

France Will Not Review Mistral Carrier Deal Before October

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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The Mistral-class helicopter carrier Vladivostok is seen at the STX Les Chantiers de l'Atlantique shipyard site in Saint-Nazaire, western France, April 24, 2014. The Vladivostok is due to be delivered to the Russian Navy in October.

France will not review its 1.2 billion-euro (\$1.66 billion) contract to sell helicopter carriers to Russia earlier than planned because of the Ukraine crisis, despite U.S. concerns, a French government source said on Thursday.

Paris has come under pressure from Washington and some European partners to reconsider its supply of high-tech military hardware to Moscow, and has responded by saying it will review the deal in October — but not before.

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland told the House Foreign Affairs Committee in Washington on Thursday that she had qualms about the deal.

"We have regularly and consistently expressed our concerns about this sale, even before we had the latest Russian actions, and we will continue to do so," she said, responding to a query by U.S. Republican representative Adam Kinzinger.

Kinzinger said: "I'm not here to bash the French — but I think this is a time when the French could stop that sale from happening and send a very strong message to the Russians."

The comments come just three days before French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius is due to travel to the United States, setting up a potentially uncomfortable meeting with Secretary of State John Kerry on Tuesday.

"Our position remains the same. No decision before October," a French government source said.

French officials have shied away from discussing whether the 2011 contract with Russia for two Mistral helicopter carriers, with an option for two more, could be suspended to show French resolve in future sanctions against Moscow.

Russia's Mistral purchase would give it access to advanced technology, alarming some of France's NATO allies.

In an interview with Reuters this week, Lithuanian Foreign Minister Linas Linkevicius said he believed the European Union should include an arms embargo in any new round of sanctions on Russia.

The long-discussed French sale was Moscow's first major foreign arms purchase in the two decades since the fall of the Soviet Union.

Former President Nicolas Sarkozy had hailed the signing of the Mistral contract as evidence the Cold War was over. It has created about 1,000 jobs in France.

The first carrier, the Vladivostok, is due to be delivered by the last quarter of 2014. The second, named Sevastopol after the Crimean seaport, is supposed to be delivered by 2016.

About 400 Russian sailors are due to come to France in June to receive training for the Mistral. The carriers can hold up to 16 helicopters, such as Russia's Ka-50/52s.

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