

ROLE OF MARITIME STRATEGY IN RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY: A CASE STUDY OF BLACK SEA

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Abstract

Russia is using the Black Sea as a diplomatic tool in its foreign policy to achieve its maritime and foreign policy objectives, which are also linked with the country's strategic culture. This research investigates the significance of the Black Sea in Russia's Maritime Strategy for achieving its foreign policy objectives by using the balance of interest theory. This research employs two conceptual schemas. Firstly, with the help of maritime diplomacy, it analyses a tool to achieve foreign policy objectives in the waters. Secondly, the research uses the concept of strategic culture, which helps explore the diplomatic importance of the Black Sea in Russian foreign policy through the perspective of history and attitudes of decision-makers. This research highlights the case of the Black Sea for Russian maritime strategy, which also has a great economic significance for the region and world. It also highlights the importance of the Black Sea in the Russian maritime doctrine (2022) and links between maritime strategic culture and foreign policy objectives. It concludes that Russia is successfully pursuing its cooperative, coercive, and persuasive maritime diplomacy in the Black Sea region by providing humanitarian assistance, blocking Ukrainian access, and operating a stronghold at Sevastopol port as its naval base. In conclusion, this paper argues that strategic culture plays a vital role in employing the three diplomatic dimensions for achieving maritime objectives in the Black Sea.

Keywords: Black Sea, Maritime Diplomacy, Russian Maritime Doctrine, Russian Foreign Policy, Strategic Culture.

Introduction

Russia was a land empire and it built its naval power as a strategic tool.¹ It has the largest territory globally, stretching from Eastern Europe and expanding to northern Asia. Russia emerged from the disintegration of the USSR in 1991. It has a significant place in world history with a rich historical, political, military, and ideological background.

Therefore, Russia's strategic culture comprises its history of wars and relations with Europe and its geographic presence, which provides strategic depth to the country, religion, and national character, which are the key determinants.² These determinants of Russian Strategic culture also play a role in the country's foreign

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policy however, the evolution of its strategic culture continued after the fall of the USSR in 1991.³

Historically, Kyiv has been Russia's capital, which falls in Europe. Kievan Rus was a federation in the 9th century and marked the beginning of the history of the Russian maritime trade route during the same period. The religious ideology of Russia is Christianity because Kyiv was converted to Christianity in 988. However, the imperial Russia was founded in 1721 by Peter the Great. His policy was expansionism but fell after World War I after the Killing of Tsar-II of the Romanov dynasty.

Russian interests in the Black Sea are Western-driven. The Baltic, the Sea of Azov, and the Black and Caspian Seas were the hurdles in the way of Russian expansion in the 16th century.⁴ According to Peter the Great, "Any ruler who has ground troops has one hand, but one that has navy too has both."⁵ However, the Russian coastline is 2.5 times longer than its land border.

In the 18th Century, Peter the Great (Peter-I) laid the foundation of Russian naval organization. He built a naval power instead of a sea power (Naval power is one aspect of sea power that includes the economy, security, culture, etc.). The aim behind the creation of naval power was to serve the national interests and to drive the strategic policy. Peter-I centralized the Russian navy and structured it along regional lines. Hence, the main regions under Russian influence had their navies. For example, the Northern Fleet, Baltic Fleet, Black Sea Fleet, the Pacific Fleet, and the Caspian Flotilla.⁶

The Russian history of the Black Sea is important as it was a direct trade route to Constantinople (Istanbul) for centuries. However, direct access through the Black Sea was lost after the Mongol invasion of Kievan Rus in the 12th century. Furthermore, in the late 18th century, Russia gained access to the Black Sea during the reign of Catherine II. Russian Black Sea Fleet and the city of Sevastopol were founded in 1783. In the 19th century, the Black Sea Fleet was used against Turks to gain access to the Mediterranean Sea.⁷ Moldova, Bulgaria, Turkey, Ukraine, Romania, and Russia border the Black Sea. This region is important for Russia for reasons to include historical, strategic, geopolitical, and economic.

