

Mistral Deal Signed in France

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Sarkozy, left, and Sechin, center left, touring the STX shipyard in France on Tuesday, after the signing ceremony. **Stephane Mahe**

Deputy Prime Minister Igor Sechin and France's Defense Minister Alain Juppe signed a landmark arms deal Tuesday that commits France to deliver two Mistral-class helicopter carriers to the Russian navy.

The signing ceremony took place on the quayside of France's Atlantic Saint-Nazaire docks under the watchful eye of French President Nicolas Sarkozy, who has hailed the agreement as a major victory for the country's declining shipbuilding industry.

The deal is the biggest purchase of foreign arms by the government in the post-Soviet era, but it builds on a growing trend for Russia to look to foreign markets to enhance its military capabilities. The deal is worth an estimated \$1.9 billion, RIA-Novosti reported.

The Mistral-class amphibious assault ships can carry up to 16 helicopters and 450 troops for long periods, as well as 40 tanks, vehicles and other landing vessels. The first one is scheduled

to be delivered to Russia by year-end 2013.

The Baltic nations and Georgia have expressed reservations about the transfer of state-of-the-art military technology from a NATO member state to Russia.

Russia's state-controlled United Shipbuilding Corporation, or UCS, which is joining France's STX in constructing the ships, said the first ship's Russian content will be 20 percent — a figure that will rise to 80 percent for the projected fourth ship.

Though the first two helicopter carriers will be built in France, two more are expected to be constructed at docks in St. Petersburg. A UCS spokesman said an agreement on the ships to be built in Russia will be signed by May, Interfax reported.

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