black Sea Fleet, and by 2017 most of the Black Sea Fleet's most modern warships were assigned to the Mediterranean force.⁸³

By 2017 most of the Black Sea Fleet's most modern warships were assigned to the Mediterranean force

GPV-2020 reportedly foresaw the addition to the Black Sea Fleet of six to eight new frigates, up to six smaller frigates or corvettes, six conventional submarines and up to two large landing ships. In addition, some of the existing ships were to be modernized.⁸⁴

By mid-2018 most ships of the Black Sea Fleet were still from the Soviet era, some of which had been upgraded, but the fleet did include six new submarines as well as three new large Admiral Grigorovich-class frigates armed with Kalibr land-attack cruise missiles and one corvette also armed with Kalibr missiles.⁸⁵ Another 3 frigates, at least 13 corvettes and 2 landing ships are reported to be in production for the Black Sea Fleet.

⁷⁹ TASS, 'Рогозин сообщил о подписании президентом РФ новой госпрограммы вооружения' [Rogozin announced the signing of a new State Armament Programme by the President of the Russian Federation], 26 Feb. 2018.

⁸⁰ TASS, 'Госпрограмму вооружения до 2025 года согласуют в течение полугодия' [The State Armament Programme to 2025 will be agreed on within six months], 10 Jan. 2017; TASS, 'Минобороны: в бюджете ведомства на 2018 год нет сокращения социальных статей' [Ministry of Defence: there is no cut in social spending in the budget of the ministry for 2018], 23 Nov. 2017; and Russian Ministry of Defence, 'New 2018–2027 State Armaments Programme stipulates first-ever fund allocations for infrastructure construction', 10 Jan. 2018.

⁸¹ TASS (note 79).

⁸² Gavrilov, Y., 'Оборона Крыма: с воздуха, с земли и с моря' [The defence of the Crimea: from the air, from the ground and from the sea], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 10 Oct. 2014; RIA Novosti, 'День Черноморского флота в России' [The Black Sea Fleet Day in Russia], 13 May 2017; Russian Defense Policy, 'Russia reinforcing Mediterranean formation', 12 June 2017; and Schneider (note 29).

⁸³ Smirnov (note 14); and Russian Defense Policy (note 82).

⁸⁴ Navy Recognition, 'Moskva cruiser (Project 1164 Atlant: Slava class) flagship of Russia Black Sea Fleet to be refitted', 23 May 2014; and Schneider (note 29).

⁸⁵ Russianships.info, 'Боевые корабли Российской Федерации: 2018' [Warships of the Russian Federation: 2018], 25 Sep. 2018.



VII. Conclusions

With large armed forces around the Black Sea, Russia plays a key role in the security of the region. The Black Sea is seen by Russia not only as an important transit corridor for goods and energy resources but also as its access point to the Mediterranean region, where Russia's role has been growing significantly in recent years. Russian military operations in Syria would be nearly impossible, for instance, without the 'Syrian Express' logistic supply network operating from Russia's Black Sea bases.

Russia sees NATO's expansion eastwards and ongoing military exercises between NATO members and allies near the Black Sea as threats to Russian security and feels that it needs to react by enhancing its military presence in the Black Sea. From the Russian perspective, the integration of Crimea into Russia was a logical 'defensive' step. Possession of Crimea facilitated the objective of modernizing and providing a secure base for the Black Sea Fleet. Possession of Crimea also advances Russia's defences by several hundred kilometres and gives Russia coverage of most of the Black Sea even with land-based missiles. Through the state armaments programmes, the Black Sea Fleet has been receiving new equipment and modernizing its old equipment from Soviet times, which has significantly enhanced the fleet's capabilities. It remains uncertain how far Russia is willing and able to further enhance its military presence to counter what it perceives as a threatening NATO military build-up and to what extent modernization and expansion of Russia's military forces in the Black Sea region are related to, and will have an impact on, Russia's interests in the Middle East and North Africa or specifically the Black Sea region.

Possession of Crimea facilitated the objective of modernizing and providing a secure base for the Black Sea Fleet



Abbreviations

| | |
|------|--|
| CIS | Commonwealth of Independent States |
| CSTO | Collective Security Treaty Organization |
| EEZ | Exclusive economic zone |
| GDP | Gross domestic product |
| GPV | Russian state armaments programme (gosudarstvennaia programma vooruzhenii) |
| MOD | Ministry of Defence |
| NATO | North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| SAM | Surface-to-air missile |



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SIPRI BACKGROUND PAPER

RUSSIA AND BLACK SEA SECURITY

ALEXANDRA KUIIMOVA AND SIEMON T. WEZEMAN

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