

The Russians are coming!

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Here comes the Russian nuclear-powered heavy missile cruiser, Peter the Great, headed with a Russian naval task force toward the Caribbean for maneuvers with the Venezuela navy in November. The Russians are showing "the flag and the finger" to the United States, is how one naval expert described this mission to the Times of London.

The Caribbean is not the only place where Russians are probing. The Kremlin is speeding another warship from its Black Sea naval base to Somalia's Indian Ocean coast where U.S. warships have cordoned off a pirated Ukrainian freighter carrying Russian tanks and other heavy weapons, ostensibly to Kenya.

Somali authorities, if such there be, are said to have given permission to take the ship by force. More on that below.

Meantime, the Russian task force approaching the Caribbean is led by the 19,000-ton, 826 foot-long Kirov-class cruiser, Peter the Great in English, Pyotr Velikhiy in Russian. She is listed as carrying 20 SSN-19 long-range antiship missiles, as well torpedoes and dozens of air defense missiles. The ship is accompanied by the frigate Admiral Chabanenko, a Udaloy-class anti-submarine warfare vessel.

Peter the Great outweighs her American counterparts, Ticonderoga-class cruisers, which come in at 9,600 tons and 567 feet long at the waterline.

Back in the Red Sea: the U.S. 5th Fleet is keeping an eye on the MV Faina, which was seized by Somali pirates last week. The telephone contacts een established between the ship's owners and the pirates apparaently haver failed to convey an agreement to pay a reported ransom demand of \$20 million.

I asked Pentagon spokesman Geoff Morrell whether the U.S. needed or wanted Russian help. He said, politely, no. But the U.S. will cooperate if the Russians show up.

During the Cold War, when Russian and American warships regularly jostled each other at sea, Washington and Moscow set up a mechanism for avoiding unintentional clashes and settling disputes. The 1972 Incidents at Sea treaty is still in force, as far as I know.

Maybe it's time to dust it off.

http://weblogs.baltimoresun.com/news/militarywatch/2008/10/the_russians_are_coming.html

 Russian warships head across Atlantic - Sept. 22, 2008

{youtube}_jSjTtq18M8{/youtube}

Russian nuclear missile cruiser to dock at Syrian port on Yom Kippur eve
 DEBKAFfile Exclusive Report
 October 2, 2008, 4:55 AM (GMT+02:00)

Russian Navy spokesman Capt. Igor Dygalo disclosed Wednesday, Oct. 1, that a four-ship squadron led by the Peter the Great nuclear missile cruiser will call in at the Libyan port of Tripoli and "other Middle East ports" before heading out to the Caribbean for joint maneuvers with Venezuela.

DEBKAFfile's military sources report that one of those ports is Tartus, Syria, where preparations are afoot to receive the visiting Russian flotilla.

Peter the Great , one of the most advanced naval vessels afloat, may in fact anchor at the new facility the Russians are building at Syria's second major port, Latakia, for its first visit to Syria; the rest of the squadron, the Admiral Chabanenko submarine, a reconnaissance vessel and a fourth ship, will dock at Tartus.

Peter the Great is designed to sink large surface vessels such as aircraft carriers. The ship's Granit (Nato

designated SS-N-19 Shipwreck) anti-ship cruise missiles (20 missile launchers) can destroy vessels up to 500 km distant in ripple-fire mode.

An S-300F defense missile complex is installed on Peter the Great , with 12 launchers and 96 vertical launch air defense missiles.

The Navy spokesman in Moscow said the Russian warships will perform maneuvers in the Mediterranean, without adding details. They will pass through the Strait of Gibraltar Sunday, Oct. 5, visit Tripoli next and on Oct, 8 or 9, put in at a Syrian port.

Coinciding with the 35th anniversary of the Egyptian-Syrian Yom Kippur attack on Israel, the Russian warships' arrival in Syria has serious connotations:

1. It means that prime minister Ehud Olmert will be wasting his time if he intends using his talks in Moscow next week with president Dmitry Medvedev and prime minister Vladimir Putin to ask them to drop their plan for a permanent base at a Syrian port. That plan is clearly going full steam ahead.

2. The Yom Kippur War of 1973 is recorded in Russian and Arab military annals as the high point of Russian-Arab military and intelligence cooperation. The Soviet Union as it was then was responsible for the great deception which disguised Arab war preparations behind a screen of misdirection and gulled Israeli intelligence into complacency.

Moscow is signaling Jerusalem on this sensitive date that it has decided to revert to its old military ties with Damascus on the same scale as its historic 20th century partnership.

3. The precedence the Russian navy is awarding to visiting Middle East ports before Venezuela attests to the importance Moscow attaches to its new Damascus-Tehran-Caracas alignment opposite the US-Israel alliance.

footnote: Peter the Great is armed with nuclear missiles

<http://www.debka.com/headline.php?hid=5623>

Russian warships head to Mediterranean
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MOSCOW, October 1 (RIA Novosti) - Russian warships, currently on a long-range sortie that will bring them to the Caribbean in November, will enter the Mediterranean Sea on October 5 and make several port calls in the region, the Navy said on Wednesday.

A naval task group from the Northern Fleet, comprising the nuclear-powered missile cruiser Pyotr Velikiy (Peter the Great), the large ASW ship Admiral Chabanenko, and support ships, left a naval base in northern Russia on September 22 and is currently in the northern Atlantic, having covered a distance of 1,000 nautical miles (2,000 km) in a week.

"Having some spare time before a joint exercise with the Venezuelan navy, which is planned for November 2008, the warships will perform a number of tasks in the Mediterranean Sea and visit several Mediterranean ports, including Tripoli," the Navy's press service said in a statement.

Russian warships are scheduled to participate in joint naval exercises with the Venezuelan navy in the Caribbean on November 10-14, in line with the 2008 training program, and in order to expand military cooperation with foreign navies.

During the entire mission, the task group is expected to cover a distance of 15,000 nautical miles (30,000 km).

Russia announced last year that its Navy had resumed and would build up a constant presence in different regions of the world's oceans.

<http://en.rian.ru/russia/20081001/117367978.html>