

The Strategic Significance of Russia's Black Sea Fleet

By [Igor Pejic](#)

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The Black Sea Fleet is an operational-strategic command of the Russian Navy located on the Black Sea which also includes the ships harbored in the Azov Sea. The history of the fleet begins in the late 18th century in the city of Sevastopol. At that time Russia struggled with its main adversary in that region for naval superiority in the Black Sea - the Ottoman Empire.

The most notable engagements of the fleet include the Battle for the Kerch Strait in 1790 against Ottoman Empire, the Crimean War in the mid 19th century, both World Wars and the Georgian conflict in 2008. The Black Sea Fleet has an immense political and military significance for the Russian government. This has been proven throughout history and also during the most recent Crimean Crisis. The geostrategic significance of the Black Sea Fleet is further increased by the possibility of accessing the Mediterranean Sea by the Bosphorus and Dardanelle straits, which allows Russia to send its naval force into a warm-water sea. This fact is one of the most important traits of the Black Sea Fleet which explains how and why this fleet survived since the 18th century and why the Crimean Peninsula is so important to Russian.

Strategic Role

Beside Russia, the other countries that have coastlines on the Black Sea are Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria, Georgia and Turkey. The Ukrainian Navy has around 6,000-7,000 servicemen with HQ in Odessa (before the coup the Navy had more than 13,000), the Romanian Navy numbers around 7,000 servicemen (one part of the navy operates on the Black Sea coast the other on the Danube river), the Bulgarian Navy has around 3,500 servicemen with HQ in Varna, Georgia whose Navy was merged with the Coast Guard in 2009 under the jurisdiction of the Border Guard and the Ministry of Interior Affairs has 5,000 servicemen and HQ in Poti. And finally, Turkey which has the longest coastline and is also the country which controls the Bosphorus and the Dardanelle straits.

The Turkish Navy has around 50,000 servicemen (~15,000 active and ~35,000 conscripts) with its Northern Sea Area Command in Istanbul and Southern Sea Area Command in Izmir. Although the country has the largest coastline on the Black Sea, Turkey's primary naval objectives are focused on the two straits connecting the Black Sea with the Mediterranean. These two straits have an enormous impact on all naval forces in the Black Sea as well as on the commerce of Turkey and other countries in that region. The significance of these straits can be seen in the daily transportation of oil which reaches more than 2.9 million barrels per day transported by 5,500 oil tankers. Though Turkey has sovereignty over the Bosphorus and the Dardanelle, closing these straits for whichever navy would mean an open act of

aggression, exceeding the incident with the SU-24 downing. Recently there have been concerns of imposing some kind of restrictions to the Russian ships passing these straits, especially since the incident in Syria, but these restrictions are farfetched.

The Black Sea Fleet is truly a major asset for Russia, especially since the unification of Crimea. Also, the power of this fleet can be further boosted by the Caspian Flotilla which is connected to the Black Sea via the Volga-Don canal. In the recent years this fleet has proven to be very important for the Syrian forces. Since the autumn of 2015 for the Russian forces as well - transporting and delivering supplies, and also providing military support against the potential external threats for Syria.

Though this fleet is heavily dependent on the two Turkish straits in order to access the Mediterranean Sea, successful operations in Syria and a possible ending of the conflict could provide Russia with two important naval bases in the Mediterranean. The Russian navy already has some military installations and facilities in Tartus which could be expanded, and in the future we could see similar naval activities taking place in Latakia. As always, the financial aspect determines the state, as well as, the military policy. If Russia decides to expand its navy in the future, it must be cost-effective and efficient.

Igor Pejic graduated Political Science Foreign Affairs Department at the Faculty of Political Science and now he is a postgraduate student on the MA Terrorism, Security and Organised Crime at the University of Belgrade, Serbia.

