



Defence & Security Series

Working Paper

April 2022

## **THE RUSSO-UKRAINIAN AND RUSSO-JAPANESE WARS. MILITARY AND POLITICAL COMPARISONS Russian defense malfunctions and geopolitical repercussions**

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This paper presents the first part of the findings of an ongoing research project of the Center of Strategic Studies (CSS) and the Center of Defense, Energy and Geopolitical Research (CEDEG) titled

"From the sinking of battleship 'Sissoi Veliky' to the sinking of cruiser 'Moskva'. Russian defense malfunctions and geopolitical repercussions".

The second part of the findings is focusing on a scenario regarding the sinking of cruiser 'Moskva' and the role of Snake island as well as the conclusions one could draw on the Russian defense malfunctions.

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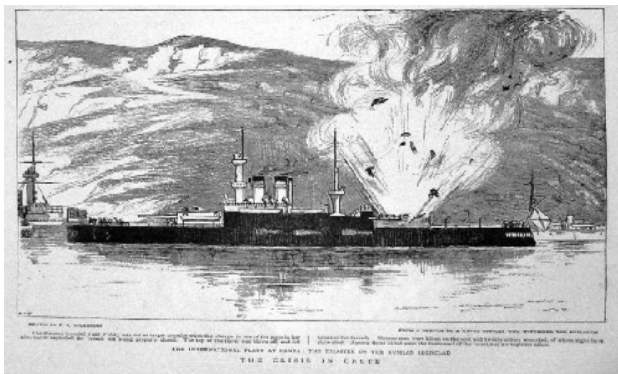
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# 1. THE NAVAL TRADITION OF RUSSIA AND THE STATE OF THE RUSSIAN NAVY

## 1a. The case of sinking of battleship 'Sissoi Veliky' in 1897

<https://britishinterventionincrete.wordpress.com/category/european-intervention-crete/naval/>

Britain's Naval Archives (The British in Crete, 1896 to 1913) reported that one of the initial contributions by Russia to the International naval fleet sent to Crete in 1897 was the Pre-Dreadnaught battleship 'Sissoi Veliky'. The ship had been a floating disaster since the very beginning, suffering from numerous design, engineering and construction faults. On 15th March 1897 when on a routine target practice, the rear turret of the battleship exploded, killing 16 men instantly, another six dying later of their injuries. The reason for the explosion was later put down to the crew disabling a faulty safety mechanism, and the incompetence of the turret commander. There exist surprising similarities (see photos below) between the sinking of battleship 'Sissoi Veliky' and the sinking of cruiser 'Moskva'. As was reported by Second Lieutenant W. D. Downes, 2/Royal Sussex Regiment, who served on Crete with his battalion in 1906, seven years later matters in the Russian navy did not appear to have improved that much. Another anecdotal reference at that period (recorded in the Naval Archives), showing the inefficiency of the Russian Navy, is the following one "About three months before my arrival, the Russian Destroyer received orders to go to some place on the Greek Coast. They had no charts to show them how to get there, notwithstanding the fact, they were on duty in these seas. The Navigator had to apply to the Navigating Lieutenant of H. M. S. *Venus* to allow him to take a tracing of the Charts of these waters. It is not surprising therefore how easily the Japanese were able to deal with the Russian Navy in 1905."



source: <https://www.thedailyscrum.ca/2022/04/14/ukraine-sinks-prized-russian-battleship-moskva/>

## **1b. The naval tradition and heritage of Russia**

With respect to the naval tradition and heritage of Russia Chadick (1969) underlines the following: "For over 250 years their navy has been striving for its identity among the other navies of the world. It is a history of alternate frustration and achievement. The Russians have never been quite able to develop their capabilities to the extent of other leading sea powers, but they have nevertheless kept their goal in mind". With reference to Mahan's treatise on the influence of power upon history the author argues that in spite of Russia's long coast-lines there are only a few good harbors. On the other hand, the four separate fleets are not an acceptable answer to the long divided coastlines. Commenting on Russia's strategic pursuits regarding the Straits the author underlines the following: "elimination of the objectionable provisions concerning control of the Dardanelles has been only partially successful, and the Russians can be expected to continue efforts to gain unlimited passage through the straits".

