



## ТЕМАТИЧЕСКОЕ ДОСЬЕ: Большое Средиземноморье: продолжая конструировать макрорегион

## THEMATIC DOSSIER: The Greater Mediterranean: Still Constructing the Macro-region


DOI: 10.22363/2313-0660-2021-21-4-609-624

*Research article / Научная статья*

### Russian Policy in the Mediterranean: Historical Continuity and International Context

Konstantin P. Kurylev  , Nickolay P. Parkhitko 

Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University), Moscow, Russian Federation

 [kurylev-kp@rudn.ru](mailto:kurylev-kp@rudn.ru)

**Abstract.** The article considers the main directions of the Russian Federation's foreign policy in the Mediterranean region in the period from 2015 to autumn 2021. The authors present a historical analysis of Russia's military presence in the Mediterranean Sea since its first deployment in the 18th century and separately during the Cold War, since the key strategic goals and operational-tactical tasks facing the 5th Soviet Navy operational squadron in those years, as a whole, remained unchanged. Only their scale was adjusted. Three key aspects that determine the need for Russia's presence in the Mediterranean are researched. These are the military, political and economic (raw) components that form the determinant of Russian foreign policy in the region. The expansion of the military activity of NATO countries — in particular, the United States, Great Britain and France — in the Mediterranean Sea and the Middle East, especially since the beginning of the civil war in the Syrian Arab Republic in 2011, requires an asymmetric response from Russia in the context of protecting its national interests. As far as geopolitics is concerned, Russia's return of at least partial of those Soviet influence in the region also contributes to strengthening our country's international positions. Finally, Russia's presence in a part of the world, which is a natural logistics hub in the context of both world trade and energy supplies, conceptually complements the military-political agenda. The authors use the methods of historical and political analysis and practical systematization in order to formulate the main hypothesis of the study and come to scientific and theoretical conclusions. The main hypothesis is that the expansion of Russia's military, political and economic presence in the Mediterranean will be intensified as the country's economic potential grows. The authors suggest the following order as tools for implementing the strategy: speeding up efforts to ensure the permanent military presence of the Russian Navy in the Mediterranean, deepening bilateral ties with Syria and conducting a pragmatic economic policy towards Turkey, which claims to be an important actor in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East as a whole.

**Key words:** history, Mediterranean Sea, Middle East, Russia, Syria, Turkey, NATO, energy resources, economy, security

© Kurylev K.P., Parkhitko N.P., 2021




This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

**For citation:** Kurylev, K. P., & Parkhitko, N. P. (2021). Russian policy in the Mediterranean: Historical continuity and international context. *Vestnik RUDN. International Relations*, 21(4), 609—624. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-0660-2021-21-4-609-624>

## Политика Российской Федерации в Средиземноморье: преемственность в контексте актуальной международной повестки

К.П. Курьлев  , Н.П. Пархитко 

Российский университет дружбы народов, Москва, Российская Федерация  
 [kurylev-kp@rudn.ru](mailto:kurylev-kp@rudn.ru)

**Аннотация.** Рассматриваются основные направления внешней политики РФ в Средиземноморском регионе в период с 2015 г. по осень 2021 г. Проводится исторический анализ военного присутствия России в акватории Средиземного моря с момента его развертывания в XVIII в. и отдельно — в годы холодной войны, поскольку ключевые стратегические цели и оперативно-тактические задачи, стоявшие в те годы перед 5-й оперативной эскадрой ВМФ СССР, в целом остались неизменными. Корректировке подвергся лишь их масштаб. Рассматриваются три ключевых аспекта, обуславливающих необходимость присутствия России в Средиземноморье: это военный, политический и экономический (сырьевой) компоненты, формирующие детерминанту российской внешней политики в регионе. Расширение военной активности стран НАТО, в частности США, Великобритании и Франции, в Средиземном море и на Ближнем Востоке, особенно с началом гражданской войны в Сирийской Арабской Республике в 2011 г., требует асимметричного ответа со стороны России в контексте защиты ее национальных интересов. С точки зрения геополитики возвращение Россией хотя бы частичного влияния в регионе, которым обладал СССР, также способствует укреплению международных позиций страны. Наконец, присутствие России в части света, представляющей собой естественный логистический узел в контексте как мировой торговли, так и поставок энергоносителей, концептуально дополняет военно-политическую повестку. Используются метод исторического анализа, метод политического анализа и метод практической систематизации, позволяющие авторам сформулировать главную гипотезу исследования и прийти к научно-теоретическим выводам. Основная гипотеза заключается в том, что расширение военного, политического и экономического присутствия России в Средиземноморье будет расширяться по мере роста экономического потенциала страны. В качестве инструментов реализации данной задачи авторы предполагают следующий порядок: форсирование усилий по обеспечению постоянного военного присутствия ВМФ РФ в акватории Средиземного моря, углубление двусторонних связей с Сирией и проведение прагматичной экономической политики в отношении Турции, претендующей на роль ключевого игрока в Восточном Средиземноморье и на Ближнем Востоке в целом.

**Ключевые слова:** история, Средиземное море, Ближний Восток, Россия, Сирия, Турция, НАТО, энергоносители, экономика, безопасность

**Для цитирования:** Kurylev K.P., Parkhitko N.P. Russian Policy in the Mediterranean: Historical Continuity and International Context // Вестник Российского университета дружбы народов. Серия: Международные отношения. 2021. Т. 21. № 4. С. 609—624. DOI: 10.22363/2313-0660-2021-21-4-609-624

### Introduction

The Mediterranean region is a geographical, economic, geopolitical and cultural space that has all the features of a strategic “anchor point” for the entire Eastern hemisphere.

Firstly, it is a huge trade and logistics hub on its scale. The Suez Canal alone accounts for 10 to 12 % of global trade. Only in 2020—2021, the canal’s economic indicators amounted to 9763 ships with a total cargo of about 610 million tons. Moreover, the highest in the history

income of the canal was recorded — USD 5.84 billion.<sup>1</sup> The Bosphorus and Dardanelles, connecting the Black Sea and the Mediterranean, are annually crossed by over 60 000 ships of various classes<sup>2</sup>, which is about four times more

<sup>1</sup> Daly Transit Report // Suez Canal Authority (SCA). September 6, 2021. URL: <https://www.suezcanal.gov.eg/English/Pages/default.aspx> (accessed: 13.09.2021).

<sup>2</sup> “Narrow Throat” of the Sea Straits // Central Dispatch Office of the Fuel and Energy Complex [«Узкое горло» морских проливов // Центральное диспетчерское управление топливно-энергетического комплекса].

than the trade and logistics flow of the Panama Canal, the key transport artery of the Western hemisphere. With adding Gibraltar<sup>3</sup> to the list (even if the Gibraltar Strait is not directly related to the Eastern Mediterranean — a zone of potential Russian interests), then a relatively compact region would account for three key transport and logistics facilities.

Secondly, given the discovery over the past decade of significant natural gas reserves in the Mediterranean Sea shelf near the island of Cyprus, as well as off the coast of Israel, Syria, and Egypt, the region is of particular value both in the context of its resource potential and in the long term — in terms of building a future logistics concept (Maleev, 2011, p. 62).

Finally, the region is of particular importance in terms of the traditionally heightened interest in its politico-military dimension. Being actually at the junction of two continents and three macro-regions, the Mediterranean geopolitical space is an extremely convenient base for the deployment of both — a naval strike force and deterrent forces in proportion to the estimated military threat (Ivanov, 2013, p. 21).

In addition, the Mediterranean is an arena of political rivalry for almost all of the largest geopolitical actors: first of all, the EU, the USA, Russia and, to a large extent, the PRC (Balfour, 2009, p. 101; Kausch & Youngs, 2009, p. 972).

In fact, the authors consider the latter aspect to be one of the key in assessing the policy of the Russian Federation in the Mediterranean in terms of its national (military) security policy.

