
U.S. CARRIER'S MOVES SEND MESSAGE TO RUSSIA

-

09.06.2016

The Wall Street Journal, 08 June 2016

This 20-story-tall aircraft carrier with a crew of 5,000 made an unplanned diversion from the Gulf to the eastern Mediterranean last week—a quick pivot intended to send a clear message to Russia.

The massive ship serves as a launching point for a near-constant barrage of airstrikes on Islamic State targets in Iraq and Syria. Since November, it has accounted for a little more than half of the total sorties flown over those two countries by the U.S. military.

Rear Adm. Bret Batchelder, the highest-ranking officer on the carrier, told visiting reporters this week that moving the capital ship of the U.S. Navy from the Gulf through the Suez Canal is a flexing of muscle meant to reassure North Atlantic Treaty Organization allies of the American commitment to maintaining the balance of naval power in the Mediterranean.

It is a demonstration of capability. Thats for sure, he said. There are undoubtedly folks who are watching that and this is just a graphic representation of what were capable of.

The repositioning of the USS Harry S. Truman provides a window into American military strategy at a time when Russia has asserted itself aggressively in the region, using its navy and air force to turn the tide of the five-year Syria conflict in favor of President Bashar al-Assad.

The U.S. has shown a willingness to use powerful Navy vessels to make provocative political statements, as it did in 2015 when it sailed a destroyer through the South China Sea at the height of tensions with Beijing over Chinas territorial claims there.

A military official in Washington said the Trumans shift was a signal to Moscow and a demonstration of the Navys operational flexibility and reach.

The ship is operating in the U.S. European Commands area of responsibility while conducting airstrikes inside Iraq and Syria. [REDACTED] fall under another combatant command, U.S. Central Command. This demonstrates the U.S. Navy can be agile and adaptive, the official said.

It provides some needed presence in the Med to check * [REDACTED] Russians, the official said. The unpredictability of what we did with Truman kind of makes them think twice.

Russia has maintained a contingent of about 10 to 15 ships in the Mediterranean for three years because of the conflict in Syria. In March, state media said the countrys sole aircraft carrier would be sent to join those ships by summer.

Russian and U.S. aims in the Syrian war aren't entirely at odds.

Moscow and its Syrian regime allies, like the U.S.-led coalition, are all battling Islamic State.

The official and Adm. Batchelder said the ships position in the Mediterranean could make it a vital asset if the U.S. and its allies were to begin operations against Islamic State in Libya. The U.S. is contemplating operations in the oil-rich North African country.

On the ships 4.5-acre flight deck, sailors and airmen busied themselves with launching and landing F-18 class jet fighters. The carrier, one of 10 in the Navys fleet, is capable of catapulting an aircraft off the deck every 40 seconds.

The vessel has been a workhorse in operations against Islamic State in Syria and Iraq since it joined the effort in November, launching seven-hour close-air-support missions several times a day.

Planes from the carrier conducted 52 strikes in Iraq and Syria from Friday through Tuesday.

The 75-plane fleet assigned to the ship responds to calls from allies on the ground for airstrikes.

Starting in the early morning and lasting well into the night, F/A-18 jet fighters and E-2C Hawkeye

surveillance planes take off using a steam-powered catapult to slingshot them off the short runway.

Capt. David Little, commander of the air squadrons, said his fleet has been active recently over Fallujah, where Iraq's military and allied militia forces have been engaged in an intense battle to uproot Islamic State from one of the first cities it occupied.

Capt. Little declined to identify specific targets, but said the Trumans airborne fleet has focused its firepower on Islamic States ability to wage war and he rattled off a list of the types of facilities the jet fighters have struck based on intelligence provided by partners on the ground.

Where they store money, the oil refineries they steal the money from, the banks where they store and hide money, the factories where they produce vehicle-borne [improvised explosive devices], he said.

French Senate supports resolution to lift EU sanctions against Russia

Russia Today, 08 June 2016

The French Senate has voted in favor of a resolution designed to lift EU-imposed sanctions slapped on Russia in 2014 over the crisis in eastern Ukraine and reunification with Crimea. The proposal calls for a "gradual relief" of restrictive measures imposed by the West.

The vast majority — 302 senators — voted for the move, with only 16 being against the lifting of anti-Russia sanctions. In all, 335 politicians were present at the meeting in the Luxembourg Palace.

The motion is non-binding, however.

The initiatives of deputies and senators, aimed at pressuring the government, have no binding force because the renewal of the embargo is made in Brussels and requires unanimity of the 28 Member States, Le Figaro reported.

In late April, 55 members of the French National Assembly supported a similar resolution, submitted by 85 French MPs calling on the government not to extend EU-imposed sanctions on Russia. The debate on canceling sanctions was held at the National Assembly for the first time. Thierry Mariani, a member of the center-right Republicans party, who initiated the parliamentary debate, said anti-Russian sanctions should be lifted because they only cause harm.

"We are demanding that the sanctions be lifted because they are totally ineffective and they are dangerous for our economy," he told the Assembly.

"I have seen our minister of agriculture standing in front of our farmers and say 'We have to lift the sanctions.' I've seen the minister of finance reiterate the same thing. And all they do is say 'We can't do anything, Europe is to blame'," the MP told RT in April.

German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier said last week that a number of EU states are reluctant to extend anti-Russian sanctions. The big question is whether the 28-nation bloc will nonetheless decide to renew them after they expire on July 31.

"The sanctions are there to ensure a political solution, Steinmeier told reporters last Tuesday. I don't know what the European Council will decide on Russia sanctions," he said, adding that the recent release of Ukrainian pilot Nadezhda Savchenko from jail would hopefully "bring a new dynamic into the talks between Russia and Ukraine."

General view of the French National Assembly © Charles Platiau
French Assembly adopts resolution calling to end anti-Russian sanctions imposed by EU

A number of prominent European policymakers and businesses have emphasized that sanctions have proven pointless and economically damaging for all parties.

Italy and Hungary said last month there could be no automatic extension of EU sanctions against Russia, Reuters reported.

In mid-May, the council of Italy's Veneto region adopted a resolution calling for the country's government to work toward lifting sanctions against Russia. Twenty-nine out of 51 members of the regional council voted in favor of the resolution, while nine voted against, Interfax reported.

Italian lawmaker Stefano Valdegamberi told Sputnik that in just one year the Veneto region lost over €600 million (\$679.8 million) due to the slump in exports to Russia.

Some, in contrast, have been calling on Brussels not to relax sanctions on Moscow until the Minsk peace agreement is fully implemented. Poland's Deputy Foreign Minister Konrad Szymanski has recently warned that lifting sanctions would weaken the bloc's position vis-à-vis Russia.

"The European Union's authority ... in the future depends on the successful influencing of Russia through sanctions," Szymanski told Reuters last week.

Since 2014, EU and US sanctions against Russia have targeted Russias financial, energy and defense sectors, along with a number of government officials, businessmen and public figures. Moscow responded by imposing an embargo on agricultural produce, food and raw materials against countries that joined anti-Russian sanctions. Both sides have since repeatedly broadened and extended the sanctions.

Kaynak/Source: