

# Russian Fleet Worries Israel - Kommersant Moscow

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Russian Navy  
Commander-  
in-Chief  
Vladimir  
Masorin thinks  
Moscow's navy  
should sail the  
Mediterranean.

Photo: [Nikita Infantyev](#)

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Russian Fleet Worries Israel

// Even though it is nowhere near it

**Russia's plans to restore its permanent naval presence in the Mediterranean Sea are causing serious concern in Israel. The Israelis think that the Syrian ports the Russians are most likely to use will turn into major centers of electronic surveillance and air defense centers and, as such, threats to Israel's national security. Russian experts say that Moscow's plans are unlikely to come to fruition any time soon. There is neither the money nor the technical capacity for it.**

Commander of the Russian Navy Fleet Adm. Vladimir Masorin announced Russia's plans to return to the Mediterranean at the end of last week in Sevastopol. He did not say whether new bases would be established in the region. It is commonly known, however, that such bases could only be opened in Syria, where ports were used for the same purposes by the USSR. As *Kommersant* reported on June 2, 2006, Russia is already dredging the port of Tartus and has begun to build a dock in the Syrian port of Latakia. A defense Ministry source at that time revealed that Moscow plans to a squadron of military vessels led by the missile cruiser *Moskva* to be permanently based in the Mediterranean Sea.

Masorin's announcement, in which those plans were recalled, has caused serious alarm in Israel. The major Israeli newspaper *Yediot Ahronot* reported yesterday that Israeli intelligence holds that the presence of Russian ships in Syria is a direct threat to Israel's security. In particular, the bases in Tartus and Latakia will turn into centers of electronic surveillance that will be able to monitor not only Israel, but the entire Middle East. There is also concern in Israel that Russia will share that information with its Muslim partners, especially Syria and possibly Iran. In addition, Russia will certainly create a major air defense system to defend its bases that will be able to defend much of Syria from attack as well.

Russian experts say that it is still too early for Israel to sound alarms. "Only the Soviet Navy had the means to maintain a rapid deployment group of ships in the Mediterranean Sea, and it maintain a permanent squadron in which ships from the Black Sea, Northern and Baltic Fleets served in rotation," former commander of the Black Sea Fleet Eduard Baltin explained. "In addition, a rapid response brigade from the Iberian zone near Gibraltar. Judging by the quantitative makeup of our Navy, it would be very hard to maintain a military presence in Mediterranean. Essentially, we only have the capability to maintain a military-political presence in the region."

The main problem with returning to the Mediterranean is money. The Navy is the most expensive of the armed forces. "We have almost no ships left in the Black Sea. There is a balanced group in the Baltic, but it is maintained at the minimum acceptable level. The Northern Fleet, no to mention the Pacific Fleet, is too far away for expeditions to the Mediterranean Sea. Therefore, all that Russia can maintain in Syria is a ship or two. That is only a symbolic presence," Konstantin Makienko of the Center for Strategic and Technical Analysis commented for *Kommersant*.

**Dossier**

**The History of the Russian Base in Syria**

The 720th Logistics Support Point at the Syrian port of Tartus is the only Russian military base beyond the CIS. The agreement on the placement of Soviet naval objects at the base was signed with Syria in 1971. The base at Tartus was created to support the activities of a fleet in the Mediterranean Sea, mainly repairing and equipping the ships of the 5th Rapid Response (Mediterranean) Squadron. In Soviet times, such points were also located in Egypt and at the Syrian port of Latakia.

In 1977, the Soviet 54th Rapid Response Brigade of service vessels evacuated their bases at Alexandria and Mersa-Matruh. The ships and property from those bases were transferred to Tartus, where the 229th Naval and Estuary Vessel Support Division was formed in April 1977. In 1984, a logistics support point was formed at Tartus.

In 1991, the Mediterranean Squadron ceased its existence. Since then, there have been only one-time expeditions by Russian Navy vessels to the Mediterranean Sea. The logistics support point in Syria is now part of the Black Sea Fleet and consists of three floating docks (of which only one is operational), a floating workshop, storage facilities, barracks and other facilities.

Olga Berezintseva, Konstantin Lantratov

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