For at least the past 10 years, the Mediterranean has been a real hotbed of instability. According to V.V. Popov, Director of MGIMO University Center for the Partnership of Civilizations, “it is a region in which growing environmental, economic, social and cultural problems coexist with increasing international tensions. Significant differences in the levels of development between countries, as well as regional

conflicts pose increasing threats to its sustainable future.”<sup>4</sup> Syrian and Libyan civil conflicts have a heavy destabilizing effect on the entire region. The “Arab Spring”, along with the regime changes in a number of countries, provoked a severe socio-political crisis, the consequences of which have not yet been overcome (Streltsov, 2014, pp. 122—123). While Tunisia and Egypt have largely recovered from political turmoil, in Lebanon, Iraq and Algeria socio-political instability has become nearly chronic. The civil conflict in Syria, provoked in 2011, is also far from over.

These challenges contribute to all kinds of extremist and fundamentalist sentiments, given the cultural specificity of the region. As a result, the terrorist threat is growing, with the risk of escalating from isolated “pockets” into a vast zone of instability (Naumkin, Popov & Kuznetsov, 2012, p. 95).

The vacuum resulting from the unprecedented weakening of the statehood of the once major regional actors (Egypt, Syria, Libya) was attempted by Western powers (primarily the United States and France), which seek to preserve their influence (Gadzhiev, 2007, p. 244). A number of extremist and openly terrorist organizations have entered the political arena (from al-Qaeda to Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, Jabhat al-Nusra, and others, which now constitute the core of the so-called Islamic State<sup>5</sup>). The security challenges, which the whole region has been facing for quite long period, have obviously slowed down the socio-economic development of almost all Arab states in the Mediterranean (Podtserob, 2015, p. 39).

These processes are taking place against the background of mass migration of refugees from African and Asian countries (Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq, and now Afghanistan, located outside the Mediterranean Sea, but burdening the

01.07.2016. (In Russian). URL: [https://www.cdu.ru/tek\\_russia/issue/2016/7/177/](https://www.cdu.ru/tek_russia/issue/2016/7/177/) (accessed: 13.09.2021).

<sup>3</sup> Gibraltar // World Trade Statistics [Гибралтар // Статистика мировой торговли]. 2019. (In Russian). URL: [https://customsonline.ru/world\\_trade\\_statistics.html](https://customsonline.ru/world_trade_statistics.html) (accessed: 13.09.2021).

<sup>4</sup> Popov V.V. Two Policy Lines in the Mediterranean // *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* [Независимая газета]. 23.12.2019. (In Russian). URL: [https://www.ng.ru/vision/2019-12-23/6\\_7759\\_vision.html](https://www.ng.ru/vision/2019-12-23/6_7759_vision.html) (accessed: 13.09.2021).

<sup>5</sup> These organizations are banned in the Russian Federation.

region with refugee flows) to Europe. As Eurostat puts it, migration is growing exponentially as socio-economic conditions in home countries of migrants seriously deteriorate.<sup>6</sup>

All this affects (directly or indirectly) the Russia's foreign policy strategy in the Black Sea-Mediterranean region. The object of our study is the Russian policy in the Mediterranean region in the historical and political context. The implementation of key foreign policy instruments by the Russian leadership forms the research subject.

The Mediterranean is actually a “geopolitical rift,” where political concepts of key international actors collide (the “home” Arab concept is present in the region by default). Russia and the Euro-Atlantic community follow quite different approaches to dealing with regional problems. Western coalition tries to retain its influence in the region by any means, even at the cost of further destabilization of the socio-political situation. Russia's concept is inspired by collective efforts and necessity for joint interaction in order to neutralize common challenges and threats (Primakov, 2016, p. 122).

The research looks quite novel as it systematizes and generalizes the current historical and political imperatives of the current Russia's foreign policy strategy in the region, instead of just identifying historical facts. The authors analyze the main military, political and economic determinants of Russia's foreign policy strategy, explaining its presence in the Mediterranean. The main objective from which the authors proceed is to identify priorities in the planning of Russia's foreign policy in the region, based on the analysis of the above-mentioned aspects. They are presented in the final part of the article in the form of analytical conclusions and recommendations, which demonstrate the practical significance of the study.

<sup>6</sup> Migration and migrant population statistics // Eurostat. March 2021. URL: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Migration\\_and\\_migrant\\_population\\_statistics#Migration\\_flows:\\_Immigration\\_to\\_the\\_EU\\_from\\_non-member\\_countries\\_was\\_2.7\\_million\\_in\\_2019](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Migration_and_migrant_population_statistics#Migration_flows:_Immigration_to_the_EU_from_non-member_countries_was_2.7_million_in_2019) (accessed: 19.08.2021).

## Theoretical Background and Research Methodology

Contemporary Russian historiography on the Mediterranean region and Russian policy there is represented by an extensive list of fundamental scientific works on both general and specific issues. The topic has been elaborated at a high degree in the publications of many contemporary scholars.

A research paper written by M.V. Ilyin provides a comprehensive analysis of the Greater Mediterranean. The author stresses the global importance of the region as it has long been one of the key structures that determine processes in the “Old World” and beyond, and is actually woven into a wide network of structural relations. In addition, the author specifically emphasizes that the impact of the Greater Mediterranean on the evolution of our planet and humanity goes beyond single and local events. It is a constant source of development and convergence of humanity as a planetary creative force.<sup>7</sup>

A systematic analysis of the political situation in the Mediterranean by the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century is presented in the study of E.M. Primakov (2016), and a preliminary analysis — in the research work of A.A. Gromyko (2014).

The school of Sevastopol State University (A.A. Irkhin, D.V. Makovskaya, O.A. Moskalenko, L.P. Nelina, V.D. Nechaev, etc.) deserves special mentioning. Its representatives stress that “the restoration of Russian sovereignty over the Crimea and Sevastopol strategically won back some of the space lost during the collapse of the USSR... Gaining opportunities for a more independent policy in the Greater Mediterranean is one of the directions for Russia's revival. But Russia meets some considerable constraints to pursuing such a policy, which boil down to vulnerable economic model and possible joint

<sup>7</sup> Ilyin M.V. Introductory sketch for the Greater Mediterranean [Ильин М.В. Вводный очерк для Большого Средиземноморья] // ResearchGate. January 2020. (In Russian). URL: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338901203\\_Vvodnyj\\_ocherk\\_dla\\_Bolsogo\\_Sredizemnomora](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338901203_Vvodnyj_ocherk_dla_Bolsogo_Sredizemnomora) (accessed: 26.04.2021).

consolidation of the West and Turkey on an anti-Russian basis” (Irkhin, Nelina & Chikharev, 2018, p. 67).

According to A.A. Irkhin, by defending its interests in Syria, Moscow questions the division of spheres of influence in the Black Sea and wider Black Sea-Caspian region between Russia and Turkey. By invading the Turkish near abroad, it provoked Ankara’s mirror activity in the Russian near abroad — the formation of a Turkish-Ukrainian military-political alliance, which will also have both the Crimean dimension and the defrosting of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh (Irkhin, 2016, p. 28).

In his turn, I.A. Chikharev argues that “Russia’s return to the region is accompanied by serious shocks. Though it is already obvious that Russia’s activities contribute to the balance of power in the macro-region, whose states for 25 years have been the object of unrestrained destructive interference from the United States and its European allies. One can speak of a Eurasian turn in the geopolitics and geo-economics of the Mediterranean, with Russia as one of the drivers. This turn may be associated with a special role of Russia in Eurasian processes, which is not limited to its geostrategic position, but is associated with civilizational, scientific and technological potential, as well as global political opportunities” (Chikharev, 2021, pp. 453—454).

The practical steps taken by the Russian leadership to regain the lost influence in the Mediterranean are covered by research papers authored by S.G. Luzyanin (2007), scholars from the Russian Academy of Sciences represented by V.V. Naumkin, V.V. Popov, V.A. Kuznetsov (Naumkin, Popov & Kuznetsov, 2012), research team of the MGIMO University (Streltsov, 2014). It’s worth mentioning the paper of D.B. Malysheva, who highlights the factors that determine the strategic importance of the Mediterranean. According to her, the region remains a convenient springboard from which one can influence the Middle East, North Africa, the Black Sea-Azov basin. The geographical and related geopolitical position of Mediterranean

countries makes these countries an important component of the entire security system of the European continent. In addition, the main trade routes connecting the West with the East and its oil-bearing Persian Gulf run through the Mediterranean Sea. Finally, the importance of the Mediterranean as an energy corridor from Africa and the Middle East to Europe is also important (Malysheva, 2015).

