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Russia Will Build Mistral Helicopters Even If France Won't Deliver Warships

By The Moscow Times

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A Russian Kamov Ka-52 helicopter.

France's refusal to deliver two Mistral helicopter-carrier warships to Russia has left the Defense Ministry scrambling to find other uses for a special batch of Ka-52 attack helicopters that were developed to serve on the ships, a news report said Tuesday.

France last year halted delivery of the Mistrals in response to Russia's support of separatist militias in Ukraine. France has maintained that the situation in Ukraine still does not permit delivery of the ships, and the 1.2 billion euros ($1.3 billion) remain indefinitely suspended.

The Mistrals are far more powerful than anything currently in the Russian navy, and Russia had created a special line of helicopters — the Ka-52Ks — to fill them.

But with the deal in the doldrums, Russian Helicopters, the state-owned company that manufactures the choppers, sought and received reassurance from the Defense Ministry that

the project wouldn't be killed, news agency RIA Novosti reported Tuesday.

“Regardless of the fate of the Mistral vessels, the [Ka-52K] program will be developed,” RIA quoted Russian Helicopters Deputy Director Alexei Shibitov as saying.

Updates to the standard Ka-52 design include folding rotor blades and winglets that allow up to 16 of the choppers to be easily stored in the hangars of Mistral-class assault ships, where space is tight. A total of 32 Ka-52Ks were ordered by the Defense Ministry, IHS Jane's reported in August, citing an unidentified Russian defense industry source.

Shibitov said that the adapted helicopter features other improvements that make the chopper ideally suited for service along Russia's coastlines if the Mistral carriers are not delivered, RIA reported.

Aircraft built for naval service typically feature engines and airframes strengthened against the harmful effects of saltwater corrosion.

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