



Possible Reasoning for Russian Extraterritorial Naval Bases

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpted article from *Izvestia* discusses Russian plans to put a naval base in Sudan. Although a formal agreement has yet to be signed, it appears that the broad brushstrokes have been agreed upon. Reportedly, the base will garrison up to 300 personnel and have berths for four ships. The author of the article proffers that this base is an opportunity to again exert influence in the Indian Ocean.

The accompanying excerpted article from *Novaya Gazeta*, written by renowned journalist and military scholar Pavel Felgenhauer, discusses the general reasoning behind Russian extraterritorial naval bases. Felgenhauer posits that due to Russia cannot adequately project power on the high seas because of its lack of large naval vessels. This lack of a blue-water navy has lead Russia to pursue other means of controlling strategically important seas and shipping lanes, namely through the use of extraterritorial naval bases. These naval bases not only support the operations of naval vessels, but also provide ground-based area denial capabilities in the form of anti-aircraft and anti-ship missiles. Felgenhauer believes that Russia's current activities in Syria have little to do with fighting Islamic extremism and are, instead, oriented on more traditional strategic concerns and force projection. If Felgenhauer's theories prove correct, it suggests that Russian efforts to secure extraterritorial naval bases in Crimea, Syria, and Sudan were not opportunities of chance, but instead part of a broader Russian strategy of globally integrated operations. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

“Russia is awaited in the region [Indian Ocean]. Moreover, not only by countries that were previously in the zone of the Soviet influence, such as Mozambique, Madagascar and the Seychelles, but also other states on the coast of East Africa and islands of the Indian Ocean. In the conditions of Chinese, Indian, European, American economic expansion, the presence of another interested player will give them an opportunity to pursue a more flexible policy, maneuver and negotiate, in exchange providing Russian companies with contracts, and the navy with bases and supply centers.”



Steregushchiy-class (Project 20380) corvette.

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin, <https://photos.smugmug.com/Military/NAVY-Day-2018-Saint-Petersburg/i-zBFmjFC/0/4385608f/X3/NAVYDay2018SPb-026-X3.jpg>, Attribution: CC BY 4.0



Continued: Possible Reasoning for Russian Extra-territorial Naval Bases

Source: “Aleksey Kupriyanov, “В Африку гулять: что даст России военное присутствие на берегах Индийского океана (To Africa for a Stroll: What Will Russia Gain From Military Presence on Shores of Indian Ocean),” *Izvestia Online*, 16 November 2020. <https://iz.ru/1086965/aleksei-kupriyanov/v-afriku-guliat-cto-dast-rossii-voennoe-prisutstvie-na-beregakh-indiiskogo-okeana>

Russia received the right to establish a “logistics support center” for its navy on the territory of Sudan. In fact, we are talking about the return of our country to the big politics of the Indian Ocean. Details -- in the material... the creation of the modest logistics center in Port Sudan is no less important than the freezing of hostilities in the Transcaucasus. Russian peacekeepers in Karabakh ensure that the conflict on Russia’s southern borders does not escalate into a full-scale humanitarian crisis; Russian sailors in Port Sudan seem to be an indication of the fact that Russia intends to seriously engage in the complex foreign policy game now unfolding in the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

After the collapse of the USSR, the once formidable Soviet Navy turned into a sad shadow of its former power. Cruisers, destroyers, large anti-submarine warfare ships and large landing ships rusted at the berths, waiting to be cut into scrap metal, and they had to forget about the demonstration of force in distant sea areas. This period lasted almost two decades -- not a lot by historical standards, but long enough to turn into a difficult task even the limited restoration of the ocean-going fleet in a situation when it was suddenly needed. If in Soviet times the presence of the Soviet Navy in the Indian Ocean was provided by the ships of the Pacific Fleet, then the honor to restore this presence was granted to the Black Sea Fleet. It so happened that Russia started its return to the big chess game from the Middle East, not from the Far East, and therefore Port Sudan, as the next operating base after Tartus, looked logical.

A convenient location that allows one to control traffic in the Red Sea and, if necessary, to protect one’s ships from pirate raids from the territory of the nearby Somalia, a good bay, a relatively developed infrastructure, absence of foreign policy problems with the country’s leadership give reason to hope that this time the base will not have to be urgently moved.

“The typical peacetime personnel for such a base are to repair ships, a rescue tug, 3-4 units of lower-rank ships,” believes Ilya Kramnik, a Russian International Affairs Council expert. But the key there will most likely be presented in the form of inconspicuous means of intelligence and special forces -- the region needs special tools more than purely military ones. For the latter, if necessary, large ships will obviously be sent there -- up to and including nuclear submarines and nuclear missile cruisers, given that Russia has obtained an agreement on a possible entry of nuclear-powered ships, but their presence will clearly not be permanent.

The key question now is what are Moscow’s future plans? Figuratively speaking, will Port Sudan remain a southern bastion ensuring Russia’s presence in the Middle East, or will it become the first step towards a full-fledged return of Russia to the Indian Ocean. Russia is awaited in the region. Moreover, not only by countries that were previously in the zone of the Soviet influence, such as Mozambique, Madagascar and the Seychelles, but also other states on the coast of East Africa and islands of the Indian Ocean. In the conditions of Chinese, Indian, European, American economic expansion, the presence of another interested player will give them an opportunity to pursue a more flexible policy, maneuver and negotiate, in exchange providing Russian companies with contracts, and the navy with bases and supply centers.