The report of the Russian Council on Foreign Affairs (RIAC) (Ivanov, 2013) and the fundamental work of A.B. Podtserob (2015), devoted to the analysis of relations between Russia and the Arab world, is of a special interest. One of the key factors behind Russia’s foreign policy interest in the Mediterranean is energy, which is reflected in the publications of I.V. Danilin (2012). International energy security is fully analyzed by A.A. Kokoshin (2006). S.A. Kondakov focuses on the geopolitical aspect of Russian energy policy (2012). For B.S. Lukshin the key research priority is military and political aspects (2012).

Yannis A. Stivachtis provides a profound analysis of the theory of the regional security complex in its application to the Mediterranean region. He sees the Mediterranean security complex as including three sub-complexes. The first is the Eastern Mediterranean, which revolves around the Greco-Turkish, Syrian and Israeli-Palestinian/Arab conflicts. The second, the Central Mediterranean, includes Italy, Libya, Albania and Malta and is centered mainly around migration. The third, the Western Mediterranean, includes France, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Spain and Portugal. It is formed around France, the migration issue and related threats such as terrorism, radicalism and human trafficking (Stivachtis, 2021, p. 417).

M.M. Aghazada views the Greater Mediterranean regional security complex as global. The processes taking place in the region have a direct impact on global security. It includes Russia, France and Britain — permanent members of the UN Security Council. At the same time, regional powers such as Turkey, Italy, Israel, Iran and Saudi Arabia also play an important role in increasing the importance of the Greater Mediterranean, as well

as tightening there the struggle for leadership (Aghazada, 2021, p. 438).

The European vision of the region's potential is presented in research papers authored by Balfour (2009), Del Sarto (2006), and Kausch and Youngs (2009). Mark Pierini from the European branch of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace gives a systematic assessment of Russia's policy in the Mediterranean,<sup>8</sup> which looks like as alternative to the accepted in the domestic information and political space.

A monograph authored by the former Commander-in-chief of the Soviet Navy, Admiral of the Fleet of the Soviet Union S.G. Gorshkov "The Sea Power of the State" is a comprehensive theoretical research with a profound analysis of national naval strategy, including in the Mediterranean (Gorshkov, 1979). By that time, the USSR had become a global naval power capable of conducting operations of any scale and complexity in the World Ocean. At the same time, in operational and strategic terms, the fleet was assigned a secondary role, and the Soviet leadership itself, both party and military, adhered to a continental thinking, viewing the navy only as one of the factors within the U.S. nuclear deterrent and the need to maintain the nuclear component of the Soviet fleet in peacetime (Kurylev, Parkhitko & Nikulin, 2020, p. 28). In his work S.G. Gorshkov emphasizes the idea of the role and importance of the military fleet in peacetime as one of the main factors of demonstration of economic and military power of the state outside its borders, ensuring the country's state interests abroad, that is a diplomatic tool for the prevention of wars and military conflicts (Kurylev, Parkhitko & Nikulin, 2020, p. 28).

S.G. Gorshkov believed that the concept of using the navy was part of an overall strategy, culminating in victory on land. However, he insisted that fleets were capable of performing unique missions. He wrote that "for the USSR, sea power acts as one of the important factors in

reinforcing the economy, accelerating scientific and technical development, strengthening economic, political, cultural and scientific ties of the Soviet people with friendly peoples and countries. The essence of sea power... lies in the state's ability to study the ocean and develop its riches, the condition of the transport and fishing fleets and their ability to meet the needs of the state, the condition and capabilities of the country's shipbuilding industry, and the availability of a naval fleet corresponding to the interests of this state..." (Gorshkov, 1979).

From the theoretical perspective the current study applies the structural realism in its defensive version, which proceeds from the principle of the expediency of striving for relative rather than absolute power superiority, due to which Russia's role in ensuring security in the Greater Mediterranean has been studied. The research is based on a set of methods — comparative-historical, political analysis and political science forecasting (within the framework of the system approach).

### **Historical Overview of the Russian Presence in the Mediterranean**

It is traditionally believed that the starting point of the presence of the Russian military fleet in the Mediterranean is the First Archipelago Expedition, successfully undertaken during the Russian-Turkish War of 1768—1774 (Tarle, 1959, p. 104). Although there is historical evidence that suggests that even in the 7th century the ships of the East Slavic tribes reached not only the Byzantine shores of the Black Sea, but also the Sea of Marmara and even Cyprus, Crete and the Apennine Peninsula (Mishulin, 1941, p. 232). The authors consider it correct to proceed exactly from the generally accepted approach. After all, the object of our analysis is the navy as an independent (but not situationally formed) branch of the armed forces, designed to solve the strategic and operational tasks of the state. It also does not seem possible to speak of an established Russian state in the early Middle Ages.

In connection with the outbreak of a major war with Turkey in 1768, Catherine II decided to redeploy part of the forces of the Russian fleet

<sup>8</sup> Pierini M. Russia's Posture in the Mediterranean: Implications for NATO and Europe // Carnegie Europe. June 8, 2021. URL: <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2021/06/08/russia-s-posture-in-mediterranean-implications-for-nato-and-europe-pub-84670> (accessed: 13.09.2021).

from the Baltic to the Mediterranean Sea in order to draw back the Turkish army and fleet from the Danube and Balkan theaters of military operations. Thus, five squadrons (consisting of 20 battleships and ships of other classes) were redeployed from the Baltic to the Mediterranean Sea in the summer of 1769. The squadron was commanded by Admiral G.A. Spiridov. The First Archipelago Expedition ended by the defeat of the Turkish fleet from the Russians in the Chesme Bay on June 24—26, which facilitated the actions of the Russian army in Moldova and Wallachia, contributed to the anti-Ottoman uprisings in Greece, Syria and Egypt and the conclusion of the Kuchuk-Kainarji Peace in 1774,<sup>9</sup> extremely beneficial for the Russian Empire. It should be noted that the participation of five Russian squadrons in the Mediterranean campaign was the first major operation of the Russian fleet outside the Baltic Sea.

The victory of the Russian fleet far from its bases and the use of modern battle tactics against an experienced and powerful opponent, such as the Ottoman Empire at that time, clearly demonstrated to Europe the strength of Russia's military presence in the Mediterranean. In the following years — since Crimea joined Russia in 1783 and the Black Sea Fleet was formed — Russia's military strength in the Black Sea-Mediterranean region only increased.

An important stage in the history of the Russian Navy's military presence in the Mediterranean is the short but glorious period of naval warfare against Napoleonic France. The united Mediterranean squadron under the command of Russian Admiral F.F. Ushakov (previously distinguished during the Russian-Turkish War of 1787—1791) within two years (1798—1800) liberated the Ionian Islands from the French, taking by storm on 18—19 February

<sup>9</sup> Russian State Naval Archive (RSNA). F. 190. Оп. 1. Military Campaign Chancellery of Admiral G.A. Spiridov for Commanding a Squadron in the Mediterranean Sea (1769—1774) [Российский государственный архив Военно-морского флота (РГАВМФ). Ф. 190. Оп. 1. Военно-походная канцелярия адмирала Г.А. Спиридова по командованию эскадрой в Средиземном море (1769—1774 гг.)]. (In Russian). URL: [https://rgavmf.ru/sites/default/files/opis\\_pdf/\\_190\\_1\\_full.pdf](https://rgavmf.ru/sites/default/files/opis_pdf/_190_1_full.pdf) (accessed: 06.09.2021).

1799 a fortress on the island of Corfu, which was considered impregnable from the sea.<sup>10</sup>

During the Russian-Turkish war of 1806—1812 a squadron under the command of Vice-Admiral D.N. Senyavin operated in the Mediterranean Sea. Under his leadership, the Dardanelles (May 10, 1807) and Athos (June 21, 1807) battles were won, which laid the foundation for the signing of the Bucharest Peace Treaty, victorious for Russia.<sup>11</sup>

Similarly, the progress of Russian-Turkish war of 1828—1829 was affected by the victory of the Russian squadron under the command of Rear Admiral L.P. Gayden together with the squadrons of British and French fleets in the Navarino battle on October 8, 1827. The Adrianople Peace Treaty, beneficial for Russia, was signed with Turkey on September 14, 1829.