The research argues that the Russian maritime strategy in the Black Sea may become an effective tool of diplomacy for achieving foreign policy objectives vis-a-vis practicing its strategic culture. The study addresses the main question of why Black Sea holds a significant place in the Russian Maritime Strategy for achieving its foreign policy objectives. The significance of this research is that it highlights the importance of Russian maritime diplomacy as a tool to achieve its foreign policy objectives. This study investigates the types of maritime diplomacy Russia is practicing in the Black Sea, following its strategic culture to achieve its foreign policy objectives. This research aims to identify the influence of Russian strategic culture in its practice of threefold maritime diplomacy. It is qualitative method-based research that incorporates primary sources (official websites like the Russian Foreign Office) and secondary such as books

(Sea Power States, Maritime Diplomacy in the 21st Century, etc.), articles (The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Limited Operations, Russia's Strategic Culture: Prisoner of Imperial History) and journals. It is a case study that is descriptive and analytical for the conceptual framework of maritime diplomacy and strategic culture and has been used along with the theory of balance of interests by Randall L. Schweller.

The Sea Power States by Andre Lamber was published in 2018 by Yale University Press New Havens and London. The book argues that the Mahanian description of sea power transformed the original concept of sea power from a cultural identity to a naval power because, for Greeks, sea power means a state dominated by a sea and not by a navy. The seventh chapter, 'The Limits of Continental Naval Power', is all about imperial Russia. Russia was a land empire and not a sea power; however, Peter the Great was interested in strengthening Russia's naval power. Furthermore, the author argues that Peter the Great failed to achieve his purpose due to the absolute political power structure.⁸

In his book 'Maritime Diplomacy in the 21st Century Drivers and Challenges' published in 2014, Christian Le Miere discussed the threefold diplomacy and shed light on the conceptual aspect of maritime diplomacy.⁹

Why Are Warm-Water Ports Important to Russian Security? The Cases of Sevastopol and Tartus Compared, written by Tanvi Chauhan, was published in 2020 by Air University United States discusses the importance of warm water ports for Russia.¹⁰

The Soviet Strategic Culture: Implications for Limited Operations written by Jack Snyder, was published in 1977 by Rand Corporation discusses that the strategic culture of the Soviet Union during the Cold War era was shaped by a unique set of historical, political, and cultural factors that influenced its approach to nuclear deterrence and warfighting. He also identifies several key features of Soviet strategic culture, including a strong belief in the inevitability of conflict between capitalist and socialist systems, a high tolerance for risk-taking, and a preference for offensive military strategies.¹¹

Maritime Diplomacy

Christian Le Miere divides maritime diplomacy into three folds; cooperative, persuasive, and coercive. Cooperative Maritime Diplomacy, proposed by J.R. Holmes, has been chosen. Four forms of cooperative maritime diplomacy and its goals have been mentioned. The first is humanitarian assistance or disaster management, and the second is a goodwill visit. Both can be used as soft power and can be significant to form Confidence Building Measures (CBMs). However, the third form is training and joint exercises, and the fourth is joint maritime security operations. The goals of both forms are the CBMs and coalition building.

The second fold of maritime diplomacy is that persuasive diplomacy does not align with cooperative maritime diplomacy or with coercive maritime diplomacy. The goals of this fold are to recognize national or maritime power. It is to posture one's naval strength without affecting the other actor's policies.

The third fold is about coercive maritime diplomacy. It takes gunboat diplomacy into account. The author sheds light on the role of non-state actors. Naval power helps control the environment and affects the policy and the posture of another actor. It defines the limit of the use of force. The main goals include countering illegal immigration, piracy, trafficking, pollution, etc. The book describes the para gunboat diplomacy in detail. James Cable defined coercive maritime diplomacy as "the threat or utility of limited naval force is gunboat diplomacy that is employed to have a limited advantage or to minimize loss, either in the furtherance of an international dispute or else against foreign nationals within the territory or the jurisdiction of their own state".¹²

Strategic Culture

The concept of strategic culture has evolved through the ages; its roots can be traced to the classical work of Sun Tzu and Thucydides. However, contemporarily the concept of strategic culture has evolved, in 1971, Colin Gray discussed and analyzed the relationship between nuclear arms and statecraft. Gray also focused on deterrence, limited war, arms control, and disarmament. In 1977, Jack Snyder coined the term 'strategic culture' by following Gray's analysis. According to Snyder, "the sum of ideas, conditioned emotional responses, and patterns of habitual behavior that members of a national strategic community have acquired through instruction or imitation and share with each other." Snyder found the strategic culture from his analysis of the US and Soviet security competition, nuclear rivalry, and decision-making.¹³ In 1995, Johnson argued about the role of history, experiences, geography, political, philosophical, cultural, and character of elites, and he also stressed their importance in shaping the strategic culture. From the Russian strategic behavior, it can be observed that its historical experiences, geography, etc. influence its culture.

