



Russia Lays Keels for Two Universal Landing Ships

OE Watch Commentary: The accompanying excerpted article from *Moskovsky Komsomolets* discusses Russia's laying of keels for two 'Priboy' class universal landing ships (UDKs). The Priboys are intended to replace the French 'Mistral' UDKs that were cancelled due to Western sanctions stemming from Russia's annexation of Crimea. Apparently, the Priboys will be significantly larger 199-meter Mistrals that displace 21,300 tons. The Priboys are 220 meters long and displace 25,000 tons. They are reportedly capable of carrying more than 20 heavy attack helicopters, six landing craft, 70 pieces of large military equipment, over 1,000 naval infantrymen, and are quite heavily armed.

The accompanying excerpted article from *Izvestia* discusses that Russia intends to use these vessels for expeditionary operations off remote coasts. The accompanying excerpted article from *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* has a more pessimistic view of Russian naval capabilities. Although the Russian ability to field high quality, multipurpose patrol ships and corvettes that are capable of fielding an assortment of missiles is believed to be impressive, the author laments that Russia lacks sufficient large ocean-going vessels and foreign port facilities to field a world-class naval presence such as that of the United States Navy. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

“The new Russian UDK’s dimensions surpass the French helicopter amphibious assault ship, while having a length of 220 meters and a displacement of 25 tons. It will be able to have more than 20 heavy attack helicopters. The ship will get a spacious dock chamber for six landing craft. It will be able to transport up to 70 pieces of large military equipment and over 1,000 naval infantrymen.”

Source: Olga Bozhyeva, “Стало известно, какие военные корабли Путин заложит в Керчи: Российские вертолетоносцы будут круче французских «Мистралей» (We Have Learned the Keels of Which Military Ships Putin Will Lay in Kerch: The Russian Helicopter Amphibious Assault Ships Will Be Larger than the French ‘Mistrals’),” *Moskovsky Komsomolets Online*, 16 July 2020. <https://www.mk.ru/politics/2020/07/16/stalo-izvestno-kakie-voennye-korabli-putin-zalozhit-v-kerchi.html>

The keel laying of six large combat ships will take place at the same time at three Russian shipyards - in St. Petersburg, Severodvinsk, and Kerch - on Thursday, 16 July, in the period immediately preceding Navy Day in Russia: two nuclear submarines, multi-role frigates, and helicopter amphibious assault ships. Our country has not known such massive construction of major combat ships since the times of the Soviet Union. President Vladimir Putin personally visited Kerch for the keel-laying of the two Project 23900 “Priboy” Russian universal landing ships (UDK), which they are calling equivalents to the French “Mistrals”...

And well now the keels of two ships of that same class are being laid at Russian shipyards in Kerch, which appears to be very symbolic: At one time, France refused to deliver our helicopter amphibious assault ships because of the Crimea but now we are beginning to build those same ships in the Crimea.

In the process, it is impossible to state that the Russian universal landing ships are complete copies of the French ships...The Russian UDK 23900 “Priboy”, which will be built at Kerch’s “Zaliv” Shipyard based upon the Nevskiy Design Bureau design - is a full-fledged Russian product. According to the information of the Krylov Center specialists, our ships will be more spacious and much more state-of-the-art than the French “Mistrals”.

For comparison: A Mistral Class helicopter amphibious assault ship with a length of 199 meters has a total displacement of 21,300 tons. Its helicopter group consists of eight assault and eight attack helicopters. The ship has four light landing craft or two air-cushion amphibious assault landing craft. One can accommodate 1,100 tons of cargo on its cargo deck: up to 470 assault troops or up to 40 tanks.

The new Russian UDK’s dimensions surpass the French helicopter amphibious assault ship, while having a length of 220 meters and a displacement of 25,000 tons. It will be able to have more than 20 heavy attack helicopters. The ship will get a spacious dock chamber for six landing craft. It will be able to transport up to 70 pieces of large military equipment and over 1,000 naval infantrymen. As compared to the “toothless” “Mistral”, which has only two Simbad air defense missile launchers, two Breda-Mauser 30-millimeter artillery mounts, and four 12.7-millimeter machine guns, the Russian UDK will be much more thoroughly armed and more self-contained...