As it should be in a major geopolitical game, Russia's successes in the Mediterranean irritated not only its traditional opponent, the Ottoman Empire, but also the country with which relations since the early 19th century could be described as allied — Great Britain. It was London, which claimed to conquer global maritime dominance, and turned out to be among Russia's opponents in the Crimean War of 1853—1856. Notably, Britain acted in alliance with its recent geopolitical rival, France, and quite atypical “ally” — the Ottoman Empire. The unsuccessful outcome of the war temporarily forced Russia to abandon the expansion of its military presence in the Mediterranean, which became hardly feasible, given that the Paris Peace Treaty deprived Russia (like Turkey) of

<sup>10</sup> RSNA. F. 192. Оп. 1. Field Campaign Chancellery of Admiral F.F. Ushakov for Commanding a Squadron in the Mediterranean Sea (1798—1800) [РГАВМФ. Ф. 192. Оп. 1. Походная канцелярия адмирала Ф.Ф. Ушакова по командованию эскадрой в Средиземном море (1798—1800 гг.)]. (In Russian). URL: [https://rgavmf.ru/sites/default/files/opis\\_pdf/\\_192\\_1\\_full.pdf](https://rgavmf.ru/sites/default/files/opis_pdf/_192_1_full.pdf) (accessed: 06.09.2021).

<sup>11</sup> RSNA. F. 194. Оп. 1. Chancellery of Vice-Admiral D.N. Senyavin for Commanding a Squadron in the Mediterranean Sea (1805—1810) [РГАВМФ. Ф. 194. Оп. 1. Канцелярия командующего эскадрой в Средиземном море вице-адмирала Д.Н. Сенявина (1805—1810 гг.)]. (In Russian). URL: [https://rgavmf.ru/sites/default/files/opis\\_pdf/\\_194\\_1\\_full.pdf](https://rgavmf.ru/sites/default/files/opis_pdf/_194_1_full.pdf) (accessed: 06.09.2021).

the right to possess both the fleet and the military infrastructure in the Black Sea. Russia was able to achieve the abolition of this provision of the treaty relatively soon — in 1871 during the London Conference. The restoration of full-fledged military presence in the Black Sea-Mediterranean basin took place in 1877—1878 after Russia's victorious war with Turkey.

In general, before the outbreak of World War I, Russia maintained a fleet in the Mediterranean on a permanent basis. Training trips, scientific research and humanitarian work were carried out. One of the brightest examples of the latter is the assistance of the ships of the midshipman squadron of the Baltic Fleet of Rear Admiral V.I. Litvinov to the Italian cities affected by the earthquake in the area of Messina on December 15, 1908.<sup>12</sup>

With the beginning of World War I the command of the Russian Navy was tasked to capture the Turkish straits. However, the Russian squadron on the Mediterranean Sea did not deploy active operations. It was only the cruiser "Askold" of the heavy ships that took part in combat operations.

However, military logistics were different. The Russian ships "Chesma," "Askold," the cruiser "Varyag," six destroyers and the submarine "St. George," built in Italy, passed from the Far East to Arkhangelsk and Murmansk through the Suez Canal and Gibraltar at different times during World War I. In 1916—1917 up to 45 thousand Russian soldiers were deployed across the Mediterranean from Arkhangelsk and from the Far East to France to participate in battles on the Western front.<sup>13</sup>

After 1917 and until the end of World War II, Russia's interest (beyond the political etymology of the country's name) in the

Mediterranean was temporarily devalued, which did not prevent it from returning to the region when it became necessary.

Summing up the almost 150 years of Russian military presence in the Mediterranean, two conclusions are to be made. First, the expansion of Russia's military influence was a reciprocal measure and somehow a historical necessity in the face of the hostile policies pursued by the Ottoman Empire and the European powers (France before 1815 — directly, Great Britain before 1853 and after 1856 — indirectly). And although the goals that are usually classified as "imperial"<sup>14</sup> have not been achieved by Russia, the key task — increasing the security of the state's southern borders and preventing the hegemony of the foreign fleet in the Black Sea-Mediterranean basin — was fully reached.

The second conclusion suggests that from 1829 until the signing of the Russo-British agreement in 1907, the Mediterranean Sea was an arena of confrontation between Britain and Russia. In a sense, this confrontation can be compared with the Cold War, since the processes and mechanisms that took place were generally similar to those observed in the region in the postwar decades of the 20th century. The only difference — the struggle between Russia and the British Empire was replaced by the Soviet-American confrontation.

### **International Situation in the Mediterranean at the Beginning of the 21st Century**

During the Soviet era, the country's maritime presence in the World Ocean was global by nature. Strategic planning for displaying the Soviet flag in different parts of the world was based on the Maritime Strategy, adopted in the

<sup>12</sup> Siryi S.P. The Tragedy of the Italian Messina and the Role of Navy in Assisting the Victims // RSNA [Сирый С.П. Трагедия итальянского города Мессины и роль флота в оказании помощи пострадавшим // РГАВМФ]. (In Russian). URL: [https://rgavmf.ru/sites/default/files/lib/siry\\_messina.pdf](https://rgavmf.ru/sites/default/files/lib/siry_messina.pdf) (accessed: 06.09.2021).

<sup>13</sup> Gorbachev S.P. Russian Fleet in the Mediterranean // Military Review [Горбачев С.П. Флот России в Средиземноморье // Военное обозрение]. 25.07.2013. (In Russian). URL: <https://topwar.ru/31277-flot-rossii-v-sredizemnomore.html> (accessed: 06.09.2021).

<sup>14</sup> This refers primarily to the conquest or other form of establishing strategic control over the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits. This can also be conventionally attributed to the failure of Paul I's idea to convert Malta to Russian citizenship and rather mediocre results of gaining political independence of a number of Slavic or orthodox Eastern European states (with the exception of Serbia), which ultimately turned out to be among Russia's adversaries during World War I.



1960s and drafted by Commander-in-Chief of the Soviet Navy, Admiral S.G. Gorshkov. The Soviet Navy was viewed not only as an instrument of military deterrence of the U.S. and NATO in the World Ocean, but also as a “powerful factor in creating favorable conditions for building socialism and communism” in the Third World (Gorshkov, 1979, p. 11).

To perform operational and tactical tasks in the Mediterranean Sea, the 5th operational squadron of the USSR Navy was formed in 1967, which first began to carry out combat missions to repel a possible nuclear attack on the USSR by the U.S. 6th Fleet stationed in the water. Until 1977, the squadron was based in the Egyptian ports of Port Said and Alexandria, and after the pro-Western President A. Sadat came to power in Egypt, it moved to the port of Tartus (Syrian Arab Republic), which had previously been used as a logistical support base.

With the end of the Cold War and after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia reduced its military presence in the World Ocean in general and in the Mediterranean in particular. On December 31, 1992, the 5th (Mediterranean) operational squadron of the Russian Navy was disbanded. The only “clue” of Russia in the Mediterranean Sea was the port in Tartus, again “downgraded” to a logistical support point. The USSR Maritime Doctrine was replaced by the Memorandum on Russia’s Mediterranean Policy of 1995, which actually formalized Russia’s withdrawal from this key region in many respects (Luzyanin, 2007, p. 72).

As D.B. Malysheva stresses “the resulting political vacuum allowed the USA and some allied European states to expand their sphere of influence in the Mediterranean. Thus, the U.S. 6th fleet not only did not leave its area of responsibility — the Mediterranean Sea and adjacent Atlantic waters, but even expanded the geography of its actions, including the coast of Africa (Gulf of Guinea)” (Malysheva, 2015, p. 114). Given the geographical location of the region as a bridgehead at the junction of two continents and three macro-regions, its value for the U.S. strike force is obvious.

