

Russian Navy Deploys For War Avoidance

Nov. 27—Senior retired officers of the Russian Navy have confirmed that some of its ships have recently visited their repair and support facility at Tartus, Syria, while two battleships from Russia's Northern Fleet are about to embark on a long-range cruise that will also take them to Tartus. The Russian naval moves are a phased and measured action, signalling Moscow's determination not to stand idly by, in the face of attempts to overthrow the Syrian government.

The Tartus facility dates from an agreement between the Soviet Union and Syria in the 1970s, when the port served as a supply and maintenance base for the Soviet 5th Mediterranean Squadron, a special unit that established a permanent Soviet presence in the Mediterranean, staffed out of the Black Sea Fleet (Sevastopol) and the Northern Fleet (Murmansk) of the Soviet Navy. That unit went out of existence in 1991, but Tartus is still staffed by Russian naval personnel.

According to Adm. Valentin Selivanov (ret.), former commander of the Mediterranean Squadron and former Chief of Staff of the Russian Navy, who was interviewed by *Svobodnaya Pressa* Nov. 23, "the three Russian ships" reported to have been off the Syrian coast recently, were two warehouse and repair vessels, and the patrol ship *Smetlivy* (Russia's only remaining Kashin-class destroyer), which made a call at Tartus en route to base in the Crimea after deploying with Italian naval forces in joint exercises this Summer.

Selivanov also confirmed widespread reports that two ships from Russia's strategic Northern Fleet will soon leave Murmansk for the Mediterranean. The government daily *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* announced Nov. 24 that the *Admiral Kuznetsov* and the *Admiral Chabanenko* have just completed preparations in the Barents Sea for a long-distance cruise. They carried out firing practice, and Russian Navy Commander-in-Chief Adm. Vladimir Vysotsky

visited them Nov. 24-26 to check their readiness for the long-distance cruise. The *Kuznetsov*, an aircraft carrier, took on board an aircraft group consisting of Su-33 and Su-25 fighters (the Su-25UTG is a special carrier-compatible model of this versatile fighter aircraft), and Ka-27 ASW/anti-ship helicopters.

These ships belong to the "strategic" Northern Fleet, which periodically conducts exercises in the North Atlantic, coordinated with long-range bomber and strategic missile tests. The *Kuznetsov-Chabanenko* deployment will not be a sailing of the Northern Fleet as a whole, but the *Kuznetsov* is Russia's only remaining aircraft carrier, formally classified as a "heavy, aircraft-carrying cruiser," with anti-ship missile batteries. The *Chabanenko* is a destroyer, an Udaloy-II-class "large anti-ship (and anti-submarine) ship."

Selivanov said of the vessels' cruise into the Mediterranean: "If somebody's ships are located somewhere, of course it's not possible to simply fly over them and bomb someplace. Even the Americans will not be able to ignore the arrival of our ships off the coast of Syria. Although, probably, our only aircraft carrier plus the *Chabanenko* do not have the ability to stop an entire war. . . . But their appearance in the Eastern Mediterranean will be a signal to the whole world, that Russia has its interests here, and you can't just crush, destroy, and kill everybody without taking them into account."

Today's *Izvestia* interviewed another former Russian Navy chief of staff, Adm. Victor Kravchenko (ret.), who said that, even if the *Kuznetsov* and the *Chabanenko* take some time to arrive in the Mediterranean, "The appearance there of any naval force besides NATO's is very useful for the region, since it represents an obstacle to unleashing armed conflict."



U.S. Navy

Two ships from Russia's strategic Northern Fleet, the *Kuznetsov* (shown here) and the *Chabanenko* will soon leave Murmansk for the Mediterranean.