



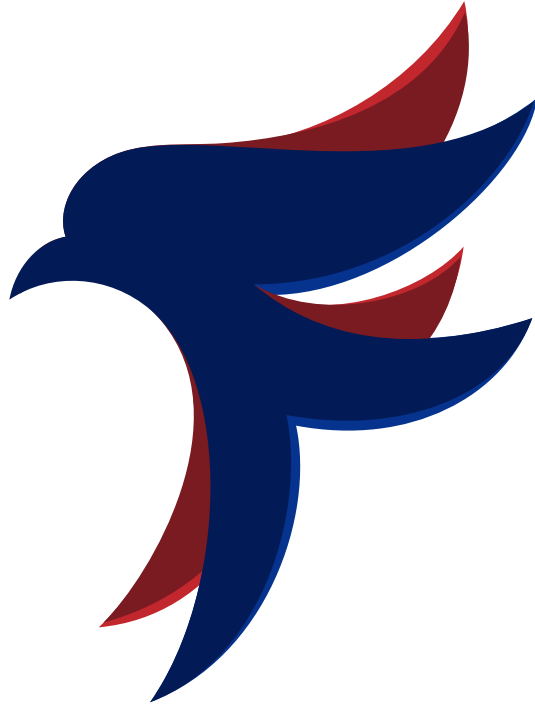
FOREIGN POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE

RUSSIA'S WAR IN SYRIA

RUSSIAN NAVAL FORCES IN THE SYRIAN WAR

IGOR DELANOË





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RUSSIAN NAVAL FORCES IN THE SYRIAN WAR

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INTRODUCTION

Since the late 2000s, the Russian Federation has expanded its naval footprint in the Eastern Mediterranean, and even resurrected its Mediterranean Squadron in 2013. The backbone of this operational squadron is provided by units coming from the Black Sea Fleet, complemented by vessels from other Russian naval formations (namely, the Northern, Baltic, and Pacific Fleets, as well as the Caspian Sea Flotilla) on a rotational basis. As the Russian State Armament Program for the period 2011-2020 was implemented, the Black Sea Fleet received new warships and new diesel-powered submarines. Consequently, by the outbreak of the Syrian crisis, Moscow's naval footprint in the Mediterranean had already been reconstituted. Yet, since the mid-2010s, a structural change occurred in the Mediterranean Squadron's order of battle. The Squadron has morphed qualitatively and quantitatively, and has become more capable. Featuring fewer ex-Soviet large platforms and more modern green water units, this naval task force has been assigned mainly a defensive objective: locally counterbalance navies of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and protect Russia's southern flank from perceived instability emanating from the Mediterranean's southern shore, in the context of the Arab Spring. Moreover, Moscow's direct military involvement in the war in Syria has provided the Mediterranean Squadron with a new purpose while highlighting a conventional deterrence mission.

THE REBIRTH OF RUSSIA'S MEDITERRANEAN SQUADRON

From a historical perspective, it is not a surprise that Russia resurrected a permanent naval task force in the Mediterranean. Starting from the second half of the 18th century, the Russian Empire permanently deployed a naval squadron in the Levant that patrolled the Greek Islands through most of the 19th century. During the Cold War, the Soviet *Fifth Eskadra*—or 5th Operational Squadron of the Black Sea Fleet—was tasked with projecting Soviet power and influence in the Middle East through the Mediterranean and exerting a permanent nuclear threat on NATO's southern flank. Amounting to 50 units in the late 1980s, including nuclear-powered submarines, the *Eskadra* enjoyed a good logistical base on the southern shore of the Mediterranean, with bases in Egypt (until the early 1970s), Syria, and naval facilities in Libya and in the Red Sea (Dahlak Archipelago).¹

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, it was not until the early 2000s that Moscow displayed a naval interest in the Mediterranean area. Russia's 2001 Maritime Doctrine, signed by then-newly elected President Vladimir Putin, called for a "sufficient" naval presence of warships in the Mediterranean waters. Furthermore, the text emphasized the need for Moscow to promote a "zone of politico-military stability" in the region.² However, Russia only gradually resumed the deployment of war vessels on a non-permanent basis during the 2000s. By the end of the decade, the Mediterranean became one of Russia's preferred theaters to project units and to