Thus, “the peculiarities of the current military and political situation and possible

future trends have determined the return to the Russian military practice of its vital element — the constant activity of naval groupings in sea areas and ocean zones, important for ensuring Russia’s national interests” (Kurylev, Parkhitko & Nikulin, 2020, p. 26). From the second half of the 2000s, Russia started regaining its influence in the region. Since 2007, the Russian Navy has relaunched its permanent presence in different areas of the World Ocean, including the Mediterranean Sea. However, at that time it was a question of deploying individual warships and supply vessels in the water strictly on a rotational basis, which, on the one hand, means the constant presence of the Russian fleet in the Mediterranean Sea, and, on the other, does not allow to assert the presence of a permanent operational group, as in the case of the Soviet 5th squadron and even more the US 6th fleet.

The authors consider two documents to be the most important in understanding the national maritime policy: the Maritime Doctrine of the Russian Federation, adopted on July 26, 2015,<sup>15</sup> and the Concept of National Security of the Russian Federation, adopted on July 2, 2021.<sup>16</sup> The Maritime Doctrine is a fundamental document that defines the state policy in protecting national interests in the World Ocean, includes regional directions of the national maritime policy, as well as methods of its implementation. It is the new Maritime Doctrine that has largely made the Russian Navy the main beneficiary of the State Armament Program 2011—2020 (Martynenko & Parkhitko, 2018, p. 514).

<sup>15</sup> Maritime Doctrine of the Russian Federation dated July 26, 2015 // Electronic Fund of Legal and Normative-technical Documents [Морская доктрина Российской Федерации от 26 июля 2015 года // Электронный фонд правовых и нормативно-технических документов]. (In Russian). URL: <https://docs.cntd.ru/document/555631869> (accessed: 06.09.2021).

<sup>16</sup> Decree of the President of the Russian Federation dated 02.07.2021 No. 400 “On the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation” // Official Internet Portal of Legal Information [Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 02.07.2021 № 400 «О Стратегии национальной безопасности Российской Федерации» // Официальный интернет-портал правовой информации]. 03.07.2021. (In Russian). URL: <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202107030001> (accessed: 06.09.2021).

Strategically, the doctrine includes the regions of the Arctic, Pacific, Atlantic and, separately, the Mediterranean. The main foreign policy imperatives include pursuing a purposeful course towards turning the region into a zone of military-political stability and good-neighborliness; ensuring a sufficient Russian naval presence in the region on a permanent basis; developing the cruise shipping from the ports of Crimea and Krasnodar territory to the countries of the Mediterranean basin.<sup>17</sup>

In general, the Maritime Doctrine is based on the following mechanisms and implementation tools: 1) protection of national interests with the help of the navy; 2) demonstration of the flag and military force in the world's oceans; 3) protection and defense of the state border, territorial sea, continental shelf and exclusive economic zone; 4) development of fleet forces and basing system (Druzhinin & Lachinskii, 2019, p. 8).

As for the National Security Concept, the authors believe it appropriate to highlight paragraph 37, which indicates as a regional threat the “escalation of tensions in conflict zones in the post-Soviet space, the Middle East, North Africa... Weakening of global and regional security systems creates conditions for the spread of international terrorism and extremism.”<sup>18</sup> As a response to the identified challenges, the Concept provides for “ensuring and protecting national interests of the Russian Federation,” which are “carried out by focusing the efforts and resources of public authorities, organizations and civil society institutions on the implementation of the following strategic national priorities: ...national defense... strategic

stability and mutually beneficial international cooperation.”<sup>19</sup>

Let us consider the main aspects that determine the importance of the studied region for the Russian Federation.

### **Key Aspects of Russian Policy in the Mediterranean. Military Factor**

As noted above, the Mediterranean is an extremely convenient strategic springboard, which allows to exert serious economic, politico-military, cultural and other influence on such important for the development and functioning of the world economy and politics areas as the Middle East, North Africa, the Black Sea-Azov basin, and the geographical and related geopolitical position of Mediterranean countries makes them an important component of the whole security system in Europe (Mikhlin et al., 2020, p. 25).

It is interesting to note that the Maritime Doctrine was updated two months before Russia began the Syrian military campaign. In confronting terrorists, the Russian naval forces provided cover for the air operation and carried out strikes with the help of cruise missiles and ship-based aviation. But their main operational task is to track the movements of the 6th US fleet and warships of NATO countries.

As already mentioned, combat duty off the coast of Syria takes place on a rotational basis, that is, de facto Russian ships and submarines are constantly present in the Mediterranean Sea.

At the time of writing, the Russian military presence in the Mediterranean Sea was represented by a grouping of five diesel-electric submarines of Project 636.3 of the Russian Navy with Caliber-PL cruise missiles on board: three from the Black Sea Fleet and two from the

<sup>17</sup> Maritime Doctrine of the Russian Federation dated July 26, 2015 // Electronic Fund of Legal and Normative-technical Documents [Морская доктрина Российской Федерации от 26 июля 2015 года // Электронный фонд правовых и нормативно-технических документов]. (In Russian). URL: <https://docs.cntd.ru/document/555631869> (accessed: 06.09.2021).

<sup>18</sup> A New Concept of the National Security of the Russian Federation was Adopted // Army Collection [Принята новая Концепция национальной безопасности Российской Федерации // Армейский сборник]. 02.08.2021. (In Russian). URL: <https://army.ric.mil.ru/Stati/item/336026/> (accessed: 06.09.2021).

<sup>19</sup> Decree of the President of the Russian Federation dated 02.07.2021 No. 400 “On the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation” // Official Internet Portal of Legal Information [Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 02.07.2021 № 400 «О Стратегии национальной безопасности Российской Федерации» // Официальный интернет-портал правовой информации]. 03.07.2021. (In Russian). URL: <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202107030001> (accessed: 06.09.2021).

Pacific Fleet. Such a number of submarines, simultaneously present in the waters of the Mediterranean Sea, have been deployed there for the first time in the modern history of Russia. Though two submarines — “Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky” and “Volkhov” are making an inter-fleet transition from the Baltic to the Pacific, they may stay in the permanent operational connection of the Russian Navy in the Mediterranean Sea. Along with them, “Krasnodar,” a submarine of the Black Sea Fleet of the same type, entered the Mediterranean Sea after being repaired in Kronshtadt. Two more submarines of the Black Sea Fleet are in the Mediterranean squadron. In addition, the Project 20385 missile corvette “Gremyashchiy” is undergoing an inter-fleet transition from the Baltic to the Talnakh Concentration Fleet.<sup>20</sup>

For presenting the preliminary assessment of the Russian military presence in the Mediterranean the authors compare the scale and operational-tactical objectives of the NATO exercise “Sea Breeze — 2021” (in which Ukraine was also involved)<sup>21</sup> and the Russian strategic maneuvers in the Mediterranean, conducted almost simultaneously at the end of June 2021. Russia has engaged five ships, including the missile cruiser “Moscow,” frigates “Admiral Essen” and “Admiral Makarov,” and also two submarines “Stary Oskol” and “Rostov-on-Don” together with anti-submarine aircraft Tu-142MK and Il-38, long-range bombers Tu-22M3 and fighter-interceptors MiG-31K were involved in the exercise. During the exercises of the forces of the permanent operational

formation of the Russian Navy in the Mediterranean Sea and the aviation forces of the Russian Air Force in the eastern Mediterranean Sea, the crews of the ships worked out the tasks to repel attacks by enemy air forces.<sup>22</sup> Separately, it should be mentioned that for the first time Russia deployed “Kinnzhal” hypersonic missile carriers (MiG-31K fighter-interceptors) to the Khmeimim base in Syria, marking the high vulnerability of NATO’s southern flank.

The Russian Federation does not seek military conflicts with its neighbors, does not threaten anyone, and yet has strong arguments in the dialogue “from power position” imposed by the collective West. Although the U.S. spends on military needs 12.5 times more than Russia<sup>23</sup> the anti-Russian exercise “Sea Breeze — 2021” in the Black Sea ended under the operational control of coastal missile systems and under the wing of Russian Tu-22M3 missile carriers. This confirms the increased capabilities of the Russian Navy (as well as the Armed Forces as a whole), allowing to give an asymmetric response to unfriendly actions of both NATO and non-bloc countries.

