

Navy in Mediterranean Not Saber-Rattling, Putin Says

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President Vladimir Putin says Russia will permanently keep a navy squadron in the Mediterranean Sea to protect its interests.

Speaking at a meeting Thursday with the military top brass, Putin said the move should not be interpreted as saber-rattling. He said the Mediterranean was a "strategically important region, where we have interests connected with ensuring Russia's national security."

Gen. Valery Gerasimov said the Russian squadron currently deployed to the area consists of 16 navy ships. The Defense Ministry said it would regularly rotate them to keep a constant presence of about a dozen ships.

Russia has a navy base in the Syrian port of Tartus, and its ships have been making regular visits to the Mediterranean in a show of support for Syrian President Bashar Assad.

(AP)

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