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Putin says sending Admiral Kuznetsov aircraft carrier group to Syria's shores was his own idea

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Russian President Vladimir Putin has said that the idea to send a Russian aircraft carrier group to Syria was his own, adding that Russia does not intend to interfere in Syria's internal affairs, but wants to deal with the terrorists.

Russia's aircraft carrier group from the Northern Fleet inflicted significant damage to extremist groups in Syria, Putin said at a meeting with the officers who distinguished themselves during the operation in the Mediterranean near Syria's shores.

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*"You have fulfilled all the tasks that were given to you and inflicted significant damage to the international terrorist groups by hitting their bases, ammunition storages, equipment, and infrastructure," he said.*

The Russian military has greatly contributed to international anti-terrorist efforts and *"helped to create conditions for the peace talks between the Syrian government and the armed opposition,"* Putin said.

The Russian president added that Russia's goal in Syria is to stabilize the legitimate government and to *"put an end to the terrorist blight."*

*"Our goal is to stabilize the legitimate government and strike a decisive blow to the international terrorism,"* Putin said, adding that *"the sooner the country [Syria] will proceed with political settlement the more chances the international community will have in putting an end to the terrorist blight on the Syrian territory."*

He went on to say that more than 4,000 militants from Russia and 5,000 from the former USSR are fighting with extremists in Syria, citing Russian intelligence data.

The president said that this poses a serious threat to Russia's security and thanked the officers for doing their duty to protect the country.

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The officers who took part in the operation told Putin that the aircraft carrier group was closely followed by NATO vessels, both on its way to Syria and on its way back to their Russian port, noting that “*at least eight NATO warships*” were around constantly whose actions were “*far from friendly*.”

The Russian naval group headed by the Admiral Kuznetsov aircraft carrier made headlines in 2016 when it was deployed to fight jihadists in the Middle East.

It departed from the town of Severomorsk, which is the main base of Russia's Northern fleet, in October of last year. A month later, it carried out its first combat mission in the Mediterranean.

Its flagship aircraft carrier – manned by nearly 2,500 crew members and carrying dozens of fighter jets and helicopters – is also a missile cruiser equipped to protect itself from incoming air attacks.

The group also included the Peter the Great battle cruiser and other military ships equipped with precision weapons, as well as Kamov helicopters capable of carrying out anti-submarine warfare, and search and rescue missions.