### Logistic Aspect

The Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits, which connect the Black Sea with the Mediterranean, are historically a zone of Russia’s national interests. “The Black Sea region is a kind of bridge or crossroads — a link between Europe and Asia. Located between Russia, Southern Europe and the Middle East, having access to the Mediterranean and Central Europe, it is much more than a region of local importance” (Kurylev, 2013, p. 112). With

<sup>20</sup> Admiral Komoyedov: Russia Corrects Mistakes in the Mediterranean Sea // *Vzglyad* [Адмирал Комоедов: Россия исправляет ошибки в Средиземном море // *Взгляд*]. 09.09.2021. (In Russian). URL: <https://vz.ru/news/2021/9/9/1118012.html> (accessed: 12.09.2021).

<sup>21</sup> A total of five thousand soldiers, 32 ships and 40 aircraft from 32 countries took part in the exercise “Sea Breeze — 2021.” For more details see: Lavrov A., Boltenkov D. Quiet Breeze: U.S.-Ukrainian exercises did not become large-scale // *Izvestia* [Лавров А., Болтенков Д. Тихий Breeze: американо-украинские учения не стали масштабными // *Известия*]. 03.07.2021. (In Russian). URL: <https://iz.ru/1187801/anton-lavrov-dmitrii-boltenkov/tikhii-breeze-amerikano-ukrainskie-ucheniia-ne-stali-masshtabnymi> (accessed: 10.09.2021).

<sup>22</sup> Joint Exercises of the Russian Navy and Air Force were took place in the Mediterranean Sea // Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation [В Средиземном море прошли совместные учения ВМФ и ВКС России // Министерство обороны Российской Федерации]. 28.06.2021. (In Russian). URL: <https://syria.mil.ru/war-on-terror/info/news/more.htm?id=12369098@egNews> (accessed: 10.09.2021).

<sup>23</sup> US Defense Budget Materials — FY2021 // Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller) / Chief Financial Officer. URL: <https://comptroller.defense.gov/Budget-Materials/Budget2021/> (accessed: 06.09.2021).

dozens of large commercial ports, the Black Sea represents both the starting point and the end point of strategically important sea routes connecting Europe, Asia and the Middle East. In turn, the main trade routes connecting the West with the East and the oil-rich Persian Gulf pass through the Mediterranean Sea. In this regard, the presence of a permanent group of naval forces in the Mediterranean Sea serves a dual purpose: it demonstrates the presence of the Russian flag in the region and increases the level of security against all kinds of terrorist threats and military provocations, the probability of which has increased significantly over the past decade (Lebedeva, 2020, p. 28).

The security of Russian shipping in the Mediterranean is “caused by the permanent increase of NATO presence not only in the Mediterranean region, but in Europe as a whole. At present, NATO is pursuing an active policy aimed at ousting Russia from its traditional sphere of influence in the Balkans, creating a hotbed of instability in Serbia by using the technology of ‘new wars’ in order to overthrow the legitimate government and to force the country to join NATO. The terrorist threat is characterized by the increased activity of Albanian and other transnational criminal clans operating in the Mediterranean with close links to the drug and terrorist group ‘Liberation Army of Kosovo’ and other criminal organizations operating outside the region with the support of the United States and NATO” (Mikhlin et al., 2020, p. 25).

A separate aspect, the importance of which has only increased in recent decades, is directly related to the global energy agenda (Lukshin, 2012, p. 101). Firstly, the Suez Canal provides about 5 % of global oil transportation and up to 15 % of natural gas (mainly liquefied). The Bosphorus and Dardanelles account for more than 7 % of global oil trade (Kondakov, 2012, p. 76). If the new Istanbul channel is put into operation, these indicators are likely to change upward. Secondly, the energy potential of the Mediterranean region itself also deserves the closest attention of the leading global and regional actors, which is actually happening.

## Russian Policy in the Mediterranean. The Energy Factor

Until 2020, Russia took a consistently neutral position in the energy dispute in the Eastern Mediterranean for the following reasons: the scale of its own energy projects in Europe and its cooperation with Turkey in implementing the “Turkish Stream.” However, it is Turkey’s activity in the search and extraction of gas in the Black Sea and Mediterranean basins which has become a clear factor in complicating the negotiations of Russian state-owned companies with Ankara on long-term issues, and prompted Russia to change its position. The price of Russian gas for Turkey is falling as Turkey discovers new fields. In addition, Russia must respond to threats in the region that directly affect its ally, Syria.

In 2011, the first large gas field named “Aphrodite” was found offshore Cyprus. Its reserves are estimated at 200 billion cubic meters. This is one of the many fields in the Levantine Basin, a promising gas production region located close to the large European gas market. The first major discovery in the area, the Israeli *Tamar* field with reserves of about 200 bcm, was made in 2001. This was followed by the discovery of larger fields, the most significant of which were the Israeli *Leviathan* with reserves up to 650 bcm of gas and the Egyptian *Zohr* with 850 bcm (Danilin, 2012, p. 59).

The world’s largest gas companies have shown interest in developing the Levantine Basin. Among them is Noble Energy, which, in addition to Cyprus, operates in Israeli fields. *Zohr* is being developed by Eni, Rosneft and BP. Syria is about to start producing gas on its shelf as well. At the end of 2017, the country’s Minister of Oil and Natural Resources, Ali Ghanem, announced that the country plans to start gas production by early 2019.<sup>24</sup> As of January 31, 2018, Russia and Syria signed a roadmap for energy cooperation. As the Russian Energy Ministry notes, the document “provides for the phased implementation of

<sup>24</sup> Syria to start offshore energy exploration in early 2019 — oil minister // Reuters. December 13, 2017. URL: <https://www.reuters.com/article/mideast-crisis-syria-oil-idAFL8N1OD4SB> (accessed: 13.09.2021).

strategically important projects for the restoration, modernization, as well as the construction of new energy facilities in Syria.”<sup>25</sup> According to the US Geological Survey, the Syrian shelf can contain up to 700 bcm of gas<sup>26</sup> — twice as much as on the mainland.

In February 2018, Lebanon joined the oil and gas race. The rights to search for gas on its shelf were obtained by the Russian company Novatek in a consortium with the French Total and Italian Eni. According to the Lebanese authorities, their exclusive economic zone also contains 700 bcm of gas.<sup>27</sup>

The US energy policy in the region deserves special consideration. As noted above, since the beginning of the 21st century solid deposits of hydrocarbons were discovered in the Mediterranean Sea. Herewith, since the end of the 20th century the regional security situation is challenged by serious problems, which might hinder the development of deposits. The U.S. immediately took advantage of the situation, explaining its “military buildup in the region by the need to increase security in the region” (Kokoshin, 2006, p. 44). Characteristically, American researchers hold a similar view (Del Sarto, 2006, p. 102).

On December 20, 2019, the US Congress passed the Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act,<sup>28</sup> which authorizes the

<sup>25</sup> International Activities in 2018 // Ministry of Energy of the Russian Federation [Международная деятельность в 2018 г. // Министерство энергетики Российской Федерации]. (In Russian). URL: <https://minenergo.gov.ru/node/14543> (accessed: 05.09.2021).

<sup>26</sup> Energy: Oil Resources // U.S. Geological Survey. URL: <https://www.usgs.gov/science/science-explorer/Energy> (accessed: 13.09.2021).

<sup>27</sup> Novatek will Look for Gas on the shelf of Lebanon // *Vedomosti* [«Новатэк» поищет газ на шельфе Ливана // *Ведомости*]. 11.02.2018. (In Russian). URL: <https://www.vedomosti.ru/business/articles/2018/02/12/750606-novatek-shelfe-livana> (accessed: 05.09.2021).