## **1c. The state of the Russian navy**

Regarding the state of the Russian Navy Decker (2010) notes the following: "Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union were major maritime powers. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Russian Navy, like the rest of the country, has experienced the effects of political instability and economic crises. The Navy has, in many ways, become a liability for society, rather than an asset. The massive buildup of ships created by the USSR has proven a great burden for Russia – not only to maintain, but also to dispose of the aging equipment".

The author argues that the Russian Navy, still having an internal structure based on the Soviet model, is ineffective relying often to unwilling conscripts to staff its ranks.

## **2. THE REFORMS IN RUSSIA'S MILITARY DECISION-MAKING AND THE RUSSIAN NAVY**

Mc Dermott (2021) underlines the fact that "Russia's Armed Forces have experienced considerable change and modernization since the reforms initiated in late 2008 that have impacted structures, personnel, equipment and weapons systems across the entire range of combat arms and branches, as well as combat support and combat service support. a widely underestimated area of improvement lies in the realm of military decision-making". The author also argues that Russia's improvements in

military decision-making, and especially its efforts to employ high technology to transform it, is an area widely underestimated in the West.

As a result of these reforms a new, network-centric and highly automated, structure at the operational, control and command hierarchy areas was established to enhance both the overall speed and efficiency of decision-making from strategic, to operational and tactical levels.

The author also notes that within two years of the reforms that began in 2008, the number of military districts was cut to four (North, South, Central and East) and the concept of the joint strategic command was initiated in each of these. Furthermore, a new National Defense Management Center was established in Moscow to coordinate the decision-making process in the above joint strategic command levels.

### **3. THE RELATIVE STRENGTH OF THE RUSSIAN NAVAL POWER IN THE STRATEGIC HOT SPOT OF THE MEDITERRANEAN BASIN**

The wider Mediterranean basin is having historically enormous strategic significance for Russia. Karkazis (2020) presented the naval power distribution among the main actors (NATO and Russia) in the Mediterranean basin in the context of a paper dealing with the Libyan crisis. The relative naval strength of Russia among the main naval powers in the wider Mediterranean basin can be characterized as particularly weak.

The following presentation shows only the large fleet units (aircraft and helicopter carriers, frigates and submarines). With regard to Spain and France, whose naval forces also operate outside the Mediterranean, we estimate that two thirds of their total naval power operates in the Mediterranean on a regular basis.

Aircraft carriers. NATO countries (USA, Spain, France and Italy) have 3-6 aircraft carriers (depending on the situation) in the Mediterranean: 1-2 heavy American aircraft carriers occasionally joining the force of the 6th Fleet based in Gaeta (Italy), 1 heavy French aircraft carrier (Charles de Gaulle), 1 Spanish aircraft carrier (Prince of Asturias) which occasionally acts in the Mediterranean and 2 light Italian aircraft carriers. Russia does not have an aircraft carrier in the Mediterranean for a long time. Kuznetsov is in a long period of maintenance and repairs.

Helicopter carriers. NATO countries have 7-8 helicopter carriers in the Mediterranean (one of them is Turkish, which has already entered the testing phase), Egypt 1 (Mistral class) and Russia none.

Frigates. NATO countries have 70-72 frigates in the Mediterranean. Russia has 2-3 frigates being part of its Mediterranean fleet, which currently has a total strength of 15 units assigned to the Tartus (Syria) naval base.

Submarines. NATO countries have 39-41 submarines in the Mediterranean, of which 6-8 (French) are nuclear-powered and equipped with missiles carrying nuclear warheads. Russia has 2-3 nuclear submarines while Israel has a total of 6 conventional Dolphin type submarines (equipped with nuclear missiles) with most of them most probably operating outside the Mediterranean (Indian Ocean).

