

Russian Aircraft Carrier group heads to the Mediterranean

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Russia has dispatched an aircraft carrier group to the Mediterranean Sea in an effort to show its naval presence in world oceans, Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov announced Wednesday.

The mission involves an aircraft carrier with 47 aircraft on board, two anti-submarine ships, a guided missile cruiser and a refueling ship from Russia's Northern and Black Sea fleets, Serdyukov said at a Kremlin meeting with President Vladimir Putin.

The aircraft carrier group will conduct three tactical exercises, including real and simulated launch of missiles, said Serdyukov, adding 11 port visits are expected to be made.

"The aim of the cruise operation is to ensure Russia's naval presence and the navigation safety of its vessels," he said.

Naval chief Admiral Vladimir Masorin in August called for adjusting of strategies to restore a permanent Russian naval presence in the Mediterranean.

Russia's Black Sea Fleet is currently leasing Ukraine's Sevastopol port which expires in 2017. Russia plans to relocate part of its Black Sea Fleet to the Mediterranean if it fails to extend the leasing agreement with Ukraine.

Russia's navy is using Syria's port of Tartus as a supply base serving its ships in the Mediterranean Sea.

Upon a decree by Putin, permanent patrolling by long-range aircraft of the Russian Air Force was resumed on Aug. 17 for the first time since 1992.

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