1 Norman Polmar, *The Naval Institute Guide to the Soviet Navy* (Annapolis, US Naval Institute Press, 1991), p. 19.

2 "Maritime Doctrine of the Russian Federation until 2020," July 27, 2001. Text in Russian: <https://legalacts.ru/doc/morskaja-doktrina-rossiiskoi-federatsii-na-period-do/>.

show the flag.³ Although the capabilities of the current squadron are very different from those of the Soviet *Eskadra*, the purposes of Russia's reinvestment in the Mediterranean naval stage remain tied to Moscow's self-proclaimed status of a great power. At the end of the 2000s, Russia started to recompose a proto-Mediterranean Squadron through the deployment on a rotational basis of ex-Soviet platforms, including blue water warships, such as Project 1164 guided missile cruisers and Project 1155 large anti-submarine vessels. In 2013, the Mediterranean Squadron was formally reinstated and organically tied to the command of the Black Sea Fleet.

RUSSIAN NAVAL FORCES' EARLY INVOLVEMENT IN THE SYRIAN CRISIS

In the early 2010s, Russia's Mediterranean task force supported Moscow's overall objective to impede the collapse of the Syrian regime and to prevent any NATO move to implement a "Libya-style scenario" in Damascus. With that aim, Russia provided material and logistical support to Syria in the early stages of the uprising. Large ex-Soviet landing ships of Projects 775 and 1171 regularly departed Russia's Black Sea port of Novorossiysk for Syria's ports of Tartus and Latakia, creating a "maritime bridge" nicknamed "the Tartus Express." From July 2012 to January 2018, 318 rotations were carried out along this maritime route, shipping 185,500 tons of military cargo,

55% of which was transported on amphibious units of the Black Sea Fleet.⁴

AS THE CONFLICT IN SYRIA TURNED INTO A VIOLENT PROXY WAR INVOLVING MANY MORE ACTORS, SEA LANES OF COMMUNICATION BECAME INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT FOR RUSSIAN SECURITY INTERESTS.

As the conflict in Syria turned into a violent proxy war involving many more actors, sea lanes of communication became increasingly important for Russian security interests. In October 2012, Turkey intercepted and grounded a Syrian civilian airliner flying from Russia to Syria, which was believed to have military cargo on board. This move signaled that Ankara was not ready to tolerate Russian aid to Damascus flying through its airspace.⁵ With time, as VMF (Voyenno-Morskoy Flot, Russian naval forces) shipping capabilities proved insufficient, the Kremlin bought and refitted old merchant civilian vessels to

3 See, Dmitry Gorenburg, "Russian Naval Deployments A Return to Global Power Projection or a Temporary Blip?" *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo*, N° 57, May 2009, <https://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/russian-naval-deployments-return-global-power-projection-or-temporary-blip>.

4 «Rossiiskie dessantnye korabli sozdali 'dorogou jizni' dlia Sirii» ["Russian Large Landing Ships created a 'life line' for Syria"], *Vzgliad*, October 2, 2017, <https://vz.ru/society/2017/10/2/888931.html>

5 Ellen Barry and Rick Gladstone, "Turkish Premier Says Russian Munitions Were Found on Syrian Jet," *New York Times*, October 11, 2012, <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/12/world/middleeast/syria.html>.



Projet 1164_Moskva: guided missiles cruiser Moskva (Projet 1164 Atlant) in Sevastopol, July 2009. (Wikimedia Commons)

increase the flow of cargo to Syria.⁶ Among other tasks, the VMF fulfilled intelligence missions, mainly assigned to the Black Sea Fleet's 519th autonomous division of intelligence vessels.