Naval bases. As for the naval bases that support the above naval forces, France has its main naval base in Toulon, Spain a naval base in Cartagena, Italy has naval bases in Spezia and Taranto, Greece in Salamis and Souda and Turkey has 4 naval bases in the Mediterranean (one of them in Albania) with the largest of them located in Aksaz of Marmaris. Russia has only one naval base in Tartus (Syria).

It is clear from the above that Russia's involvement in the Libyan crisis during this period of time is characterized by an overstretched military power supported by comparatively very limited naval forces which are acting in an economic environment of acute financial stagnation.

#### **4. THE RUSSO-UKRAINIAN AND RUSSO-JAPANESE WARS. MILITARY AND POLITICAL COMPARISONS**

The Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05 is considered as the first great war of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This war exhibited vividly Russia's chronic malfunctions and incompetency both at a political and a military (mainly naval) level.

In 1902 Japan signed a military alliance with Britain. This alliance was characterized as controversial by many scholars in the sense that it set (secured) a favorable diplomatic environment for the massive built-up of Japan, its expansionist policies and its involvement in World War II. This alliance ended the so called "Splendid Isolation" of Britain and opened for the Japanese the road towards (regaining) Manchuria an area rich in raw materials desperately needed by the fast growing Japanese industry. As mentioned earlier, one of the causal roots of the Anglo-Japanese Treaty of Alliance, from the point of view of the British, most probably lied on the threat imposed by Russians on the British interests in the Persian Gulf and in the strategic sea passage to India. Note that this threat reached a climax in 1901-1902 with the regular (rotating) deployment in the Persian Gulf of Russian warships belonging to the Pacific Fleet. The Pacific Fleet imposed a serious threat to the

strategic interests of Britain in Western Pacific and mainly in China. Muroviev (2007) presented the history of the Pacific Fleet from the Crimean War to Perestroika.

Karkazis (2004) argued that the war was the result of the conflicting ambitions of Japan and Russia over the geo-economic and geo-political significance of Manchuria and Korea in their imperial designs:

-The need, on the part of Russia, of Manchuria to safeguard from the south its Maritime Province and the strategic port of Vladivostok and at the same time to secure Port Arthur as a warm naval base, controlling Bo Hai and Korean Bay, for the winter season during which Vladivostok was closed. Also one could add the need for Russia to distract internal public opinion from criticism against the Tsar's regime with imperialistic adventures feeding nationalistic sentiments. **One cannot easily disregard the scenario that Putin is seeking desperately a victorious end to the Russo-Ukrainian war as a means of distracting internal public opinion and mounting reactions against his totalitarian regime and himself personally.**

-The need, on the part of Japan, of Manchuria's raw material wealth, to feed both its fast growing industry and its fast growing naval forces and also of Korea's strategic location both to safeguard access to Manchuria and also to safeguard the strategic Korean Straits.

Having grossly underestimated the ability and resolution of Japan to provoke a new war in the area, the Russians had been heavily involved in psychological deterrence games against the Japanese by over-projecting the capabilities of their Pacific Fleet deploying detachments of this fleet as far as the Persian Gulf. **It seems that after a century the Russians have again underestimated the resolution of western powers (mainly USA and Britain) to defend Ukraine and they have started to be heavily involved in psychological deterrence games against them, this time with reference to a nuclear war.**

Negotiations between Japan and Russia to settle the above conflicts started as early as July 1903 when Japan handed over to Russia proposals on this issue providing for a Russian zone of influence over Manchuria and for a Japanese zone of influence over Korea. Although these proposals satisfied the basic Russian interests and ambitions in Manchuria, the over-confident tsarist regime responded with a maximalistic counter-proposal demanding that Korea should be left outside the interests of Japan. Again, after a century the over-confident Russians responded to western proposals for a peaceful settlement of the arising New Eastern Question with **maximalistic counter-proposals demanding that the Baltic States and Poland to leave NATO and Sweden and Finland not to dare joining it.**

As a result of the deadlock in these negotiations, on 8 February 1904, to secure the element of surprise, the imperial Japanese navy, under the command of Admiral Togo, attacked, three hours before the formal declaration of war, Port Arthur, the heavily fortified Russian naval base overlooking the bays of Korea and Bo Hai. During the first day of the battle Japan, with an attack of a torpedo boat destroyer, badly damaged the two strongest warships of the Pacific Fleet and also a cruiser. The next few days, although the battle of Port Arthur was undecided, the Russians were unfortunate enough to lose Admiral Makarov, the commander of the armed forces in Port Arthur, who was killed in the battle.