ANNEX

Structure

Black Sea Fleet ~11,000 servicemen (including marines)

30th Surface Ship Division

- **Missile Cruiser** - *Moskva* ♦ **Missiles:** 16 x P-500/SS-N-12 Bazalt/Sandbox SSM; 8 x B303A VLS systems; 2 x *Osa*-MA Sam Systems ♦ **Guns:** 1 - Twin 130 mm / 70 cal. AK 130. DP; 6 - AK-630 CIWS Gatling Guns; 2 - 45 mm / 85 cal Gun
- **Large Antisubmarine Ship** - *Kerch* ♦ **Missiles:** 2 x 4 URK-5/SS-N-14 Rastrub/Silex SSM/ASW missiles; 2 *Shtorm* SAM systems; 2 *Osa*-M SAM systems ♦ **Guns:** 2 x 2 76.2 mm/59cal AK-726 DP; 4 x 6 30 mm AK-630 AA
- **Patrol Ship** - *Smetlivyy* ♦ **Missiles:** 2 x *Uran*; 2 *Volna*-M SAM systems ♦ **Guns:** 1 x 2 76.2 mm/59 cal DP AK-726
- **Patrol Ship** - *Ladnyy* ♦ **Missiles:** 4 URK-5/SS-N-14 Rasturb/Silex SSM/ASW missiles; 2 *Osa*-MA-2 SAM systems ♦ **Guns:** 2 dual 76.2 mm/59cal DP AK-726
- **Patrol Ship** - *Pytlivyy* ♦ **Missiles:** 4 URPK-5 Rasturb/SS-N-14 Siles SSM/ASW missiles; 2 *Osa*-MA-2 SAM systems ♦ **Guns:** 2 x 1 100 mm DP AK-100

197th Assault Ship Brigade

- **Large Landing Ship** - *Nikolay Filchenkov* ♦ **Missiles:** 3 SA-N-5 Grail launchers manual aiming; 122 mm UMS-73 *Grad*-M bombardment ♦ **Guns:** 1 dual 57 mm/70 DP; 2 dual 25 mm AA

- **Large Landing Ship - Orsk** ♦ **Missiles:** 3 SA-N-5 Grail launchers manual aiming
♦ **Guns:** 1 dual 57 mm/70 DP
- **Large Landing Ship - Saratov** ♦ **Missiles:** 3 SA-N-5 Grail launchers manual aiming
♦ **Guns:** 1 dual 57 mm/70DP
- **Large Landing Ship - Azov** ♦ **Missiles:** 4 x 8 *Strela* (SS-N-3); 2 122 mm UMS-73 Grad-M bombardment ♦ **Guns:** 1 AK-726 DP (1 x 76.2 mm); 2 x 6 - AK-630 CIWS Gatling Guns
- **Large Landing Ship - Novocherkassk** ♦ **Missiles:** 4 x 8 *Strela* (SS-N-3); 2 122 mm UMS-73 Grad-M bombardment ♦ **Guns:** 2 x 2 AK-725 DP (2 x 57 mm)
- **Large Landing Ship - Tsesar Kunikov** ♦ **Missiles:** 4 x 8 *Strela* (SS-N-3); 2 122 mm UMS-73 Grad-M bombardment ♦ **Guns:** 2 x 2 AK-725 DP (2 x 57 mm)
- **Large Landing Ship - Yamal** ♦ **Missiles:** 4 x 8 *Strela* (SS-N-3); 2 122 mm UMS-73 Grad-M bombardment ♦ **Guns:** 2 x 2 AK-725 DP (2 x 57 mm)

4th Independent Submarine Brigade

- **Diesel-Electric Submarine B-871 - Alrosa** ♦ **Armament:** 6 x 21 inch torpedo tubes; 8 *Strela-3* (SA-N-8 Gremlin) or 8 *Igla* (SA-N-10 Gimlet) missiles
- **Diesel-Electric Submarine - B-380** ♦ **Armament:** 6 x 21 inch torpedo tubes; 24 x 21 inch anti-submarine or anti-ship torpedoes
- **Diesel-Electric Submarine B-261 - Novorossiysk** ♦ **Armament:** 6 x 21 inch torpedo tubes; 8 *Strela-3* (SA-N-8 Gremlin) or 8 *Igla* (SA-N-10 Gimlet) missiles
- **Diesel-Electric Submarine B-237 - Rostov on Don** ♦ **Armament:** 6 x 21 inch torpedo tubes; 8 *Strela-3* (SA-N-8 Gremlin) or 8 *Igla* (SA-N-10 Gimlet) missiles
- **Diesel-Electric Submarine B-435 - former Zaporizhzhia** ♦ **Armament:** 10 x 21 inch torpedo tubes

68th Coastal Defense Ship Brigade

149th Antisubmarine Ships Tactical group:

