



Russian Expeditionary Capabilities, a Relatively Low Priority

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpted article from *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* discusses the logistic issues regarding Russia's Syrian campaign. Russia relies upon Large Landing Craft (BDK) such as the Project 1171 "Alligator" and the Project 775 "Ropucha" class ships to provide the vast majority of heavy lift for the Syrian campaign. The article reports that Russia is having difficulty providing logistical support for the operation. The Russian Navy's auxiliary fleet, as well as chartered vessels, are participating in logistic support operations, which is often referred to as the 'Syrian Express.' On 30 December 2017, the Yamal, a 775 "Ropucha," collided with a Sierra Leone flagged freighter in the Aegean Sea. The Yamal received extensive damage, and will be unavailable for operations for the foreseeable future, resulting in some scrambling to mitigate the loss. The temporary loss of the Yamal highlights how much difficulty an overtaxed Russian Navy is having in order to support a relatively modest sized operation (in comparison to US operations).

The accompanying excerpted article from *Izvestiya* discusses Russian efforts to obtain Universal Landing Ship (UDK) class ships. This class of ship is much larger than a BDK and they are capable of transporting a full naval infantry battalion and act as a docking station for air-cushioned vehicles and other landing craft. They can also function as a helicopter carrier for an aviation group. Aside from the obvious tactical advantages of such a vessel, there was also a less obvious operational or strategic one. A UDK equipped with an assault force and aviation group is an effective instrument of deterrence in remote theaters, making it possible to quickly, easily, and relatively cheaply deploy a complete air, land, and sea force off a given coastline to intervene in local conflicts or possibly even prevent them by the force's mere presence. The UDK is likely perceived by Russia to also be a defensive asset. The Russian Federation has a vast coastline to defend with a relatively small coastal defense infrastructure and personnel base, so Russian naval infantry exercises often involve forced-entry landings on Russian territory to combat an enemy that has already landed on Russian soil. The *Izvestiya* article discusses the Russian UDK requirements, methods of attainment, the amount of technical experience the Russian ship industry would gain from building such a ship as well as the often delayed timeline for acquisition. The earliest a UDK could be delivered is 2024, but given the history ship production delays, 2024 seems unrealistic.

The accompanying excerpted article from *RIA Novosti* explains that Russia will deploy its first Project 1171 "Ivan Gren" class, Large Amphibious Warfare Ships (AWS) this spring. The Ivan Gren is based upon the Project 1171 "Alligator" class, and was designed long before Universal Landing Ship (UDK) class ships, such as the Mistral, had been considered. The AWS 1171 is capable of transporting 300 naval infantry personnel, and 38 armored personnel carriers or 13 tanks. It is fitted with a Grad-M multiple rocket launcher system (the letter 'M' stands for maritime) with a range of up to 20 km; two AK-630M 30mm automatic six-barrel artillery systems capable of expending up to 1,000 rounds per minute; a AK-176 76.2mm gun; and facilities for a ship-based Ka-29 helicopter. Initially, Russia planned to build four Ivan Gren class ships, but has recently decided to only build two. Undoubtedly, development of the UDK, a larger more capable platform, with similar capabilities, has diminished interest in the Ivan Gren class, but there have also been many problems and delays with the project. The keel for the first in the class was laid in December 2004, and it was lowered into the water in May 2012.

To summarize, these three articles demonstrate the lack of emphasis the Russian Navy is placing on expeditionary capabilities. In the near term, Russia can only expect two Ivan Gren class ships and will have to wait till at least 2024 for the first UDKs to come online, at a time when Russia is already having difficult sustaining ongoing operations. The Navy's top priorities appear to be coastal defense, and precision munitions and their associated platforms, not expeditionary support and warfare. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

“...the Russian Navy is in dire need of large amphibious warfare ships. Even the decommissioning of one of them is disrupting deliveries of weapons and hardware to Syria.”

Source: Andrey Riskin, ““Сирийский экспресс” живет лишь за счет стареньких десантных кораблей [Syrian Express Survives Only Thanks to Very Old Amphibious Warfare Ships],” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta Online*, 17 January 2018. http://www.ng.ru/armies/2018-01-17/100_express170118.html

...As is known, large amphibious warfare ships and vessels of the Russian Navy's auxiliary fleet, as well as chartered vessels, are participating in the operation named Syrian Express to deliver freight for the Russian air group at Humaymim Airbase near Latakia, the material and technical support center at Tartus, and the Syrian Government Army...the Russian Navy is in dire need of large amphibious warfare ships. Even the decommissioning of one of them is disrupting deliveries of weapons and hardware to Syria. The Russian Navy's amphibious warfare fleet today consists of Project 1171 large amphibious warfare ships that were commissioned during the period from 1966 through 1975 and more "recent" Project 775 large amphibious warfare ships (1976-1991). Hopes were being pinned on the Ivan Gren, the first of a new series of Project 1171 amphibious warfare ships that was laid down back in 2004! But, there is no way the Ivan Gren, which is being built at the Yantar Baltic Shipyard, can be handed over to the fleet because of problems..

...A source at one of the Russian designer-enterprises robustly lambasted the seagoing qualities of the large amphibious warfare ship Ivan Gren and cast doubt on the need for series building of ships of this project. He emphasized that the ship was being created to operate in 'river-sea' zones for the transfer of a landing force from various theaters of military operations, and its dimensions were originally tied to the parameters of the Volga-Don locks and the height of the bridges. Project 1171 was conceived as a replacement for the small, aging Project 775 large amphibious warfare ships and was literally 'pasted together.' When the restriction for the 'river-sea' class fell away, the superstructure of the large amphibious warfare ships was increased. As a result of this and other design changes, the ship's stability worsened significantly.”

