

## MILITARY

# The Russian Quest for Warm Water Ports

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By opening the Syrian-Mediterranean front in 2015, Russia bypassed the whole military network that NATO and the United States had placed along the Russian Federation's Western land borders.

Peter the Great was the ruler of a landlocked nation. The Baltic was practically a Swedish lake and the Black Sea belonged entirely to the Turks. For nearly two hundred years the policy of obtaining, maintaining, and increasing a seaboard has been consistently followed. If that policy was inaugurated by Peter the Great, it was nevertheless absolutely due to the operation of irresistible natural forces.

A great nation must seek a seaboard corresponding in extent to its needs, and Russia could no more be restrained in her seaward expansion than could the United States in overflowing the Rocky Mountains in their march to the Pacific. The policy thus forced upon Russia by the conditions of her being has involved many wars and great sacrifices. The methods adopted have been various, and, in common with those which have commended themselves to all nations, have not been wholly blameless; but only the curious inability of the British people to realise the necessities of others can blind us to the fact that Russian expansion was as inevitable as our own. To the fifty millions of Great and Greater Britain free access to the sea is the breath of national life; by the eighty millions of Russia the same vital need is instinctively felt.

A glance at the map serves to show that, after nearly two centuries of effort, the conditions of Russia, from the maritime point of view, remain exceptionally disadvantageous. The British Empire had free access to all the oceans and seas of the world. France faced the Atlantic and held fourteen hundred miles of the shores of the Mediterranean. Spain is admirably placed for the exercise of sea-power. Germany, by means of the North Sea Canal, held an outlet to blue water in her own hands. The United States front two oceans. Japan is almost as favorably situated as the British Islands.

Russia, on the other hand, by a freak of circumstance, unfortunate for herself and other nations, had her sea-communications in Europe land-locked and partially ice-locked, and the effect of these great geographical disadvantages was manifested in the Crimean War. In the Far East, Kamtschatka, annexed in 1697, has its spring, summer, and autumn compressed into four months. Vladivostock, which became a Russian port in 1860, is ice-locked for about four months,\* and is situated in the almost inland Sea of Japan. Even Port Arthur, the latest acquisition, does not provide such unimpeded access to the ocean as is given by Brest, Cadiz, New York, or San Francisco, and has the additional drawback of being fully four thousand four hundred miles by the shortest railway route from the Russian capital.

Although Russia is the predominant resident power on the Eurasian Continent, geography has been very "cruel" to her in the sense that it has left her virtually landlocked. In the north, her access to the world is frozen in winter. In the west, Europe blocks her entry into the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea. In the south, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan deny her a passage to the Arabian Sea. Lastly, in the east, China and Korea separate her from the South China Sea, while Vladivostok, her sole warm water port, is "neutralized" by South Korean and Japanese domination of the strait of Tsushima. Her problems were uncomfortably accentuated by the fact that her principal adversaries were the world's dominant sea power, first Great Britain, then the United States. Russian strategists have, over the last two hundred years, sought to remedy this through a steady, but relentless drive to the seas. In this respect they seem to have drawn upon the advice and thinking of two of their great strategists, Peter the Great and Prince Gorchakov.

A "warm water port" is a port where the water does not freeze in winter. Because they are available year-round, warm water ports can be of great geopolitical or economic interest, with the ports of Saint Petersburg and Valdez being notable examples. Russia needed a warm water port to have a well rounded economy like China or America. As the Russian empire expanded to the East, it would also push down into Central Asia towards the sea, in a search for warm water ports.

Russia's Czar Ivan III (1462-1505) had warred to unify Russia and to break free of the Mongol yoke. Ivan IV (1533-84) had conquered the Mongols and warred unsuccessfully to acquire a warm water port. In the 17th century, Russia expanded westward at the expense of Poland, acquiring the Ukraine in the process, and then expanded to the Pacific and to the frontiers of China. Following upon all this, Peter's foreign policy may be reduced to three simple goals: (1) reaching the Baltic Sea; (2) reaching the Black Sea; and (3) expanding southward at the expense of Iran. Ultimately, only the first of these thrusts was successful, though it took the 21-year Swedish or Northern War to complete it.

Fifty-one years prior to the birth of the United States Peter the Great died, leaving behind his celebrated will in which he advised his subjects to " ... approach as near as possible to Constantinople and India. Whoever governs there will be the true sovereign of the world. Consequently, excite continual wars, not only in Turkey, but in Persia And, in the decadence of

Persia, Penetrate as far as the Persian Gulf advance as far as India." (In today's world, "India" ought to be read as "Pakistan").

St. Petersburg is inexorably linked with the personality of its founder, Tsar Peter I. Peter inherited a Russia that was too backward for his taste. Trade was relatively undeveloped due to the lack of access to a warm-water port (the Baltic belonged to the Swedes and the Black Sea was in Turkish hands) and the populace, even the aristocracy, was for the most part uneducated. Novorossiysk, Russia's largest warm water port on the Black Sea, was home to USSR President Brezhnev's favorite winery, Myskhako. Petropavlovsk Kamchatsky is the last warm water port along the Northern Sea Route from Southeast Asia to Europe. Kaliningrad, a Russian region strategically located "within" Europe, has the No.1 rating for social-economic development in the North-West federal region. Kaliningrad's economy has grown rapidly due to the fishing industry, oil and gas exports, and heavy industry, and has Russia's only warm water port on the Baltic coast.

Every nation desired above all things access to that highroad to everywhere, which the oldest of poets called thirty centuries ago the Wide-Wayed Sea. Russia was the only great State that found this access through her northern ports closed during the winter by ice, and through her southern ports on the Black Sea liable to be at any time closed by the Power which held the shores of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles. She had long sought a warm water harbor on the Atlantic, and thought of buying one from Norway. She had got a sort of haven on the Arctic coast west of the mouth of the White Sea, but eastwards thence along the Siberian and Kamchatkan coasts there was none nearer than Vladivostock on the Sea of Japan, unsurpassed as a naval station, for the long channel of approach is eminently defensible and capable of being kept open throughout winter by an ice breaker.

It had been the adverse fate of Russia on reaching the shores of a sea to discover that it was not an open sea. Each time Russia prepared to set foot on a seaboard, and her soldiers weary but victorious were ready like the Greeks of the Anabasis to utter the joyous cry, "The sea at last!" they met with disappointment. It was not access to a free, open sea that they had conquered for their country, but merely a salt lake controlled by some other Power. The Baltic, to the shores of which Russia came after a struggle of over two centuries against the Poles and Swedes, was closed by the ice of the Finnish Bay and by the Danish Straits. The exit from the Black Sea was found to be a trap door that might any moment be opened or closed against Russia by the Turkish janitor acting in his own interest or, more serious still, in the interests of those who might bribe or intimidate him against Russia. The bleakness of the Siberian coasts and the ardent aspirations of the Japanese neighbor deprived Russia of an egress to the warm waters of the Pacific. But it was the Black Sea that caused Russia many a dark day of her history, turning even her victories into defeat. The Black Sea was even less hospitable to the Russians than to the Greeks, who gave it the euphemistic name of the Hospitable Sea.

The Tsars of Russia had always their eyes on the warm water ports in the south to control the world economy. The Soviets, having naval supremacy in Indian Ocean, had since long enough of naval ships facilities and number of ships in these water. Warm water ports:

available by Ethiopia and South Yemen in the west and Kam Rahn Bay in the east to cherish their long term desired to capture the warm waters with ease. Latest technology, long range nuclear missiles had also reduced the dependance on large distance bases. This historical compulsion of the Russians was, however no longer valid.

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