Continued: Russia Lays Keels for Two Universal Landing Ships

Source: Roman Kretsul, Aleksey Ramm, “Под шум «Прибоя»: российские «Мистрали» заложат в ближайшие дни (Under the Hubhub of the “Priboy”: They Will Lay the Keels of the Russian “Mistrals in the Next Few Days),” *Izvestia Online*, 14 July 2020. <https://iz.ru/1034553/roman-kretcul-aleksei-ramm/pod-shum-priboia-rossiiskie-mistrali-zalozhat-v-blizhaishie-dni>

They have given the green light to the Russian “Mistrals”. This is precisely what Navy personnel call the Project “Priboy” universal landing ships (UDK)...the Nevskiy Design Bureau developed the Project 23900 UDK “Priboy”. They will build the Russian “Mistrals” at Kerch’s “Zaliv” Shipyard. It was previously reported that the amount of the contract, which was concluded during the spring by the Ministry of Defense and the enterprise, totaled 100 billion rubles [1.4 billion dollars]. The design’s development went on for several years. They had already displayed the ship’s first mock-ups in 2015, however, the engineers and military experts spent an adequately long time coordinating its parameters after this. They finally defined the UDK’s appearance and its characteristics only by the end of last year...

These large ships were practically not built in Russia in post-Soviet times, and Military Historian Dmitriy Boltenkov mentioned that in a conversation with Izvestiya....“Our country has set out along the western path in this direction. All of the developed naval powers have UDKs in their inventory,” the expert explained. “They permit ‘force projection’: Take onboard a battalion of naval infantrymen and helicopters and advance, for example, to the coasts of North Africa in order to evacuate our citizens. Or to repel unexpected aggression against Russian islands. The “Sevastopol” will most likely serve in the Black Sea, and the “Vladivostok” in the Pacific Ocean.

The question on the construction of helicopter carriers was not even posed in the post-Soviet years. It was thought that they are needed for operations off remote coasts, which the military doctrine that was adopted at that time did not assume. When the Ministry of Defense ordered the “Mistrals” from France in 2011, long discussions began around this deal - are these UDKs really needed in the Russian Navy’s composition. Later the combat operations in Syria and the appearance of areas of instability in various regions of the world demonstrated: you can’t get by without ships, which are capable of accepting naval infantrymen, equipment, and helicopters onboard.

Source: “Море кораблей, а океана не видно: Отсутствия внятной геополитической стратегии развития флота позволяет РФ только совершать «пиратские вылазки» (A Sea of Ships but the Ocean Is Not Seen: The Absence of a Geopolitical Strategy of the Navy’s Development Permits the RF To Only Conduct ‘Pirate Raids’),” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta Online*, 26 July 2020. https://www.ng.ru/editorial/2020-07-26/2_7920_red.html

...The Navy’s renaissance began with the “Toy Flotilla” in 2015. These were the “Karakurt” Class small missile ships. Their weaponry is – Kalibr long-range cruise missiles. They conducted the first strike against terrorist bases in Syria from the water area of the Caspian Sea, which completely changed the West’s perception on the Russian naval capabilities. Russian will have 18 of these “small missile ships” in the next few years. Half of the Middle East and Asia, North America, and all of Europe end up in their sights. But this is a “littoral” navy and its endurance doesn’t exceed two weeks. But, according to the “Fundamentals of Naval Activity”, the State needs ocean ships, which are capable of performing alert in the most remote regions of the world for months at a time.

Their keels were also laid on the eve of the holiday. A Total of Six Ships. Two Project 22350 frigates, two Project 23900 large helicopter assault ships, and two Project 885 “Yasen-M” Class nuclear attack submarines. Each of them substantially changes the correlation of forces in our Navy. The set of weapons, which is delivered both by the frigates and also by the nuclear submarines, is impressive. These are “Kalibr” and “Oniks” cruise missiles and “Tsirkon” hypersonic missiles. New gun mounts, which have the edge over Western weapons both based upon rate of fire, accuracy, and also based upon the use of guided munitions, and new mine-torpedo weapons, are installed on the surface combatants.

But there is one extremely important aspect. The country doesn’t have coherent geopolitical interests. In contrast to the US, the Russian Federation does not view the entire world as a space of opportunities. Foreign military bases are needed for the basing of an ocean fleet. We essentially only have one - Tartus in Syria. In Soviet times, bases were in Yemen and Vietnam, and USSR ships were able to calmly visit Cuba. As a result, the Soviet Navy was present in the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian oceans. In recent years, our ships have accomplished local missions for the control of illegal arms shipments in the Mediterranean Sea, combated pirates in the Gulf of Aden, and even conducted cruises to the shores of Venezuela and the Republic of South Africa. But all of this is “pirate raids”. Which do not at all attest that Russia is seriously prepared to have a bearing on world policy.

Besides the absence of a coherent geopolitical strategy, the Navy’s development is kept in check by another entire series of difficulties, which only appear to be minor. For example, the absence of our own gas-turbine power plants. They are precisely needed for the construction of the frigates. They have replaced the “heart” of the latest of them - the “Admiral Kasatonov” - twice due to Ukraine’s refusal to supply those engines to us. Today, they are being manufactured in Russia, but only one set per year. So, the series of still five Project 22350 ships will be built at a very leisurely pace. Just like the large helicopter assault ships. Just like during the times of Petr I, we have put to sea, but the ocean is not visible for the time being.