Theoretical Framework

The balance of interest theory was given by Randall L. Schweller in 1996.¹⁴ It defines the power politics, variation among states, and their foreign policy tactics at the strategic level. Five core assumptions of this theory relate to this research study. The first assumption is that states pursue their interest, which means that countries' policies and interests are driven by economy and ideology etc. In the case of Russia, it has maximum influence in the Black Sea region. The core interests of Russia are the security of southern borders, access to warm waters, and dealing with threats from adversaries. The second assumption of the theory is that conflict arises from the clash

of interests, which refers to competition or rivalry between states. At the same time, Russia is busy asserting itself as a regional power in the Black Sea. The third assumption is that balancing occurs to protect interests; it protects and promotes interests and acts as a balancing factor, so for Russia, as the great energy exporter, the Black Sea is a broader economic interest zone that aligns with it. The fourth assumption is the balance of power as a stabilizing mechanism which suggests the 'equalization of states' capabilities and prevents the dominance of one state. In the case of Russia, it aims to limit the influence of NATO and the Western alliance in the Black region. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the Invasion of Ukraine in 2022 by Russia are examples. The last assumption of the theory is power and interest influence behavior, which means that both ingredients shape states' behaviour, however, for Russia it means preserving historical and cultural ties to the Black Sea.¹⁵

Importance of the Black Sea for Russia

The Black Sea is importance for Russia for four reasons i.e. historical, geopolitical, economic, and strategic. This is the initial point of Russian sovereignty, and any event in the Black Sea is a threat to Russian existence. According to Armand Goşu, "The Black Sea is a traditional direction for Russian expansion. The first direction of expansion of the founder of the Russian Empire, Peter the Great, was to the South, to the shores of the Azov and Black seas, towards the Crimea. Moscow, the "Third Rome", organically sought to geographically approach the first two, meaning Constantinople and Rome, warm seas, the Black and Mediterranean seas, and not the frozen North."¹⁶

Geography is one of the most important determinants of strategic culture, and the Crimean Peninsula, which exists on the Black Sea's northern coast, greatly influences maritime diplomacy to achieve its foreign policy objectives. Crimea dominates the Black Sea region while surrounded by the Kherson region of Ukraine and Kuban of Russia. Historically, for the Russian Empire, it was a significant line for maritime communication and defence.¹⁷ Crimean annexation of 1783 was also due to the navigational importance of the Black Sea. The control over the Crimean Peninsula provided Russia with control over the sizeable maritime region as it is a defence line against maritime threats from adversaries. Crimea has the Sevastopol port, a naval base providing strategic depth to Russia. The Crimean annexation in 2014 by Russia provided a vital chance to adopt the maritime strategy and protect its national interests. The Crimean annexation reflects Russian strategic culture. Prince Vladimir I of Kievan Rus claimed the coastal cities of Crimea in the 10th century.¹⁸

In 1475, Ottomans took over the control of Crimea, which also led to conflicts between Ottomans and Russians; however, Peter the Great I challenged the Ottomans in the 17th century to possess control of Crimea and the Black Sea, and in 1783 Catherine II took control of Crimea and the Black Sea and it became the part of Russian territory.¹⁹ The rivalry between Turks and Russians continued. The core reason for the Crimean War of 1853 was the religious dispute over the Orthodox Christians

between Russia and the Ottoman Empire. The war lasted for three years till 1856. It became a European war against Russia because Britain and France allied with the Turks. However, Russia lost this war, and the coalition forces destroyed Russia's Black Sea Fleet. Crimea became an integral part of Russia after the war. Crimea became an autonomous state of the Soviet Union in 1921 and part of Ukraine after the fall of the USSR in 1991. Still, Sevastopol remained under Russia. In 2014, Crimea was annexed by Russia again through a referendum in Ukraine after the refusal of Ukraine's President Yanukovich to join hands with the European Union. The annexation of Crimea was to protect the Russian ethnic community.²⁰

In February 2022, Russia launched an attack against Ukraine. Ukraine's struggle to become part of NATO triggered the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. Russia considered NATO's expansion a threat to the mainland Russia and Black Sea region because historically, in 1949, NATO was formed to contain the USSR and started expanding Eastward.