It also undertook “gunboat diplomacy,” aimed at deterring Moscow’s opponents in Syria from undertaking any unilateral military adventure there. This “gunboat diplomacy” mission was carried out by large ex-Soviet platforms from the Pacific, Northern, and Black Sea Fleets, which were regularly deployed in the Eastern Mediterranean to “flex muscles.” Russia’s sole aircraft carrier *Admiral Kuznetsov* (Project 1143.5, Northern Fleet) was deployed between December 2011 and February 2012, and again in late 2016. The Northern

Fleet’s flagship, the nuclear-powered guided missile cruiser *Peter the Great* (Project 1144.2), completed a combat mission in the Levant in May 2014, which was part of a broader deployment in the Mediterranean. Project 1164 missile cruisers, the *Variag* (Pacific Fleet’s flagship) and *Moskva* (Black Sea Fleet’s flagship), also fulfilled combat missions off Syria in 2013, 2015, and 2016. Project 1155 large anti-submarine vessels coming from the Pacific and the Northern Fleets complemented the task force, as well as one nuclear-powered attack submarine also coming from the Northern Fleet (most likely of Project 971 type). Their deployment supported Russia’s diplomatic posture in Syria, such as when reports of chemical

6 Jonathan Saul and Maria Tsvetkova, “Russia supplies Syria Mission with old Cargo ships bought from Turkey,” *Reuters*, December 15, 2015, <https://www.reuters.com/news/picture/russia-supplies-syria-mission-with-old-c-idUSKBN0TY-2BG20151215>.

weapons use by the Syrian regime started to appear and the West threatened Damascus with retaliatory airstrikes.

Beyond “gunboat diplomacy,” Project 1164 units also provided anti-air cover to Russia’s military assets in Syria, first in Tartus, and later, the airbase in Khmeimim, via the S-300 Fort system (the naval version of the S-300 anti-air system). Even though Russia deployed S-300 systems onshore in the early stage of its military campaign, the *Moskva* was then still in charge of defending the maritime approach of the Syrian coast, suggesting that the S-300—and, later, the S-400—deployed onshore in Syria was covering other directions (presumably North, against Turkish Airforce, and East, against the U.S. Airforce).

RUSSIA’S LITTORAL WARFARE IN SYRIA

When Moscow intervened directly in the Syrian war, the scope of the missions of the VMF in the Mediterranean expanded to include combat missions and missile strikes. It has also enhanced the protection of the approach of Syrian coasts, where Russian military assets are dispatched. Similarly, the activity of the Mediterranean Squadron highlighted another growing function: the projection of Russia’s southern line of defense beyond the Black Sea region toward the Levant.⁷ By the time Russia started its military intervention in Syria, the Mediterranean Squadron had undertaken structural changes in its order of battle. The implementation of the 2011-2020 armament program proved relatively successful in the Black Sea Fleet, which received six new diesel-powered attack submarines (SSK) of Project 0636.3 (*Kilo* type), built at the Admiralty shipyard in

St. Petersburg and commissioned between 2014 and 2016. Three new frigates of Project 11356M (of six originally planned) were commissioned between 2016 and 2017. The Black Sea Fleet has also received several small missile boats of Projects 21631 and 22800 from 2014 onward. All of these units are capable of firing Kalibr cruise missiles with a range of 1500-2500 kilometers. Singularly, Russia has deployed the surface version of the Kalibr (Kalibr-NK) on very light platforms like small missile boats, which have 900-ton displacement (the submarines are equipped with the Kalibr-PL variant).

Surface vessels and submarines were involved in combat missions, especially during the active phase of Russia’s involvement in late 2015 to early 2016, when the objective was to destroy the various rebel and jihadi groups who threatened the existence of the Syrian regime.

SYRIA PROVED PARTICULARLY RELEVANT FOR TEST-FIRING KALIBR CRUISE MISSILES. IN THE FIRST ATTACK MISSION IN OCTOBER 2015, SURFACE VESSELS FROM THE CASPIAN SEA FLOTILLA FIRED AT TARGETS IN SYRIA.

⁷ Igor Delanoë, “Russia’s Black Sea Fleet: toward a Multiregional Force,” *CNA Occasional Paper*, CNA, June 2019, https://www.cna.org/CNA_files/PDF/IOP-2019-U-020190-Final.pdf.



