

THE NEW DOCTRINE OF THE RUSSIAN NAVY

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On July 31, from Saint Petersburg (the old tsarist capital), Putin unveiled the new Russian Naval Doctrine, describing the United States as the greatest threat. He highlights the willingness of the Russian government to draw "red lines" in the Arctic and the Black and Baltic seas. For Russia, the United States is "enemy number one" due to its aspiration to dominate the oceans, which includes achieving the uncontested hegemony of its Navy and restricting access to ocean resources and communications. But NATO's infrastructure approaches "our borders, the increase in Western naval maneuvers and the territorial claims of islands and coastal areas that belong to us" are also a challenge. In particular, Putin said he is especially concerned about the Western tactic of "weakening our control of the Arctic route" that he proposes as an alternative to the Suez Canal. Due to the above, "we will accelerate and diversify activities in waters from the archipelagos of Novaya Zemlya, Franz Joseph Land and Svalbard (of Norwegian sovereignty), to the Wrangel Island". One of Russia's priorities is to become one of the leaders in exploration and exploitation of the resources of the Arctic territory, especially the continental shelf, to which other countries, such as the United States, Canada and the Scandinavians, also aspire.

The Russian plan assumes the creation of naval bases in various parts of the world to ensure navigation as a global power. Bases and supply points will be established from the Eastern Mediterranean to the Asia-Pacific region, the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf. It also considers to advance with the construction of aircraft carriers, a weapons system in which the United States has a clear advantage (it has 13 in service). In the case of the Mediterranean, the main risk is the lack of sufficient bases outside Russia's borders, which can receive and supply its ships and carry out repair and technical maintenance tasks. Russia ratified its permanent presence in the Port of Tartous, in Syria, while it will open maintenance centers in "territories of other countries in the region, including Africa and the Middle East."

Specifically, it aims to increase cooperation with India, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Iraq, with a view to having strategic alternatives to its traditional partners on the European continent. It should be noted that Russia is the largest country in the world and has approximately 40,000 kilometers of coastline. In this framework, the mobilization of the Navy's resources includes civilian ships, their crews, and the use of civilian maritime facilities in times of war. It should be remembered that the Russian Navy in 2001 abandoned its base in Cuba and in 2004 the one it had in Vietnam. But once Putin asserted himself in power, the Russian Navy resumed its patrols around the world from 2008, including areas under NATO's responsibility.

In terms of weapons, the great novelty was the Zircon hypersonic missile, which gives the Russian Navy a global offensive capacity. This missile allows to respond to any naval attack. They have a range of 1,000 kilometers and belong to a new family of weapons that Putin describes as "invincible" and that have been in development since October 2020. According to the Russian president, the Admiral Gorshkov frigate will be the first ship in the fleet to receive these missiles. He said that "the deployment area of this ship will be chosen in accordance with Russia's security interests." In Saint Petersburg, Putin presided over a naval parade in the Gulf of Finland (a country that has recently asked to join NATO), in which 40 ships (submarines and speedboats), 42 naval aircraft and more than 3,500 troops participated.

Putin was accompanied by Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and Navy Chief Admiral Nikolai Yevmenov. Parades were also held in other ports due to the date and the one in Kaliningrad, the Russian stronghold on the Baltic, acquired special significance. But on July 31, a Ukrainian drone fell on the Russian Naval Command at the Sevastopol base in Crimea, where the Black Sea Command is located, forcing the suspension of events in this city. Since the beginning of the invasion on February 24, the Russian fleet has played an active role in missile attacks on Ukrainian territory, but has suffered significant losses, such as the most important ship in the Black Sea fleet.

To a large extent, the new doctrine is an update of that put forth by Czar Peter the Great in the early 18th century, when Russia began its push westward. According to this Tsar, Russia was the power of the Five Seas: Black, Azov, Caspian, Baltic and Arctic. Three centuries later, the decree signed by the

President in St. Petersburg on the occasion of the Navy Day asserts that "our interests extend to all oceans and the Caspian Sea." It also warns that Moscow does not accept interference in its affairs in the aforementioned areas nor "in the Sea of Okhotsk (Pacific), Azov (grabbed from Ukraine), the Kuril Islands (whose sovereignty Japan claims) and the straits that lead to Asia and Africa". The new doctrine points out that "we have marked the borders, both economic and strategic. We will guarantee their defense firmly and by all means."

At the same time, he warns that "the key is the ability of our Navy to respond like lightning to all those who decide to threaten us." According to the decree, the Kremlin relies on diplomatic instruments to resolve disputes, but warned that it can resort to force "if necessary." Putin did not mention the Ukraine war in his brief speech, but said the new doctrine advocates a "complete strengthening of Russia's geopolitical position in the Black and Azov seas."

In conclusion: in the new vision for the Russian Navy, announced by Putin on July 31, the United States is considered the main threat along with the expansion of NATO's infrastructure. The document states that Russia needs to have supply and technical maintenance bases in all oceans: the Pacific, the Atlantic, the Indian, the Persian Gulf and the Arctic. The novelty in terms of weapons was the announcement of the Zircon hypersonic missile, which considerably expands the offensive capacity of the Russian Navy. Finally, to some extent, the new doctrine is based on the one established three centuries ago by Czar Peter the Great, who stated that Russia was the power of the "five seas": Black, Azov, Caspian, Baltic and Arctic.