India is waiting for Russia. More than once the author of these lines had to hear from Indian experts and high-ranking military officials regret that the Russian flag is no longer visible in the Indian Ocean. New Delhi fears the growing appetite of Beijing, which is gradually intensifying its presence in the Indian Ocean, seeking to ensure the security of the supply of hydrocarbons from the Persian Gulf countries and its goods to Europe; these fears are pushing India into the arms of the United States. The Russian squadron in the Indian Ocean, on the one hand, will give New Delhi an alternative to rapprochement with Washington, and on the other hand, it will guarantee Beijing that the safety of its ships in the region will be ensured. It is still difficult to say whether Russia will live up to these expectations and whether it will take the risk of declaring its interests in one of the most strategically important regions of the world. But at least the first step in this direction has already been taken.



Continued: Possible Reasoning for Russian Extra-territorial Naval Bases

Source: “Pavel Felgenhauer, “Базовые ценности: Российский военный флот расширяет свое присутствие (Base Values. Russian Navy Expanding Its Presence: Bases Being Set up From Crimea to Sudan),” *Novaya Gazeta Online*, 19 November 2020. <https://novayagazeta.ru/articles/2020/11/19/88019-bazovye-tsennosti>

...In 2015, Russia dramatically expanded its military presence in Syria. There is no airbase near Tartus, although now, when this formerly sleepy place is being rapidly rebuilt and expanded, there are plans to build a runway somewhere there. So far in 2015, the Khmeimim military airbase was deployed near the Syrian port of Latakia, north of Tartus, based on the runway of a local civilian airfield. Khmeimim became the headquarters of the Russian operation in Syria, while providing air support and cover for the permanent Russian squadron in the Mediterranean, which is based in Tartus, where they deepened the fairway, built new berths, warehouses and deployed a multilayer air defense system.

Two new Project 636.3 diesel-electric submarines (with potential long-range nuclear cruise missiles Caliber), which were built in the Baltic Sea for the Black Sea Fleet and were to be permanently based on the Taman Peninsula, are permanently based in Tartus. Later it was decided to leave them in Tartus due to the fact that the Turks, according to the Montreux Convention, do not allow submarines (unlike surface ships) to freely navigate through the Black Sea straits, except for repairs or back from repairs. In 2015, it was announced that the Russian military was sent to Syria solely to fight Islamist terrorists, and having solved the problem, they would quickly return home. Putin several times since 2015 announced the defeat of the terrorists and the beginning of the withdrawal of troops, but it all turned out to be mere PR. The base in Tartus continues to expand and, according to Sergey Shoigu, “is capable of receiving dozens of warships; all ship mooring spots are equipped with systems of essential supplies, unloading platforms, a repair complex for servicing and minor repairs of ships and vessels.”...

The Russian Federation does not have capable strike aircraft carriers, and in order to (with any hope of success) withstand the US Navy and its NATO allies in the Mediterranean, it needs an air base in the region covered by a multi-layered modern air defense system. It was for this, in fact, that the Syrian campaign was launched -- to deploy a powerful naval base in Tartus, and with it an equally powerful air force base in Khmeimim. The Montreux Convention prohibits aircraft carriers from crossing the Black Sea straits. In wartime, all this may not be important, but American attack aircraft carrier groups have no need to get into the Black Sea basin and become targets of attacks of anti-ship missiles deployed in Crimea anyway. For example, the Americans will be able to strike the Black Sea Fleet directly from the eastern part of the Mediterranean Sea, which means that it is there that you need to prepare to meet them, developing infrastructure and practicing the deployment of a powerful group of naval and air forces. This has nothing to do with Islamists. Russian forces are concentrated on the Syrian coast in Tartus and Khmeimim, where there are no Islamists, and Alawites, loyal to Damascus, live. And they project our military force from Tartus and from Khmeimim, first of all, to the sea to the west, and not to the interior of the country, to the east.

Now the next step has been taken -- further south to Sudan... The base on the Red Sea coast is, in fact, not about Africa, but about the Indian Ocean, where there is an American strategic base on the island of Diego Garcia; there is also the headquarters of the 5th Fleet in Bahrain and the main regional air base in Qatar... Due to scarcity, our frigates now play the role of independent ocean-going flagships. In the Russian Federation, quite a few new ships are being built, but very small ones: small rocket ships and all kinds of corvettes. They are equipped with universal launchers, and they can fire Kalibr cruise missiles, on which a nuclear warhead can be installed. But these “babies” have poor seaworthiness and air defense, small sailing autonomy, and a small ammunition reserve. To somehow confront the Americans in the Indian Ocean with this “mosquito fleet,” of course, a base in the region is needed.

The Red Sea in itself is a strategically important maritime artery linking Asia to Europe via the Suez Canal. American warships and carrier strike groups often cross the Red Sea to and from the Persian Gulf. From the basin of the Red Sea, which was considered by the Americans to be completely safe before the appearance of the base in Sudan, they more than once bombed or struck with cruise missiles, for example, against targets in Syria. The naval base in Sudan may change this alignment, but, like in Syria, here you can get bogged down in local problems not related to naval strategy and global confrontation... Russia, in confrontation with the “main enemy” (the United States), is deploying new bases or reviving Soviet ones along the entire strategic perimeter...