- **Small Missile Ship - Alexandrovets** ♦ **Missiles:** 1 *Osa-M* SAM system; 2 SA-N-8 SAM positions ♦ **Guns:** 1 dual 57 mm/70cal DP; 1 30 mm AA
- **Small Missile Ship - Suzdalets** ♦ **Missiles:** 1 *Osa-M* SAM system; 2 SA-N-8 SAM positions ♦ **Guns:** 1 dual 57 mm/70cal DP; 1 30 mm AA
- **Small Missile Ship - Muromets** ♦ ♦ **Missiles:** 1 *Osa-M* SAM system; 2 SA-N-8 SAM positions ♦ **Guns:** 1 dual 57 mm/70cal DP; 1 30 mm AA

150th Minesweepers Tactical Group:

- **Seagoing Minesweeper - Kovrovets** ♦ **Missiles:** 2 x Twin Grail Launchers (10x Grail SAM) ♦ **Guns:** 2 x 2 30 mm AK-230 guns in twin turrets; 2 x 2 25 mm 2M-3M-230 guns in twin turrets
- **Seagoing Minesweeper - Ivan Golubets** ♦ **Missiles:** 2 x Twin Grail Launchers (10x Grail SAM) ♦ **Guns:** 2 x 2 30 mm AK-230 guns in twin turrets; 2 x 2 25 mm 2M-3M-230 guns in twin turrets
- **Seagoing Minesweeper - Turbinist** ♦ **Missiles:** 2 x Twin Grail Launchers (10x Grail SAM) ♦ **Guns:** 2 x 2 30 mm AK-230 guns in twin turrets; 2 x 2 25 mm 2M-3M-230 guns in twin turrets

- **Seagoing Minesweeper** - Vice Admiral Zhukov ♦ **Missiles:** 2 x Twin Grail Launchers (10x Grail SAM) ♦ **Guns:** 2 x 2 30 mm AK-230 guns in twin turrets; 2 x 2 25 mm 2M-3M-230 guns in twin turrets

41th Missile Boat Brigade

166th Novorossiysky Small Missile Ships Battalion:

- **Surface Effect Warfare Corvette** - Bora ♦ **Missiles:** 2 x 4 3M-80/SS-N-22 *Moskit/Sunburn* SSM; 1 Osa-MA SAM system ♦ **Guns:** 1 AK-176 76.2 mm/59cal DP full automatic; 2 AK-630 Gatling Gun AA 6 x 30 mm
- **Surface Effect Warfare Corvette** - Samum ♦ **Missiles:** 2 x 4 3M-80/SS-N-22 *Moskit/Sunburn* SSM; 1 Osa-MA SAM system ♦ **Guns:** 1 AK-176 76.2 mm/59cal DP full automatic; 2 AK-630 Gatling Gun AA 6 x 30 mm
- **Small Antisubmarine Ship** - Shtil ♦ **Missiles:** 6 P-120/SS-N-9 *Malakhit/Siren* SSM; 1 Osa-M SAM system ♦ **Guns:** 1 AK-176 76.2 mm/59cal full automatic; 2 AK-630 Gatling Gun AA 6 x 30 mm
- **Small Antisubmarine Ship** - Mirazh ♦ **Missiles:** 6 P-120/SS-N-9 *Malakhit/Siren* SSM; 1 Osa-M SAM system ♦ **Guns:** 1 AK-176 76.2 mm/59cal full automatic; 2 AK-630 Gatling Gun AA 6 x 30 mm
- **Small Antisubmarine Ship** - Zelenyy Dol ♦ **Missile:** 1 x 40 retractable A-215 *Grad-M*; 2 x 4 UKSK VLC Cells Kalibar-NK; 1 x 4 3M47 *Gibka*; 2 x 4 Komar ♦ **Guns:** 1 AK-176 76.2 mm/59cal DP full automatic; 2 AK-630 Gatling Gun AA 6 x 30 mm
- **Small Antisubmarine Ship** - Serpuhkov ♦ 1 x 40 retractable A-215 *Grad-M*; 2 x 4 UKSK VLC Cells Kalibar-NK; 1 x 4 3M47 *Gibka*; 2 x 4 Komar ♦ **Guns:** 1 AK-176 76.2 mm/59cal DP full automatic; 2 AK-630 Gatling Gun AA 6 x 30 mm

