

More Russian Ships On Way to Syria

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Demonstrators in Kafranbel, Syria, expressing their view about world leaders' lack of intervention in Syria's war.

WASHINGTON — The United States says the Russian military was preparing to dispatch three more ships to Syria after a separate transport carrying attack helicopters turned back when its U.K. insurer removed its coverage.

But Pentagon officials noted that Moscow's stated intent was to send supplies and personnel to its naval facility in the Syrian port of Tartus.

"We have no indication that these vessels and that material is being sent to Syria for any other purpose than that which the Russian military has acknowledged themselves," Pentagon spokesman Navy Captain John Kirby said Tuesday.

"Russian citizens have been threatened there in Syria, and their stated intention is that this is for force protection reasons."

Interfax reported Monday that Russia was preparing to send two landing ships carrying marines to Syria in the event that it needs to protect personnel and remove equipment from the naval facility.

On Tuesday, a cargo ship carrying the helicopters, the *Alaed*, turned around off the British coast after it lost its insurance.

"I am pleased that the ship that was reported to be carrying arms to Syria has now turned back apparently towards Russia," British Foreign Secretary William Hague told Parliament.

"We have in place a European Union arms embargo on Syria. We discourage anyone else from supplying arms to Syria. We have had discussions with Russia about that specifically."

The ship's operator, Femco, operating the *Alaed*, offered no comment when contacted several times by Reuters about the ship and its cargo.

Meanwhile, President Vladimir Putin made clear during talks this week that he does not want Bashar Assad to remain in power in Syria any longer, British Prime Minister David Cameron said Tuesday.

Cameron said Putin had shifted his view of the Syrian leader during talks with U.S. President Barack Obama and other world leaders at a Group of 20 summit in Mexico, and that discussions were now focused on a transition.

"There remain differences over sequencing and the shape of how the transition takes place but it is welcome that President Putin has been explicit that he does not want Assad remaining in charge in Syria," Cameron told reporters.

"What we need next is an agreement on a transitional leadership that can move Syria to a democratic future that protects the rights of all its communities."

German Chancellor Angela Merkel, French President Francois Hollande, Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan and Cameron were present with Obama for the talks with Putin.

Cameron warned that time was running out to put a stop to the violence in Syria, which shows scarce sign of stemming.

"There is little time left to resolve this, but we do now have clear agreement on the key principles, on the risks to Syria, on the need to stop the violence and the urgency of political transition," he said.

Obama said Russia and China have "not signed on" to any plan for the removal of Assad from power but that they recognize the dangers of an all-out civil war in the country.

Obama said Assad has lost all legitimacy and that it was impossible to conceive of any solution to the violence in Syria that would leave him in power.

He conceded that he had failed to make a breakthrough with the leaders of Russia or China, despite intensive talks with both Moscow and Beijing, which have shielded Assad from tougher UN sanctions.

"I wouldn't suggest that at this point the United States and the rest of the international community are aligned with Russia and China in their positions, but I do think they recognize the grave dangers of all-out civil war," he told reporters at a Group of 20 summit in Mexico.

Syria is Moscow's firmest foothold in the Middle East. The country buys weapons from Russia worth billions of dollars and hosts the Russian Navy's only permanent warm water port outside the former Soviet Union.

But Russia has faced increasing Western criticism over arms supplies to Syria, where the United Nations says government forces have killed more than 10,000 people in a crackdown.

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