



# DEBKAFfile

We Start Where the Media Stop | Est. 2000

## Russian marine and air power head for Syria versus Western intervention – “to defend Russian citizens,” says Moscow

DEBKAFfile *Special Report* June 19, 2013, 5:32 PM (GMT+02:00)

Tags: [Russian military](#) >> [Syrian war](#) >> [Vladimir Putin](#) >> [G8](#) >> [Western weapons](#) >> [Syrian rebels](#) >>



The Russian Vice Admiral Kulakov destroyer heading for Syria

Just one day after the G8 Summit ended in the failure of Western leaders to overcome Russian resistance to a resolution mandating President Bashar Assad's ouster, Moscow announced Wednesday June 19, the dispatch to Syria of two warships carrying 600 Russian marines. They were coming, said the official statement, "to protect the Russian citizens there." Russian Deputy Air Force Commander Maj.-Gen. Gradusov added that an air force umbrella would be provided the Russian expeditionary force if needed.

debkafile's military sources report that the pretext offered by Moscow for sending the force thinly disguised Russian President Vladimir Putin's intent to flex Russian military muscle in response to the delivery of Western heavy arms to Syrian rebels – which debkafile first revealed Tuesday, June 18.

Putin was giving the West due warning that if they persisted in arming the rebels any further, a Russian troop landing in Syria would take place in the guise of an operation to evacuate endangered Russian nationals.

Some 20,000 Russians live in Syria. In former stages of the conflict, they were given the locations of assembly points should Moscow decide to lift them out of the war-torn country. The evacuation of Russian citizens would in itself dramatically denote the expansion of the Syrian conflict.

The Russian *Interfax* news agency identified the warships heading for Syrian shores as the *Nikolai Filchenkov* Large Landing Ship and the *Vice Admiral Kulakov*, a Udaloy 1 class destroyer, each carrying 300 marines. Aboard the former are also 20 tanks and 15 armored troop carriers or military trucks, while the *Kulakov* is designed mainly for anti-submarine warfare.

debkafile's military sources also reveal that, although Moscow described the warships are preparing to depart for Syria, they have actually been cruising in the Mediterranean since mid-May. Upon receiving their orders, they could reach Syria in just a few hours.

Maj.-Gen. Gradusov was quoted as saying: "We won't abandon the Russians and will evacuate them from the conflict zone, if necessary."

Asked if the Russian aircraft were intended as air cover for the Russian warships coming to Syria, he declined to answer, saying said only "They will act on orders."

The Moscow communiqué does not say when the Russian forces are scheduled to reach port in Syria or in which part of the country they are to operate. Our military sources say their impending presence in the war zone and the possibility of Western-supplied weapons in Syrian rebel hands causing Russian casualties are enough to contribute three more perilous dimensions to the Syrian conflict:

1. The harming of Russian soldiers would give Moscow an excuse to pile on more military reinforcements in Syria;

2. Russian air power is on its way to Syrian airspace before any decision is taken in the West about imposing a US-led no-fly zone over Syria;
3. The presence of Russian military personnel in Syria would pour more fuel on the already highly incendiary diplomatic and military tensions between Washington and Moscow over this conflict.

Copyright 2000-2013 DEBKAfile. All Rights Reserved. [Terms and Conditions](#).