Krasnodar Mil ru: diesel-powered attack submarine B-265 Krasnodar (Project 0636.3 Kilo) in Sevastopol in 2017. (Russian Ministry of Defense)

Beyond pure combat aspects, this was an opportunity for the VMF to test new units in real operational conditions. Syria proved particularly relevant for test-firing Kalibr cruise missiles. In the first attack mission in October 2015, surface vessels from the Caspian Sea Flotilla fired at targets in Syria. The frigate *Dagestan* (Project 11661K) and the missile corvettes *Grad Sviazhsk*, *Uglitch*, and *Velikiy Ustiug* (Project 21631) fired a salvo of 26 Kalibr-NK missiles on 11 targets via Iranian and Iraqi airspaces.⁸ This attack highlighted the direct security nexus between the Caspian space and the Levant, showing Russia's ability to carry out missile strikes from a water bastion located in the Eurasian landmass. On December 8, 2015, the Black Sea Fleet's SSK B-237 *Rostov-Na-Donu* fired a salvo of four Kalibr-PL cruise missiles from a submerged position in the Levant. This was the first operational fire-test of a cruise missile

by a Russian submarine although Moscow had mastered the related technology in the 1980s.

The missions carried out by the Mediterranean Squadron in Syria mostly related to the projection of littoral warfare in the Eastern Mediterranean, challenging NATO naval supremacy in the Levant, interdicting access to Syrian waters and air space, and supporting combat operations in Syria. From Moscow's perspective, the VMF projected stability in the Levant and maintained the geopolitical status quo, which is consistent with Moscow's stark opposition to regime change or Western military intervention in the region after the wars in Iraq and Libya. Moreover, the permanent deployment of half a dozen platforms capable of delivering long-range missiles creates a latent conventional threat on NATO's Mediterranean flank while

⁸ Some of the Kalibr missiles, however, did not reach their targets and were lost during flight.

establishing the non-strategic deterrence highlighted in Russia's 2014 Military Doctrine.⁹

States, France, and the United Kingdom in April 2018, following the alleged use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime in Eastern Ghouta, near Damascus.

LIMITS AND CONSTRAINTS OF THE RUSSIAN MEDITERRANEAN SQUADRON

The involvement of the VMF in the Syrian campaign has highlighted four specific shortcomings and limits, which nevertheless have not impeded Moscow from reaching its goal of preventing the collapse of the Syrian regime. The Mediterranean Squadron suffers from limited anti-air capabilities, which is a long-standing, structural challenge in the VMF.¹⁰ Russia has therefore dispatched S-300 and S-400 anti-air systems in Syria to provide anti-air cover to its assets deployed onshore and offshore. The deployment of anti-ship coastal battery Bastion and electronic warfare systems combined with the various anti-air systems (S-300, S-400, and Pantsir-S1 for short-range anti-air warfare, and Buk-M2 for middle-range air defense) create multilayered protection for the Mediterranean Squadron. Moreover, the units featuring Kalibr cruise missiles are an integral part of Russia's anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) "bubble" in the Levant because they contribute to the interdiction mechanism. Therefore, they complicate NATO planning and compel Western navies and air forces to engage Moscow on deconfliction measures in and around Syria. This was highlighted during the retaliation strikes orchestrated by the United

SHOULD TENSIONS BETWEEN MOSCOW AND ANKARA RISE, WITH THE TURKS FEELING THREATENED BY RUSSIA'S GROWING MILITARY POSITION, THE VMF SEA LANE OF COMMUNICATION BETWEEN RUSSIAN BASES IN THE BLACK SEA AND SYRIA COULD BE IN JEOPARDY.

Another constraint pertains to the VMF operational scheme in the Eastern Mediterranean, which depends on the freedom of navigation through the Turkish Straits. Passing through the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles is regulated by the 1936 Montreux Convention that Turkey has scrupulously enforced. In the Black Sea security context, the Montreux Convention remains a powerful

⁹ "Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation," December 25, 2014. Text in English: <https://www.offiziere.ch/wp-content/uploads-001/2015/08/Russia-s-2014-Military-Doctrine.pdf>.

