evolved from the Grand Duchy of Moscow, Russia is a superpower. Geography makes it a continental nation, but for centuries Russia has striven to become a sea power. The nation has expanded towards the White Sea, the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea and East Asian shores. Russians consider the urge to expand as something natural and just: a great nation must have free access to oceans. Led by Ivan IV (Ivan the Terrible, 1538–1584), Russia tried in vain to gain access to the Baltic Sea via the Baltic countries and Finland. At the same time, Moscow opened a gateway to the world via the White Sea. The northern route involved many challenges and access to the Baltic Sea remained a strategic objective, which was attained after the Treaty of Nystad (1721) by Peter the Great. This did not, however, satisfy him as he wanted to gain a strategic focus for Russia in the Baltic region. The political and strategic focus of the navy while the Baltic Sea was considered a secondary sea front.3

After the disintegration of the USSR and the Warsaw Pact, the situation in the Baltic area changed and Russia was forced to retreat to the easternmost end of the Gulf of Finland. However, from the Russian point of view, the present situation is not as dire as before WWII. Russia still controls the Kaliningrad area and a longer strip of the northern shores of the Gulf of Finland than prior to the Moscow Peace Treaty of 1940. Despite the territorial losses, Russia has not abandoned its ocean strategy. Published in 2001, the maritime doctrine of the Russian Federation is a comprehensive definition of the principles of Russian maritime policy, discussing areas from international maritime law to the interests of the Russian Federation on the world's oceans. According to the doctrine, oceans and their resources provide one of the major directions of development of world civilisation in the third millennium. The national policies of the major maritime powers and the majority of the world's nations will be implemented through independent action and cooperation, but competition on the world's oceans will be inevitable. This is why ocean strategy and naval policy occupy centre stage in strategic planning.4

Russia considers itself a leading maritime power bordered by three oceans. Its national maritime policy must look after the interests of the state and society from the inland waters to the sea coasts, including the continental shelf of the Russian Federation and its economic zones, territorial seas and ocean access. The national interests of the Russian Federation are aligned with the maritime actions of individuals, the society and the state, and are implemented through the nation's maritime power. The national maritime policy must implement and defend Russian interests on the world's oceans and enhance Russia's position among the leading maritime powers.

The doctrine pays special attention to naval warfare; the fleet is one of the main tools protecting Russia's power-political interests. The Russian Navy is divided into the following operational strategic units: the Northern, Pacific, Black and Baltic Sea fleets and the Caspian Flotilla. The location, strength and tasks of each fleet are determined by national maritime policy and regional needs. For example, during the Soviet period, the strategic focus of the navy was in the north. Over the decades, a network of naval bases, shipyards and training and development centres was built on the coasts of the Arctic Ocean and White Sea. A strong northern navy equipped with strategic nuclear submarines is a power policy tool. The longest Russian sea coast, almost 20 000 kilometres, is in the north. During the Cold War, both the Soviet and the Western navies were on the alert in the north because the missile trajectories of both parties crossed the northern areas. The north is still the most effective buffer zone for Russian core areas, and for strategic reasons Russia insists on its exclusive right to the northern sea route. Presidents Putin and Medvedev have made several public remarks about the importance of the Northern Fleet in the defence of the Russian Federation.5

The disintegration of the USSR was detrimental to the military. Worst hit was the navy, which was reduced to a catastrophic state. The redevelopment of the Russian navy that started during President Putin's reign focuses mainly on the Northern Fleet. Development of the other fleets takes place in order of importance as follows: the Black Sea Fleet, the Pacific Fleet, the Caspian Flotilla and the Baltic Sea Fleet. The role of the Pacific Fleet is defined by superpower politics and the volatile situation on the Korean peninsula. The development of the Black Sea Fleet and the Caspian Flotilla are motivated by tension on Russia's southern borders.6

As regards the global maritime policy of the Russian Federation, the relatively small Baltic Sea plays a regional role but is not without international significance because of the nine littoral states. The Baltic Sea is important for Russian trade due to its strategic sea lines of communications, its access to oceans and because it is the most peaceful area with a reduced risk of military conflict. Military leaders nonetheless uphold the myth of the old enemies in staff exercises to maintain resistance against the Western threat. The main task of the Baltic Fleet is to defend the political status and sovereignty of Russia in the area, protect economic activity and prevent illegal access. The role of NATO as a potential enemy has increased with NATO's eastern expansion. Russia has lost the defensive zone created by the USSR after WWII, and NATO is now closer to the Russian core areas than before. The Åland Islands have gained importance as a demilitarised zone now that the Baltic nations have joined NATO. The islands are a military vacuum, which in a conflict situation will be taken advantage of by the quickest and strongest strategic power. Ac-
Sia more room for manoeuvre in its Baltic Sea policy. In the maritime doctrine, the Baltic Sea is first and foremost defined as a transport route, and special emphasis is placed on the development of port infrastructures. Over the past decade, Russia has constructed numerous new ports at the easternmost end of the Gulf of Finland, renovated old ones and constructed infrastructure to support maritime traffic. Being shallow, the Baltic Sea provides ample opportunities for the utilisation of the continental shelf of Russia and for building artificial islands (installations and structures), for example. These are means for improving coastal infrastructure and defence. The Nord Stream gas pipeline is the flagship of these projects. According to Russia, it will combine Eastern and Western interests in an ideal and balanced way.

Coordinating cooperation with St. Petersburg and Kaliningrad is also considered important. The Baltic Fleet is part of the western military district of Russia. The main training units are located in Kaliningrad and in Kronstadt. The biggest unannounced threat in Russia’s Baltic strategy is the loss of the freedom of navigation between the mouth of the Gulf of Finland and Kaliningrad. During WWII, the Soviet Navy remained blockaded at the easternmost end of the Gulf, something the Navy does not want to happen again.