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Source: Ilya Kramnik, “С опозданием на 10 лет: Какие вертолетоносцы получит ВМФ России [Ten Years Late: What Kind of Amphibious Assault Ships Will the Russian Navy Get?],” *Izvestiya Online*, 15 January 2018. <https://iz.ru/694802/ilia-kramnik/s-opozdaniem-na-10-let>

According to reports by TASS sources in the defense establishment, construction of the first domestic amphibious assault ship for the Russian Navy should begin in Saint Petersburg in 2020...

You Bought the Wrong Thing and Too Few

Back in the 1980's the domestic Navy leadership recognized the need to have Universal Landing Ship (UDK) in the Navy that are capable of playing the role of a nucleus of expeditionary formations by landing assault forces at a great distance from friendly bases (including beyond the radius of action of coastal aviation). Project 11780 UDK's, which were given the facetious nickname “Ivan Tarava” for the similarity to US Tarawa-Class general-purpose amphibious assault ships, were supposed to be the first Soviet ships of this type...In addition, the characteristics and equipment of the Project 11780 permitted these UDK's to be employed as headquarters ships as well as in hunter-killer groups for antisubmarine operations.

The USSR's disintegration made this project, construction of which was proposed to begin at the Black Sea Shipyard in Nikolayev, moot, and for a long time the Russian Navy had to forget about a presence in remote ocean areas in principle. The situation began to change by the mid-2000's, when a growth of the economy permitted thinking again about getting the necessary political tools. Considering that domestic industry was not in the best condition, it was decided to hold a tender with the involvement of foreign manufacturers...the political situation ensured victory of the French Mistral-Class UDK project... The fate of this agreement is known: the Ukrainian crisis of 2014 caused France's refusal to fulfill the contract.

What Is Necessary

...As of today it is known that Russia is studying two concepts of an amphibious assault ship...Both concepts propose the possibility of using the amphibious assault ships as headquarters ships, antisubmarine warfare ships, and floating bases in conducting humanitarian/rescue operations and for a number of other missions. In the assessment of those in the military department interviewed by portal iz.ru, Navy requirements for such ships are estimated as six to eight optimally and four minimally. For now, though, it is planned to limit the series to two units. “Four ships in the Navy will permit keeping one amphibious assault ship constantly at sea, one other in immediate readiness, and a third capable of going on combat duty in a few weeks, while the fourth will be undergoing lengthy repairs or modernization. Six to eight such ships will permit rotating forces in a timely manner and building them up where this will be required,” ...Two ships unquestionably will not provide capabilities for a constant presence in necessary areas, but will permit forming the nucleus of expeditionary forces, which will be able to perform missions in remote Theaters of Military Operations (TVDs) as necessary. The usefulness of amphibious assault ships as mobile bases for prompt deployment of forces in local conflicts has been proven repeatedly...

What Amount Is Involved

...An amphibious assault ship designed above all for landing an assault force having armament limited to air defense and short-range antisubmarine warfare weapons carries considerably less expensive systems. Depending on specifically which amphibious assault ship project will be made the primary one -- the 14,000 ton DVKD or 24,000 ton UDK -- the cost of the lead ship should result in R30-50 billion. Construction of the lead ship should begin in 2020 and her turnover to the Navy is planned for 2024. A second ship should be transferred to the client in 2026. Of course, the cost of the air group should be counted separately. For a ship of this class it can be R20 billion, but even in this case amphibious assault ships remain a rather economical means of projecting force. And the two ships planned to be built for the Russian Navy can be provided with the necessary escort even without increasing the extent of construction of non-aircraft-carrying combatants...with respect to the DVKD's/UDK's, their construction should provide industry with necessary experience, which in the future permits shifting to the creation of larger ships, including aircraft carriers.

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Source: “ВМФ к концу весны получит большой десантный корабль “Иван Грен” [The Navy Will Receive the Large Amphibious Landing Ship Ivan Gren by the End of Spring],” *RIA Novosti Online*, 9 February 2018. https://ria.ru/defense_safety/20180209/1514317277.html

The large amphibious warfare ship (AWS) Ivan Gren, Project 11711's leading ship, will be handed over to the Russian Federation Navy by the end of spring, Aleksey Rakhmanov, the United Shipbuilding Corporation (OSK) president...The Kaliningrad-based “Yantar” shipyard's newsletter published a report earlier, according to which the large AWS Ivan Gren was due to complete all the state tests by the end of February. However, the Navy was due to receive this ship back at the end of last year.

The large AWS Ivan Gren is Project 11711's leadship, which was developed by the Nevskoye Planning and Design Bureau. The keel was laid at the shipyard in December 2004, and it was lowered into the water in May 2012. The state test program began 30 November 2017 in the Baltic Sea. According to the RF Defense Ministry's order, the “Yantar” shipyard is building one more ship of this project -- the large AWS Petr Morgunov...A Project 11711 large AWS is a development of Project 1171 large amphibious warfare ships, which proved their worth over decades of service in the Soviet Navy, and later also in the Russian Navy. A major proportion of the design has undergone serious changes.

Project 11711 large AWSs are intended for amphibious landing operations and transporting vehicles and equipment; they can convey and land up to 300 naval infantry personnel, and 38 armored personnel carriers or 13 tanks. The ship is equipped with an assault transport helicopter...The project is the only one in the world in which the idea of noncontact offloading of personnel and equipment from the ship onto an austere beach by using pontoon equipment has been put into practice.



The Ivan Gren, a Project 11711 Ivan Gren-class Ship.

Source: Mil.ru, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/1e/%C2%AB%D0%98%D0%B2%D0%B0%D0%BD_%D0%93%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%BD%C2%BB.jpg, CC BY 4.0.