<sup>28</sup> Congress passes Menendez-Rubio Bill Reshaping U.S. Policy in Eastern Mediterranean // U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations. December 20, 2019. URL: [https://www.foreign.senate.gov/press/ranking/release/congress-passes-menendez-rubio-bill-reshaping-us-policy-in-eastern-mediterranean\\_#:~:text=The%20Eastern%20Mediterranean%20Security%20and,U.S.%20arms%20embargo%20on%20Cyprus.&text=%E2%80%9CThis%20legis](https://www.foreign.senate.gov/press/ranking/release/congress-passes-menendez-rubio-bill-reshaping-us-policy-in-eastern-mediterranean_#:~:text=The%20Eastern%20Mediterranean%20Security%20and,U.S.%20arms%20embargo%20on%20Cyprus.&text=%E2%80%9CThis%20legis)

US to provide new security assistance to Cyprus and Greece and lifts the U.S. arms embargo on the Republic of Cyprus. It also authorizes the creation of an energy center to enhance cooperation between the United States, Israel, Greece and Cyprus. It is noteworthy that the Act also expresses concern about the presence of Russian warships and support vessels in the region, which is unambiguously interpreted as “support for the Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad.”<sup>29</sup>

To counteract the policy of restoring Russian influence in the Mediterranean, the U.S. has taken the path of disassociating Russia from the countries with which Moscow has historically good relations. This applies primarily to Greece. In April 2021, the Greek Foreign Ministry announced negotiations with the U.S. on changes to the Mutual Defense Cooperation Agreement (MDCA).<sup>30</sup> At that time, the possibility of extending the treaty every five years instead of every year was also discussed. Earlier, on June 7, 2018, Greece and the U.S. amended the Mutual Defense Cooperation Agreement, concluded in 1990.<sup>31</sup> The agreement provides for an expansion of the U.S. naval base in Souda Bay on Crete, the use of an air base near Larissa, an army air base in Stefanovikio (Magnesia region) and the port of Alexandroupolis in northeastern Greece. Moreover, the U.S. can use any other military facility on its territory.

lation%20marks%20the%20dawn,engagement%20in%20the%20Eastern%20Mediterranean (accessed: 13.09.2021).

<sup>29</sup> Pierini M. Russia’s Posture in the Mediterranean: Implications for NATO and Europe // *Carnegie Europe*. June 8, 2021. URL: <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2021/06/08/russia-s-posture-in-mediterranean-implications-for-nato-and-eu-rope-pub-84670> (accessed: 13.09.2021).

<sup>30</sup> Greece is “recruited” into one of the main military partners of Washington [Грецию «вербуют» в одного из главных военных партнеров Вашингтона] // *News Front*. 14.09.2021. (In Russian). URL: <https://news-front.info/2021/09/14/gretyu-verbuyut-v-odnogo-iz-glavnyh-voennyh-partnerov-vashingtona> (accessed: 15.09.2021).

<sup>31</sup> Greece (10-521) — Agreement Extending the July 8, 1990 Mutual Defense Cooperation Agreement // U.S. Department of State. May 21, 2010. URL: <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/18-607-Greece-Defense-TIMS-62132-Frank.pdf> (accessed: 05.09.2021).

Obviously, Washington is thus seeking to replace Athens with its former main military partner in the region — Turkey, with which it has been constantly at odds in recent years. Despite U.S. pressure, Ankara bought Russian S-400 systems and is now negotiating the purchase of a second batch of these missiles. Contrary to the position of the U.S. and the EU, Turkey is conducting prospecting work in the economic zone of Cyprus, as well as opened the Varosi area in northern Cyprus, contrary to the UN decisions.

Thus, as Greece's military cooperation with the U.S. has intensified, there have been a number of overtly unfriendly actions against Russia recently, from the arbitrary expulsion of Russian diplomats<sup>32</sup> to the unprecedented inspection of a Russian merchant ship by Greek naval personnel as part of the EU's Operation "IRINI."<sup>33</sup>

## Conclusion

### *Current Agenda for Russia*

Based on the goals and objectives of the study, outlined at the beginning of the article, the key factors of the military-political presence of the Russian Federation in the Mediterranean region, were examined. Taking into account the historical preconditions for the formation of the Mediterranean (and Middle Eastern) policy of Russia, as well as in accordance with the emerging political and economic situation, the authors prioritize the following.

1. *Ensuring the military presence of the Russian Navy in the Mediterranean Sea.* The implementation of this foreign policy instrument

<sup>32</sup> What could have provoked the expulsion of Russian diplomats from Greece // RBC [Что могло спровоцировать высылку российских дипломатов из Греции // РБК]. 11.07.2018. (In Russian). URL: <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/11/07/2018/5b4606e89a794749ba15f8b2> (accessed: 05.09.2021).

<sup>33</sup> NATO special forces landed on a Russian cargo ship in the Mediterranean // Izvestiya [Спецназ НАТО высадили на грузовой корабль России в Средиземном море // Известия]. 13.01.2021. (In Russian). URL: <https://iz.ru/1110769/2021-01-13/spetchnaz-nato-vysadilsiana-gruzovoi-korabl-rossii-v-sredizemnom-more> (accessed: 05.09.2021).

makes it possible to achieve several goals at once. Firstly, it is a "flag demonstration" in a strategically important region of the world. Secondly, it is the security support of Russia's key ally in the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean — the Syrian Arab Republic, which perfectly demonstrates the loyalty of Russia to its allied obligations. This practice contributes to increasing the level of trust in Russia not only among current, but also among potential allies. Thirdly, it is about ensuring the safety of Russian shipping in one of the most economically active areas of the World Ocean. Fourthly, this is a serious "argument" in involving Russia in the development of the resource potential of the Mediterranean: both together with allies and on the rights of concessions.

2. *Intensification of efforts to expand economic ties with the states of the region.* In principle, this work has been carried out relatively consistently since the late 1990s. But if earlier trade and economic relations were built mainly around Russia's arms exports to a number of states (Algeria, Egypt, before the start of the civil war and the overthrow of M. Gaddafi — Libya), now, with the preservation of most of the arms market,<sup>34</sup> Russia's trade and economic potential has significantly expanded, as well as the geography of cooperation. Russia's energy and military-technical cooperation with Turkey (the latter causes extreme irritation among Ankara's NATO partners, and above all the United States), the expansion of military-political, economic and energy cooperation with Syria, the conclusion of multi-billion dollar contracts for the supply of weapons and the expansion of energy partnership with Iraq (four Russian oil companies operate in Iraq — Rosneft, Lukoil, Bashneft, Gazpromneft<sup>35</sup>)

<sup>34</sup> International arms transfers level off after years of sharp growth; Middle Eastern arms imports grow most, says SIPRI // SIPRI. March 15, 2021. URL: <https://sipri.org/media/press-release/2021/international-arms-transfers-level-off-after-years-sharp-growth-middle-eastern-arms-imports-grow-most> (accessed: 06.09.2021).

<sup>35</sup> Mamedov R. New Oil Campaign in Iraq // Oil and Capital [Мамедов Р. Новый нефтяной поход в Ирак // Нефть и Капитал]. 01.11.2019. (In Russian). URL:

clearly illustrate the increased capabilities of the Russian economy, allowing it to carry out “regional expansion,” albeit in a limited segment — the energy sector.

3. *Development of cooperation in the area of raw materials.* In this regard, two points should be taken into account. The first is the serious energy potential of the Mediterranean, mainly in the form of large reserves of natural gas and hydrocarbons. The second point is logistical. The most promising project (according to Western estimates) is the Eastern Mediterranean Pipeline (EastMed) — a gas pipeline with a capacity of 20 bcm per year, connecting the offshore fields in the eastern Mediterranean Sea with mainland Greece via Cyprus and Crete, according to some estimates, which is to be built by 2024—2026. Its main purpose is to supply gas from the offshore fields in Israel and Cyprus via Crete and then via the mainland Greece to Italy. The ultimate goal is to diversify energy supplies to the EU (as an alternative to *Turkish Stream* and gas supplies from Qatar and Algeria). Nevertheless, the

implementation of such a project seems doubtful for objective economic reasons. The high cost of investment, as well as the tense military-political situation<sup>36</sup> not only reduce the attractiveness of projects for the extraction and transportation of gas in the Eastern Mediterranean, but also make it impossible that such initiatives will be implemented with private capital without government support. This support is needed in the form of guarantees, incentives, loans, subsidies and especially security, primarily from the armed forces of the countries concerned. In this context, Russia has the tempting prospect of joining this process not as a passive observer but as a key actor.