Thus, maintaining the connection and ensuring the safety of transport is the main task of the naval and coastal defence forces, and the Baltic Fleet is furnished with equipment that supports and protects transport. According to Russia, another constant threat is the possible isolation of Kaliningrad and the fact that the Baltic nations, Poland and Germany could demand changes in the status of Kaliningrad should tensions increase in the Baltic area. Russia’s interests involve maintaining the status quo and uninterrupted transport in the Baltic.

Russian leaders do not rely on wishful thinking and are aware of their responsibilities in relation to the security of the Baltic Sea. To this end, they are purposefully developing both the Army and the Baltic Fleet. The current manpower of the Baltic Fleet is approximately 20,000 (August 2010). The fleet has been systematically renewed over the past five years, and consists of destroyers, corvettes, hovercraft and landing ships, missiles and torpedo boats and submarines suitable for Baltic Sea conditions. Unlike the Soviet Navy, the Russian Navy cooperates with foreign builders. It develops submarines together with the Italians, and its latest procurement is a French Mistral class amphibious assault ship.

Foreign and Russian experts consider the Baltic Sea an ideal environment for submarines, which will gain in importance as underwater operations in the area increase. The Baltic Fleet currently has three submarines, two of which are Kalmar class submarines in use since the 1980s. These are being replaced by modern Lada class submarines built at the Admiralty Shipyards in St. Petersburg. The first one, called Sankt-Petersburg, was commissioned on 8 May 2010. Her sister ship, Kronstadt, will be delivered to the fleet in 2013 and Sevastopol in 2015. The submarines can be equipped with both torpedoes and mines as well as cruise missiles with a range of 300 kilometres.

In addition to the ships and submarines, the navy has aviation forces comprising 24 Su-27 fighters, 29 Su-24 attack aircraft and 46 helicopters suitable for naval operations. Supporting the navy, there are also the motorised marine brigade and coastal defence regiment in Kaliningrad.

In addition to the navy, the air and ground forces of the western military district participate in the defence of the Baltic Sea. They are also undergoing redevelopment and being reinforced with new Iskander missiles.

Russia’s military power manifests itself through comparison with that of other nations in the area. Russia is the only nation to have a Baltic strategy in place, derived from the maritime doctrine and guiding Russian Baltic policy. Russians know what they want from the Baltic Sea. Other nations have not drafted similar strategies, even though many of them have associations or institutions which focus on the Baltic Sea. The Russian Baltic Fleet possesses more powerful equipment than others, but not overwhelmingly so.

The Finnish Navy mostly focuses on coastal defence. The manpower is limited, there are only a few warships and Finland does not have any submarines that would be ideally suited for operations in the Baltic Sea.

Sweden is much stronger at sea. The five Visby class corvettes built between 2003 and 2008, equipped with missiles, form the core of the Swedish Navy and are supported by five submarines. Two of them are modern Gotland class submarines, one of which even the US Navy failed to spot when the Swedes participated in joint military exercises along the coast of California. The Baltic countries have small navies and coastal defence forces, but as members of NATO they have access to support from the allied navies under certain circumstances. Maritime support for the Baltic countries would mainly come from Germany which has a navy with manpower matching that of Russia’s and equipped with modern vessels, aircraft and helicopters. Germany has eleven submarines that are suitable for operations in the Baltic Sea. Four of them are 212A class submarines with hybrid propulsion. Denmark no longer has submarines. Its navy uses fast and effective surface ships equipped with missiles and helicopters. The Polish Navy has outdated equipment. So far, NATO’s support for the Baltic countries has been almost non-existent, because NATO’s military focus is not in the Baltic area.

In addition to military and economic considerations, the perception of the Baltic Sea is also affected by a nation’s traditions, history and emotional ties. St Petersburg is one of the two Russian federal cities and the largest residential and cultural centre in the Baltic area. It is only now starting to regain its former glory and overcome the degradation caused by Bolshevism. In the autumn of 2007, the Speaker of the State Duma, Boris Gryzlov, stated to Defence Minister Anatoliy Serdyukov that St Petersburg focuses on the development of both its ports and maritime connections and that several international maritime companies have established presence in the city. The maritime objectives of the city would be further supported by the move of the Russian naval headquarters from Moscow to St Petersburg. The governor of St Petersburg, Valentina Matviyenko, was a strong supporter of the initiative and the ministry suggested that the naval headquarters start preparing for the move. Nothing happened for several years due to the fact that the senior naval officers placed in Moscow were reluctant to leave the city. A group of retired admirals approached the Russian leaders with an open letter stating that moving the headquarters made no sense and would have an adverse effect on national defence as a whole. In the spring of 2009, the Commander-in-Chief of the Russian Navy, Vladimir Vysotskiy, stated that the navy had not received an order about the move. General of the Army Nikolay Makarov, who is the Chief of the General Staff of the armed forces, was quick to reply. According to him, the move to St Petersburg was part of the ongoing reform of the armed forces. Naval headquarters should be located by the sea, and St Petersburg is an ideal location. The move will start in late 2010 and will be completed by 2012. The new headquarters will be in the Admiralty building in the centre of St Petersburg where the Baltic fleet headquarters used to be located until the recent move to Kronstadt. It seems that the leaders of the Russian Federation, who come from St Petersburg, have their eyes on the Baltic Sea.
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Notes


5. See, for example, Vystupleniye Putina 2008-02-18, Medvedeva 2009-11-21.


7. Ibid., pp. 400–439.