In 2007, Putin highlighted NATO's offer to Ukraine for its membership. In such words, "NATO has put its frontline forces on our borders. This expansion represents a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust, and we have the right to ask: against whom is this expansion intended? And what happened to our Western partners' assurances after the WARSAW Pact's dissolution?"²¹

In 2008, 20% of Ukrainians voted in favor of NATO. According to the former ambassador of the United States to Moscow, Williams J. Burns, "Ukrainian entry into NATO is the brightest of all redlines for the Russian elite and is a direct challenge to Russian interests."²² So, Russia dominates and has control over the Black Sea to counter threats from NATO because the two states, Ukraine and Georgia, are pro-Western and are key instruments of the balance of power in the region. Russia's primary concern is NATO's expansion in the region, and it considers the US as a threat to its interests. Recent conflict is a classic example of the Russian and Western approach to the region's stability.

The Black Sea also has great strategic significance for Russia; in the times of the USSR, it was a defensive line to protect. Russian Black Sea Fleet had 10,000 sailors and 40 warships.²³ Russia considers NATO a threat to the balance of the region. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 with Russia was a significant event that provided more strategic balance to Russia in the region.²⁴

The Black Sea has also economic significance for Russia. It is a trade sphere that promotes mutual relations with friendly countries. This region of the Black Sea is also known for hydrocarbon transportation and an energy corridor between Europe and the Caspian region. For Russia, energy trade is a political tool that can be used to pursue their interests. However, Russia and Turkey have built a gas pipeline cooperation through the Black Sea, which goes back to the Soviet Union of 1984.²⁵ Internationally, the Black Sea region shares 2.5% of naval trade. In 2021 exports from

these countries amounted to 30% of global wheat and 55% of the world's sunflower oil supply.

Russian Maritime Doctrine of 2022 and the Black Sea

Russian President Vladimir Putin approved the Maritime Doctrine of Russia on 31st July 2022, also known as Navy Day of Russia. Russian Maritime Doctrine is known as the National Maritime Policy. The first Russian Maritime Doctrine was released in 2001 but had no international highlights. The second Russian Maritime Doctrine came forth in 2015 after the annexation of Crimea, and the third in 2022 after Russia initiated the war against Ukraine.²⁶

In the Russian Maritime Doctrine of 2015, Russia declared NATO's military development near Russian borders as unacceptable. Later, this became a core reason for the Russian attack on Ukraine. However, in 2015 Russia also highlighted the significance of the Black Sea. Russian maritime doctrine called for developing sufficient naval capabilities in the Black Sea to counter any threat.²⁷

In 2022, the first strategic objective of Russian Maritime doctrine was the *"Development of the Russian Federation as a great maritime power and the strengthening of its position among the world's leading maritime powers"*. The main objectives of the 2022 Maritime Doctrine include economic development, protection of national interests, and access to ocean resources. Russian Maritime Doctrine focuses on the Black Sea region as an important interest zone. It defines its control over the water areas of the ocean and straits connected to the Black Sea. Any threat from an adversary is a threat to Russian existence. Hence, Russia has identified six regions where the maritime doctrine 2022 shall be implemented i.e. Arctic, Atlantic (Baltic, Azov-Black Sea and Mediterranean basins), Pacific, Indian Ocean Region, Caspian and Antarctica.²⁸

Russian Maritime Interests and Foreign Policy Objectives

Generally, the Russian foreign policy objectives are to protect their national interests and national security and maintain international order, peace, and cooperation.²⁹ However, Russian foreign policy also highlights its maritime interests in its foreign policy objectives, which include security from unfriendly countries, safe and free access to world oceans for transport communications, and sea resources such as minerals and energy. Russian interests also include the development of marine pipelines and scientific research. Lastly, the protection of the continental shelf's external borders and the protection of sovereign interests.³⁰ Hence, Russian policies are transatlantic-centric; since the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Russia can be seen practicing threefold maritime diplomacy.

