



THE RUSSIAN FLEET OF THE BLACK SEA

With Russia's annexation of the Crimea, what will happen to the Black Sea Fleet, one of the five Russian Fleets? Based in Sevastopol, it was until recently restricted to its sea.

INHERITED FROM THE EMPIRE

The Black Sea Fleet was created in 1783, along with its home port of Sevastopol. Afterwards, the city complied with the Tsarist will to develop an access to warm seas and became a naval fortress that could compete with the Ottoman presence. In 1841, under the London Convention on the straits, the fleet was confined to the Black Sea but would get back some freedom on the occasion of the First World War.

During the Cold War, Sevastopol lost its strategic importance. The entry of Turkey into NATO in 1952 allowed the international organization to monitor closely the Bosphorus Strait. This greatly reduced the scope of the fleet. A confrontation with the U.S. Navy during the Yom Kippur War was the main event involving the fleet during this time. Yet its prestige, gained in 1905 with the uprising of the Battleship Potemkin, glorified by Eisenstein, remained untouched.

The dissolution of the USSR casted doubt on the future of the fleet. With Sevastopol having ended up in Ukraine, the two countries were initially forced to share the command of the fleet. In 1997, a settlement was reached with the Partition Treaty on the Status and Conditions of the Black Sea Fleet. 80% of the fleet returned to Russia, which would also retain control of the Sevastopol base for 20 years.

A FLEET GAINING BACK IMPORTANCE

While Russia seeks to revive its maritime past with numerous building and renovation programs, the Black Sea fleet returns to the front of the stage. The Georgian incident of 2008 was an opportunity to test the fleet's strength.

Russian ships organized a blockade of Georgian ports and overpowered the modest fleet of Tbilisi. However, it was highly visible that a number of ships were aging and poorly maintained, much like most of the Russian Navy.

During the 230th anniversary of the fleet in 2013, a very ambitious program of modernization was revealed. No less than 20 new units are expected to join by 2020, of which six submarines.

The fleet:

- 25,000 men
- 2 guided missile cruisers
- 1 guided missile destroyer
- 8 frigates
- 9 corvettes and patrol vessels
- 6 amphibian ships
- 2 submarines

Commissioned ships:

- 6 frigates
- 6 submarines

WHAT FUTURE FOR THE FLEET?

The fleet that was for a long time limited to the Black Sea now has renewed ambitions to go beyond the Dardanelles. The decision to establish in the Mediterranean a permanent squadron integrating some ships of the Black Sea fleet illustrates this commitment.

While the Sevastopol base was a source of tension between Russia and Ukraine, the Kharkov agreement, signed in 2010, extended to 2042 the loan of the facilities, against significant financial benefits to Ukraine. In addition to the \$98 million annual rent, the agreement provided for preferential rates of gas supply at a 30% discount.

Even with the recent annexation of the entire region by Russia, the future of the base remains uncertain. To secure its presence in the Black Sea, Russia wanted to diversify its positions. This is why the development of the infrastructure of a second port in southern Russia was already in the planning. Novorossiysk should benefit from significant improvement of its terminal facilities, both for surface ships and for submarines to come.

Moreover an industrial base was to be created to allow rebuilding of Russian shipyards in the region. Those of the former USSR were located in Ukraine. Now, new facilities could be located in Novorossiysk.

The Black Sea Fleet is not forgotten in the Navy reform desired by Vladimir Putin. It is a gateway to the South Seas which Russia is fully conscious of. Sevastopol is the symbol of this ambition. It is the only military port in the region to accommodate the entire fleet. It is at the heart of current issues.