Given the multifactorial nature of the Concept of National Security of the Russian Federation, the authors are convinced that the listed measures taken by the Russian leadership in the identified priority will best contribute to ensuring Russian interests in the Mediterranean.

<sup>36</sup> For example, the division of Cyprus into Greek and Turkish parts leads to disputes regarding the ownership of marine deposits in the Mediterranean Sea; Turkey’s position on the exploration and development of the Cypriot shelf also runs counter to the line of the European Union.

<https://oilcapital.ru/article/general/01-11-2019/novyy-neftyanoy-pohod-v-irak> (accessed: 05.09.2021).

Received / Поступила в редакцию: 20.09.2021  
Accepted / Принята к публикации: 26.10.2021

### References / Библиографический список

- Aghazada, M. M. (2021). Greater Mediterranean regional security complex: Myth or reality? *Vestnik RUDN. International Relations*, 21(3), 429—440. (In Russian). <https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-0660-2021-21-3-429-440>
- Balfour, R. (2009). The transformation of the Union for the Mediterranean. *Mediterranean Politics*, 14(1), 99—105. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13629390902747491>
- Chikharev, I. A. (2021). Russia in Greater Mediterranean: New Pacific Eurasian transition. *Vestnik RUDN. International Relations*, 21(3), 441—458. (In Russian). <https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-0660-2021-21-3-441-458>
- Danilin, I. V. (2012). The new energy sector: A time of structural restructuring. In V. G. Baranovsky (Ed.), *The year of the planet: Yearbook. Issue of 2012: Economy, politics, security* (pp. 55—66). Moscow: Ideja-Press publ. (In Russian).
- Del Sarto, R. A. (2006). *Contested state identities and regional security in the Euro-Mediterranean area*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781403982858>
- Druzhinin, A. G., & Lachininskii, S. S. (2019). Russia at the World Ocean: Geoeconomic and geopolitical interests, scale and formats of “presence”. *Izvestiya Russkogo Geograficheskogo Obshestva*, 151(6), 1—19. (In Russian). <https://doi.org/10.31857/S0869-607115161-19>
- Gadzhiev, K. S. (2007). *Russia’s geopolitical horizons: Contours of the New World order*. Moscow: Ekonomika publ. (In Russian).
- Gorshkov, S. G. (1979). *Sea Power of the state*. Moscow: Voenizdat publ. (In Russian).
- Gromyko, A. A. (2014). About a New World order or a big mess. *Asia and Africa Today*, (12), 2—7. (In Russian).
- Irkhin, A. A. (2016). Problems of realization of Russia’s geopolitical interests in the Black Sea-Mediterranean region. In *Socio-political and historical-cultural aspects of the modern geopolitical situation*. Materials of the

- international scientific and practical conference within the framework of the IX Scientific and educational forum (pp. 21—28). Moscow: Pero publ. (In Russian).
- Irkhin, A. A., Nelina, L. P., & Chikharev, I. A. (2018). Russia and the Mediterranean macro-region (1920—2014). *Paradigms of History and Social Development*, (12), 58—68. (In Russian).
- Ivanov, I. S. (Ed.). (2013). *Russia and the Greater Middle East*. Moscow: RSMD publ. (In Russian). Retrieved from <https://russiancouncil.ru/activity/publications/rossiya-i-bolshoy-blichniy-vostok/>
- Kausch, K., & Youngs, R. (2009). The end of the 'Euro-Mediterranean vision'. *International Affairs*, 85(5), 963—975. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2346.2009.00841.x>
- Kokoshin, A. A. (2006). *International energy security*. Moscow: Evropa publ. (In Russian).
- Kondakov, S. A. (2012). *Energy geopolitics of Russia*. Moscow: Vash poligraficheskij partner publ. (In Russian).
- Kurylev, K. P. (2013). Challenges and threats to interests of Russia and Ukraine in Black Sea region. *Historical, Philosophical, Political and Law Sciences, Culturology and Study of Art. Issues of Theory and Practice*, (12—1), 109—112. (In Russian).
- Kurylev, K. P., Parkhitko, N. P., & Nikulin, M. A. (2020). Military and naval power of Russia in the Black Sea and Mediterranean regions. *Post-Soviet Studies*, 3(1), 26—39. (In Russian).
- Lebedeva, M. M. (2020). New World order: Parameters and possible contours. *Polis. Political Studies*, (4), 24—35. (In Russian). <https://doi.org/10.17976/jpps/2020.04.03>
- Lukshin, B. S. (2012). *Military and political aspects of ensuring energy security [thesis]*. Moscow: Institut SShA i Kanady RAN publ. (In Russian).
- Luzyanin, S. G. (2007). *Vladimir Putin's Eastern policy: Russia's return to the "Greater East" (2004—2008)*. Moscow: Vostok—Zapad, AST publ. (In Russian).
- Maleev, V. V. (2011). *Russia's energy policy in the context of globalization [thesis]*. Moscow: Diplomaticeskaya akademiya MID Rossii publ. (In Russian).
- Malysheva, D. B. (2015). Russia in the Mediterranean: Geopolitics and Modern Interests. *Mezhdunarodnaa Zizn'*, (11), 111—123. (In Russian).
- Martynenko, E. V., & Parkhitko, N. P. (2018). Implementation of the Russian state armaments program 2011—2020: Economic and financial analysis. *European Research Studies Journal*, 21(2), 506—517.
- Mikhlin, A. A., Molochny, V. V., Okhremchuk, S. N., Balandin, V. A., & Koemets, T. M. (2020). The new challenges and threats to the national interests of Russia in the Mediterranean region. *Voennaya Mysl'*, (6), 24—42. (In Russian).
- Mishulin, A. V. (1941). Ancient Slavs in excerpts from Greco-Roman and Byzantine writers in the 7th century AD. *Journal of Ancient History*, (1), 230—284. (In Russian).
- Naumkin, V. V., Popov, V. V., & Kuznetsov, V. A. (Eds.). (2012). *Middle East. The Arab Awakening and Russia: What's next?* Moscow: IV RAN publ. (In Russian).
- Podtserob, A. B. (2015). *Russia and the Arab world*. Moscow: MGIMO Universitet, IV RAN publ. (In Russian).
- Primakov, E. M. (2016). *Confidential. The Middle East on stage and behind the scenes*. Moscow: Tsentrpoligraf publ. (In Russian).
- Stivachtis, Ya. A. (2021). A Mediterranean region? Regional security complex theory revisited. *Vestnik RUDN. International Relations*, 21(3), 416—428. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-0660-2021-21-3-416-428>
- Streltsov, D. V. (Ed.). (2014). *Russia and East in the post-bipolar period*. Moscow: Aspekt Press publ. (In Russian).
- Tarle, E. V. (1959). Admiral Ushakov in the Mediterranean Sea (1798—1800). In E. V. Tarle (Ed.), *Collected Works*: in 12 volumes. Vol. 10 (pp. 95—229). Moscow: Izd. Akad. nauk SSSR publ. (In Russian).

**About the authors:** *Kurylev Konstantin Petrovich* — PhD, Dr. of Sc. (History), Professor, Department of Theory and History of International Relations, Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University); ORCID: 0000-0003-3075-915X; e-mail: [kurylev-kp@rudn.ru](mailto:kurylev-kp@rudn.ru)  
*Parkhitko Nikolay Petrovich* — PhD in History, Associate Professor, Department of Theory and History of Journalism, Peoples' Friendship University of Russia (RUDN University); ORCID: 0000-0002-7678-5735; e-mail: [parkhitko-np@rudn.ru](mailto:parkhitko-np@rudn.ru)

**Сведения об авторах:** *Курьлев Константин Петрович* — доктор исторических наук, профессор кафедры теории и истории международных отношений Российского университета дружбы народов; ORCID: 0000-0003-3075-915X; e-mail: [kurylev-kp@rudn.ru](mailto:kurylev-kp@rudn.ru)  
*Пархитко Николай Петрович* — кандидат исторических наук, доцент кафедры теории и истории журналистики Российского университета дружбы народов; ORCID: 0000-0002-7678-5735; e-mail: [parkhitko-np@rudn.ru](mailto:parkhitko-np@rudn.ru)