295th Sulinsky Missile Boats Battalion:

- **Missile Boat - R-60** ♦ **Missiles:** 4 SS-N-22 *Sunburn* (2 twin) launchers; SAM - SA-N-5 Grail quad launcher ♦ **Guns:** 1 AK-176 76.2 mm/59cal DP full automatic; 1 *Palash* CIWS 2 x 6 30 mm
- **Missile Boat - R-71** ♦ **Missiles:** 4 SS-N-2 Styx (2 twin) launchers ♦ **Guns:** 1 AK-176 76.2 mm/59cal DP full automatic.
- **Missile Boat - R-109** ♦ **Missiles:** 4 SS-N-22 *Sunburn* (2 twin) launchers; SAM - SA-N-5 Grail quad launcher ♦ **Guns:** 1 AK-176 76.2 mm/59cal DP full automatic; 2 AK-630M Gatling gun AA 6 x 30 mm
- **Missile Boat - R-239** ♦ **Missiles:** : 4 SS-N-22 *Sunburn* (2 twin) launchers; SAM - SA-N-5 Grail quad launcher ♦ **Guns:** 1 AK-176 76.2 mm/59cal DP full automatic; 2 AK-630M Gatling gun AA 6 x 30 mm
- **Missile Boat** - Ivanovets ♦ **Missiles:** : 4 SS-N-22 *Sunburn* (2 twin) launchers; SAM - SA-N-5 Grail quad launcher ♦ **Guns:** 1 AK-176 76.2 mm/59cal DP full automatic; 2 AK-630M Gatling gun AA 6 x 30 mm

184th Coastal Ship Brigade

- **Small Antisubmarine Ship** - Povorino ♦ **Missiles:** 1 Osa-M SAM system; 2 SA-N-8 SAM positions ♦ **Guns:** 1 76.2 mm/59cal DP; 1 30 mm AA
- **Small Antisubmarine Ship** - Eysk ♦ **Missiles:** 1 Osa-M SAM system; 2 SA-N-8 SAM

- positions ♦ **Guns:** 1 76.2 mm/59cal DP; 1 30 mm AA
- **Small Antisubmarine Ship** – *Kasimov* ♦ **Missiles:** 1 Osa-M SAM system; 2 SA-N-8 SAM positions ♦ **Guns:** 1 76.2 mm/59cal DP; 1 30 mm AA
 - **Seagoing Minesweeper** – *Velentin Pikul* ♦ **Missiles:** 18 x sets of MANPAD *Igla*; 2 x anti-submarine RBU-1200 ♦ **Guns:** 2 AK-630M Gatling Gun AA 6 x 30 mm
 - **Seagoing Minesweeper** – *Zheleznikov* ♦ **Missiles:** 18 x sets of MANPAD *Igla*; 2 x anti-submarine RBU-1200 ♦ **Guns:** 2 AK-630M Gatling Gun AA 6 x 30 mm
 - **Seagoing Minesweeper** – *Vice Admiral Zakharyin* ♦ **Missiles:** 18 x sets of MANPAD *Igla*; 2 x anti-submarine RBU-1200 ♦ **Guns:** 2 AK-630M Gatling Gun AA 6 x 30 mm
 - **Base Minesweeper** – *Mineralnie Vodi* ♦ **Armament:** 2 x 30 mm guns; 2 x 25 mm guns
 - **Base Minesweeper** – *Leytenant Ilyin* ♦ **Armament:** 2 x 30 mm guns; 2 x 25 mm guns
 - **Harbour Minesweeper** – *RT-46* ♦ **Armament:** 2 x 14.5 mm machine guns
 - **Harbour Minesweeper** – *RT-278* ♦ **Armament:** 2 x 14.5 mm machine guns

Black Sea Naval Infantry:

- 810th Naval Infantry Brigade
- 382nd Independent Naval Infantry Battalion

Black Sea Fleet Naval Air Force HQ Sevastopol:

- 25th Independent Anti-submarine Helicopter Regiment ~20 helicopters Ka-27 Mi-14
- 917th Independent Composite Air Regiment ~10 Antonov; 4 Be-12; ~10 Mi-8
- 43rd Independent Naval Assault Squad 18 Su-24M; 4 Su-24MR

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