Analysis and Findings

In contemporary times, original Russian foundations, imperial Russian culture, and the USSR's NATO-centric approach are still relevant today and influence Russian behaviour and its policies, decisions, and practices. The past Russian culture is reflected in its present through which the future can be seen. Currently, the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, and the Russia-Ukraine conflict of 2022 are all about the Russian skepticism and territorial security of Russian borders from land to coastline. The Russian invasion of Ukraine can also be compared to the Berlin Block where Russia opted for the confrontational strategy for the security of its territory against the NATO expansion. Nonetheless, Russia is carrying out all three types of marine diplomacy in the Black Sea post-Ukraine conflict in 2022.

First, the cooperative maritime diplomacy, a grain deal, was signed among Turkey, Russia, and Ukraine facilitated by the United Nations in July 2022. The 30.3 million tons of grain was exported through the Black Sea³¹. Through this deal, Russia secured its objective of cooperation mentioned in the foreign policy. However, this deal signed for the humanitarian cause saved a great chunk of the world's population from hunger.

Second, the coercive diplomacy, before the grain deal between Russia, Turkiye, and Ukraine, Russia had blocked the Ukrainian trade route in the Black Sea and cut 9% of the Ukrainian wheat supply and collective count (Russia and Ukraine) of this supply was more than 30%, this blockade disrupted the export of grain to the rest of the world, especially to Africa and the Middle East and raised the global food security concerns.³² This move by Russia was for its security and safety from unfriendly countries.

On April 14, 2022, Ukraine destroyed the Russian warship Moskva in the Black Sea by using its Neptune missiles.³³ According to the US media reports, Russia also used its Black Sea Fleet for bombardment purposes over Kherson and Mariupol, which involved missile shots to protect the sovereign interests in the waters.

Last is persuasive diplomacy. For this, Russia has militarized the Sevastopol port to protect its maritime interests and the state's sovereignty. Sevastopol is Russia's significant naval base in the Black Sea due to its harbour. It is more than 200 years old. Russia has gained influence over the Black Sea by deploying forces in the Crimean Peninsula to meet its objective of free access to world oceans for transport communications and sea resources such as minerals and energy.

This research observes that innovation in technology and its role in military affairs has played a significant role in evolving Russian strategic culture, such as Romanovs built river fleets and an ocean-going vessel because of technology transfer, and before this, Gudonov was the one who bought the ships.³⁴

This study also investigated that by following the footprints of expansionism Russia annexed Crimea based on ethnicity and got full-fledged control of the Sevastopol port of Crimea to dominate the Black Sea region. Therefore, Russia's strategic culture can also be observed in its maritime affairs. However, US academia highlighted the Russian strategy of coercive diplomacy in the Black Sea and termed it a B₃ strategy, including bombardment, blockage, and Boots on the ground.³⁵ Furthermore, the Boot on the ground doesn't refer to coercive use of the Naval fleet but it is used for persuasiveness.

Hence, foreign policy is an old and broader perspective of political science; however, strategic culture is an influential instrument of foreign policy. Strategic culture and foreign policy share mutual determinants. Still, the difference between them is that foreign policy counts in confrontation and cooperation, and even no relations, but strategic culture indicates pure military strategy.

Conclusion

It is concluded that historically significant the Black Sea for Russian geopolitics is being successfully used as a maritime diplomatic tool to achieve foreign policy objectives even in times of chaos like the Russia-Ukraine conflict in 2022. The Black Sea has a vital economic significance for Russia and the rest of the world. Furthermore, Russia blocked the Ukrainian route in the Black Sea for a while, which was also a transatlantic-centric approach, but then signed the Grain Deal. As a naval power, Russia has identified its maritime objectives in its foreign policy and pursued them through diplomatic means of cooperation, coerciveness, and persuasiveness by keeping its strategic culture in view. Russia is practicing its strategic culture of expansionism which is visible through the annexation of Crimea and taking the stronghold over Sevastopol port. Therefore, Russia's successful employment of strategic culture to achieve maritime objectives in its foreign policy is becoming a new dimension for maritime geopolitics.

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