¹⁰ The Pantsir-M (for Project 22800) has a range of 15 to 20 kilometers, and Shtil-1 (for Project 11356M) SAM systems has a range of approximately 40 kilometers.



Saint Petersburg Baltic Fleet: Frigate Admiral Makarov (Project 11356) in St Petersburg, July 2018.

point of convergence between the Turks and Russians because it constrains the freedom of navigation of non-Black Sea navies, above all the U.S. Navy.¹¹

However, in the Levant context, agreement between Turkey and Russia is less guaranteed. Should tensions between Moscow and Ankara rise, with the Turks feeling threatened by Russia's growing military position, the VMF sea lane of communication between Russian bases in the Black Sea and Syria could be in jeopardy.¹² Moreover, recent developments regarding Russia's two submarines in the Eastern Mediterranean have highlighted the high degree of understanding coming from Turkey's side. In March and April 2019, Russia swapped the two SSKs previously

deployed in the Levant (the B-268 *Veliky Novgorod* and the B-271 *Kolpino*) with two SSKs then stationed in the Black Sea (the B-265 *Krasnodar* and the B-262 *Stary Oskol*), which redeployed to the Mediterranean. The former two had to go through a planned period of maintenance in Sevastopol and therefore passed through Turkish Straits northbound in accordance with the Montreux Convention's terms. The B-262 and the B-265 sailed southbound, but did not pursue the mandated trip to a naval shipyard located outside the Black Sea, as required by Article 12.¹³ Ankara did not object, and it is likely that the two redeployed submarines will travel to a shipyard in Russia in the next 18 months to undergo planned repairs, in compliance with

¹¹ During the Russian-Georgian conflict (August 2008), Turkey prevented the United States from sending vessels in the Black Sea, citing the Montreux Convention.

¹² According to Article 20 of the Montreux Convention, "In time of war, Turkey being belligerent . . . the passage of warships shall be left entirely to the discretion of the Turkish Government." Furthermore, Article 21 stipulates, "Should Turkey consider herself to be threatened with imminent danger of war she shall have the right to apply the provisions of Article 20 of the present Convention." See, the text on the National University of Singapore, <https://cil.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/formidable/18/1936-Convention-Regarding-the-Regime-of-the-Straits.pdf>.

¹³ According to Article 12 of the Montreux Convention, Black Sea States' submarines (excluding Turkey) are only allowed to sail southbound to reach a naval shipyard located outside the Black Sea region. Yet, the article does not give any indication regarding the timespan that the submarine has to comply with the obligation.

Montreux, while being replaced by two other Black Sea Fleet SSKs.¹⁴ Should Turkey decide to strictly enforce Montreux, Russia could face difficulties rotating its SSKs.

Third, one should not overestimate the firepower of platforms equipped with Kalibr missiles sailing in Levant waters. One Project 11356M-type frigate carries a maximum of eight Kalibr-NK missiles, as much as one small missile boat of Project 21631 (or of Project 22800), while one SSK of Project 0636.3 can fire a maximum of six Kalibr-PL cruise missiles. In late August 2018, while tensions were mounting around Idlib province with rumors about the possible use of chemical weapons, Russia dispatched a “kalibricized” task force to the Levant. The Mediterranean Squadron was then staffed with the three new Project 11356M frigates of the Black Sea Fleet (*Admiral Grigorovich*, *Admiral Essen*, and *Admiral Makarov*), two small missile boats from the Caspian Flotilla (*Velikiy Ustiug* and *Grad Sviazhs* from Project 21631) and one from the Black Sea Fleet (*Vichniy Volochek*, also a Project 21631-type small missile corvettes), as well as two SSKs (the B-268 *Velikiy Novgorod* and B-271 *Kolpino*, from the Black Sea Fleet). Thus, Russia's Mediterranean Squadron in late August 2018 had a theoretical firepower of 60 Kalibr cruise missiles, the equivalent of roughly two-thirds of the firepower of one Arleigh Burke-type guided missile destroyer.¹⁵ Although limited when compared to U.S. Navy destroyers, this firepower proved sufficient for the VMF in the Syrian war, complementing forces on the

ground as well as Russian air assets.

