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Russia Builds New Naval HQ In Syria

Debka File

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A high-ranking Russian navy source reported July 21 that the Soviet-era naval maintenance base near Tartus in Syria is to be expanded and modernized to become "fully operational." DEBKAFfile's military sources report that Russian is building the facility up as its main sea base for operations in four seas: The Atlantic and Indian Oceans and the Mediterranean and Red Seas. The upgrade of Russian port facilities at Tartus, its only foothold in the Mediterranean, will automatically enhance Moscow's strategic interests in Syria and Bashar Assad's regime.

The Russian source said that the 50 naval personnel and three berthing floats currently deployed at Tartus with accommodation for up a dozen warships will be beefed up with a new berthing float delivered by two tugboats from the Black Sea Fleet. DEBKAFfile's sources disclose that those warships will include large vessels such as the nuclear-armed guided missile cruiser Peter the Great and the aircraft carrier Admiral Kuznetsov, which called in at Tartus in January.

In September 2008, DEBKAFfile first disclosed that the Russian Navy commander Adm. Vladimir Vysotsky and his Syrian counterpart Gen. Taleb al-Barri, had signed contracts for converting Tartus into one of Russia's most highly-developed naval infrastructures outside its territory. Its warships

based there will be capable of reaching the Red Sea through the Suez Canal and the Atlantic through the Strait of Gibraltar in a matter of days. For original disclosures:

<http://www.debka.com/headline.php?hid=5577>

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Israel is deeply concerned, according to our military sources, by the sophisticated air-defense S-300PMU-2 and Iskander-E missile systems the Russians propose to hand Syria on the pretext of installing a shield to defend the facility against air or missile attack. Moscow claims they will remain under the control of Russian crews but, according to information reaching Israel, they will be quietly and gradually handed over to the Syrian army; the Russian teams are in fact instructors.

Russia justifies this, according to DEBKAF's Moscow sources, by the deployment of the highly sophisticated American FBX-T missile-interception radar systems at the Israeli Negev base of Nevatim.

Furthermore, Moscow will have its rejoinder for the disputed US deployment of missile interceptors in Eastern Europe. As we reported last September, the Russian Black Sea fleet and new Mediterranean-based warships will coordinate their operations under a single command. They are designed as counter-deployments to the post-Georgian-war US and NATO naval presence in the Black Sea as well as its fleets in other parts of the Mediterranean including Israel's shores.

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