As a result of the above events and the fact that Tsar Nicholas II had been assured by his ministers in many occasions that Japan would not undertake an attack against Russia, the element of surprise of the initial attack was multiplied and extended even deeper inside Russian command apparatus in the Far East, adding also the element of a growing de-moralization at the lower ranks of the army. The above in combination with the endemic incompetence and inexperience of Russians over naval affairs (at least as compared with the British, French and Germans) could explain the hesitation of the Russians to move their fleet out of the naval base and to confront the Japanese in the open sea, a hesitation that was proved lethal some months later during the siege of Port Arthur by the Japanese army. **One century later, Putin, most probably, has been assured by his defense minister and the armed forces hierarchy that the defeat of Ukraine would be a matter of a few weeks. The following disastrous events (the dangerous slowing of the Russian advance, the loss of thousands of soldiers and the sinking of 'Moskva' ) are expected highly contribute to the demoralization of the lower rank of the Russian army.**

The naval attack on Port Arthur proved to be a cover for the landing of massive Japanese (land) forces near Incheon in Korea. By April 1904 the Japanese army had reached Yalu River, marking the borders between Korea and Manchuria, defeated the Russians in the homonymous battle and moved inside the Russian-occupied Manchuria. Despite the heavy losses it had suffered, by August 1904 the Japanese army reached the outskirts of the city of Port Arthur whereas the Japanese navy blockaded the Russian naval base. During this blockade both powers suffered considerable losses amounting to two battleships for each one of them. Around the end of 1904 the Japanese heavy artillery managed to take favorable positions on the hills overlooking the city and the naval base and destroyed all capital warships of the Russian Pacific Fleet (4 warships and 2 cruisers). This was the first incident in the world naval history in which so many battleships are lost from land-based artillery fire. In December 1904 general Anatoly Stessel, commander of Port Arthur garrison, surrendered the city to

the Japanese army. For his action, in 1908, Stessel was court-martialed and sentenced to death. In the following three months the Japanese won in Manchuria two more decisive battles, in Sandepu and Mukden, forcing the Russian army to retreat to the north of Manchuria.

To save Manchuria the Russians decided to send to the area the powerful Baltic Fleet in a 18.000 miles journey through Cape of Good Hope. It took the Baltic Fleet more than four months to reach Far East. This extremely long journey tested the morale of the sailors and created technical problems which reduced the speed capacity of the fleet. British intelligence, on the other hand, helped Japanese by providing them with useful information regarding the course of the Russian Armada. **A century later the Anglo-Saxon intelligence helped Ukrainians to sink the flagship of the Black Sea Fleet and to inflict a dangerous blow on the moral of Russian citizens and their armed forces.**

Following a series of tactical mistakes by the part of the fleet command, the Baltic Fleet (which included among its warships the crème of Russian naval forces: four new Borodino class battleships) was engaged in a fierce battle with the Combined Fleet of Japan in the Tsushima Straits between Korea and Japan (27-28 May 1905). During this battle the Baltic Fleet was practically annihilated loosing eight warships.

The defeat of the Russians in the Far East intensified the internal turmoil in Russia which turned into an open revolt at the end of 1905 in St Petersburg during which 1.000-4.000 people were massacred by Tsar's forces. **There are mounting indications that a similar course of events will take place in Russia, especially if Putin takes the fatal decision to use tactical nuclear weapons.**

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## **APPENDIX 1: STRATEGIC REPORTS**

### **Forthcoming**

THE INTELLIGENCE AGENCIES OF EUROPE AND THE ARISING SECURITY THREATS.  
The case of BND On the way of deception?

THE SINKING OF THE RUSSIAN CRUISER “MOSKVA”. Russian defense malfunctions and  
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