Finally, Russia's naval presence in the Mediterranean is likely to face a structural challenge related to the orientation of the new State Armament Plan of 2018-2027. The completion of the 2011-2020 program prioritized naval rearmament, with roughly 25% of its budget going toward the modernization of the VMF. Yet, the priorities of the new armament plan focus on ground forces, air forces, airborne forces, and the manufacture of precision-guided munitions. The VMF is less of a priority.¹⁶ It is likely that Russian shipyards will continue to produce small- and medium-sized platforms, the biggest vessels being frigates, with perhaps a couple of large amphibious ships.¹⁷ Russia's naval plans have been further hampered by the termination of military-technical cooperation with Ukrainian and Western partners following the Ukrainian crisis. Russian Military-Industrial Company (VPK) has faced tremendous difficulties overcoming the challenge of replacing gas turbines supplied by Ukraine's ZoryaMachProject (in Nikolaiev) and diesel engines (supplied by German contractors MTU and MAN). Project 11356M frigates were equipped with Ukrainian turbines, and the rupture in cooperation in 2014 has compelled Moscow to stop the production of the three last frigates of the batch and to sell two of them to India.¹⁸ In the absence of a Russian solution, Russia has turned to China to acquire diesel engines for Project 21631. However, the Chinese engines did not prove sufficiently powerful or

14 The B-262 went under repair at the Kronsdat Naval Plant in the Gulf of Finland from late January 2020 to June 2020.

15 An Arleigh Burke-type destroyer features Mk 41 Vertical Launching System with 90 cells for Tomahawk cruise missiles.

16 Dmitry Gorenburg, “Russia's Military Modernization Plans: 2018-2027,” *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo*, N°495, November 2017, <https://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/russias-military-modernization-plans-2018-2027>.

17 Yet, in Russia, vessels that qualify as “frigate” are more similar to a “destroyer” taking into account their displacement. The future “super-Gorshkov” frigate project should have a displacement of 8,000 or 9,000 tons and features 48 Kalibr-NK cruise missiles.

18 «Россия построит для Индии пару фрегатов к лету 2024 года» [“Russia to Build a Batch of two Frigates for India by Summer 2024”], Flotprom, February 6, 2020, <https://flotprom.ru/2020/%D0%98%D0%B-D%D0%B4%D0%B8%D1%8F10/>.

reliable.¹⁹ Also, the deployment of the *Admiral Kuznetsov*, Russia's sole aircraft carrier, off Syria (November-December 2016) proved ineffective. While the VMF lost 2 aircrafts during approach maneuvers, the *Kuznetsov*'s air wings were redeployed onshore on Khmeimim airbase. This demonstration proved that the attempt to reconvert the *Kuznetsov* to an offensive weapon (tasked with airstrikes against land-targets) from a defensive weapon (to interdict and deny access to a maritime zone, which is the original purpose of this type of aircraft carrier) failed.

BEYOND SYRIA: WHAT HORIZONS FOR RUSSIA'S MEDITERRANEAN SQUADRON?

Russia's naval involvement in the Mediterranean is set to grow in the coming years because it supports Moscow's geopolitical reinvestment in the Middle East and North Africa. From a political perspective, this expansion is based on the Kremlin's willingness to stick to the non-Western orientation in its foreign policy following the Ukrainian crisis. Moreover, given that the bulk of the VMF's newest vessels will be green water units, they will be unable to support sustained forward deployments in the absence of naval support points or facilities abroad. The Mediterranean Squadron will crystalize around a dozen surface units, with the two submarines stationed in Tartus and with one or two nuclear multipurpose submarines coming from the Northern

Fleet. The VMF footprint can expand either way, toward the Red Sea or the Western Mediterranean Basin, while solidifying its presence in the Levant.

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During the first half of the 2010s, the Kremlin sought alternatives to Tartus to maintain a naval support point in the eastern part of the Mediterranean. The Russians were troubled with their complete dependence on Syrian facilities, and unsuccessfully approached Montenegro (before it became a NATO member), Cyprus, and, later, Lebanon in search of facilities. In December 2017, Moscow and Damascus signed an agreement granting the VMF the use of Tarsus for 49 years, with a mechanism to automatically extend the rent for another 25 years. Up to 11 vessels, including nuclear-powered ones, are

19 «“Буяны-М” планируют ремоторизовать в начале 2020-х годов» [“Buyan-M type Small Missiles Ships to be re Motorized in the early 2020s”], Flotprom, July 9, 2019, <https://flotprom.ru/2019/ЗеленодольскийЗавод15/>.

authorized to dock at Tartus.²⁰ Until recently, Russia's Material and Technical Support Point N°720 in Tarsus only featured two floating docks and depots.²¹ Now, Moscow has started to upgrade the facility to turn it into a more robust naval base, something that will be completed during the 2020s. Considering the VMF's current order of battle and operational activity in the Levant, there is no need to expand dramatically the infrastructure in Tartus. In the Central and Western Mediterranean, Russia uses agreements with Malta, Spain (Ceuta), and Algeria for light logistical operations for the VMF. The only possibility for Moscow to potentially gain a substantial foothold in this part of the Mediterranean would be Libya, provided that the conflict is settled in terms favorable to Russia's interests.

Expansion towards the Red Sea remains another possibility. Several factors could help Moscow in this endeavor. The first is the presence of weak states that could offer Russia a naval base in return for a "life insurance" policy from Moscow. This is the kind of offer that Omar el-Bashir of Sudan apparently provided to Vladimir Putin while visiting Moscow in late 2017, before being toppled by a popular movement in April 2019.²² The same could apply in Somaliland, where Russia has reportedly been offered the possibility of setting up a naval base.²³ After its military success in Syria, Russia wants to crystalize its status as a reliable security provider in the Middle East, something it could do through a permanent naval presence in the Persian Gulf or the Arabian Sea. However, this would require a logistical support point in the Horn of Africa or in Yemen, where Moscow plays a discrete, but active, role in

urging a negotiated solution to the conflict.

The Syrian crisis has catalyzed Russia's naval reinvestment in the Mediterranean. Based on the principle of sufficiency, the Mediterranean Squadron will in the years to come feature more light surface units potentially capable of delivering powerful strikes with their Kalibr cruise missiles. Its shape will follow the current tendency of the VMF to "littoralization" and "kalibrization," a rupture with the Soviet blue water navy of the 1970s and 1980s. The permanent presence of platforms equipped with long-range non-strategic weapons in the Mediterranean contribute to Russia's conventional deterrence and could be used in a conflict in the Middle East or North Africa. Tasked with the protection of Russia's southern flank, the Mediterranean Squadron projects the Russian line of defense into the Levant. This is aimed at deflating perceived pressure exerted by NATO on Russia's southwest flank. The projection of littoral warfare executed by Russia in the Eastern Mediterranean seems unlikely to be duplicated to other contexts outside the Mediterranean space. The VMF lacks proper projection capabilities, and Tartus remains Russia's sole naval base outside the post-Soviet space that Moscow can count on.



20 «Россия арендует на 49 лет сирийский порт Тартус» ["Russia to rent Tarsus for 49 years"], RIA Novosti, April 21, 2019, <https://ria.ru/20190420/1552884890.html>.

21 In Russian, «Пункт материально-технического обеспечения».

22 «Порт Судан: чем рискует Россия, возводя базу ВМФ в Африке» ["Port Sudan: what does Russia risk with a base in Africa"], *Moskovsky Komsomolets*, November 26, 2017, <https://www.mk.ru/politics/2017/11/26/port-sudan-chem-riskuet-rossiya-vozdoya-bazu-vmf-v-afrike.html>.

23 "Somaliland seeks recognition by hosting naval bases," Anadolu Agency, January 11, 2019, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/somaliland-seeks-recognition-by-hosting-naval-bases/1361649>.

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