



The Strategic Implications of the Franco-Russian Mistral Deal

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Summary

Russia has signed a landmark weapons deal with France for the purchase of two Mistral class amphibious assault ships. The ships will strengthen the Russian Navy's capabilities for power projection. Their purchase underlines Russia's intention to give flesh to its Maritime Doctrine adopted in July 2001, which, inter alia, specifies among Russian national interests "guaranteeing the sovereign rights and jurisdiction of the Russian Federation in its exclusive economic zone and continental shelf". This is also the first major weapons system that Russia has imported from any country after the Second World War and that too from a major NATO member, which is an indication of the gradual rapprochement between the two erstwhile foes. This Issue Brief outlines the strategic implications of the path-breaking agreement, including for NATO solidarity, looks at Russia's ageing military industrial complex and foreign military collaboration and analyzes the capabilities which the Russian navy will now possess on account of the Mistral.

Introduction

In a landmark weapons deal with major regional repercussions, Russia, after two years of intense negotiations, has signed a contract with France for the purchase of two Mistral Class amphibious assault, helicopter carrier ships. This is the first *major* weapons import deal that Russia has signed with *any* country after the Second World War. The fact that France is a major NATO member, an alliance formed to counter Soviet military power, has raised apprehensions amongst many Baltic States over the current military cooperation and sharing of sensitive technology with Russia. Interestingly, the new “Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation Until 2020” adopted in 2010 looks upon NATO expansion as a source of ‘danger’ to Russia.¹ Finally, their eventual destination, i.e., where the Mistrals will be based, will provide some indication regarding Russia’s strategic intentions.

Terms of the Contract

As per the contract signed during the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum in June 2011, Russia will import two Mistral class ships from France at an estimated Euro 1.2 million. The ships will be constructed in the French shipyard of Saint-Nazaire and are expected to be delivered to Russia in 2014 and 2015. Russia’s participation in the project is limited to its United Ship Building Corporation (USC) working on some portions of the hulls of the two ships hull. The two sides have also inked a clause wherein Russia reserves the right to negotiate for two additional Mistral class ships to be built in Russia under French license.²

Power Projection Capabilities of the Mistrals

The importance of the Mistral lies in its power-projection capabilities, with the ship capable of transporting equipment, vehicles and troops while at the same time acting as a joint HQs command ship. It is designed to accommodate 16 helicopters, four landing vessels, 70 armoured vehicles and 450 personnel.³ It can also be utilized as a floating hospital to cater for the medical requirements of a town of 40,000 people, a feature which can project a country’s soft power capabilities through humanitarian expeditions.⁴

¹ Government of Russia, “The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation” approved by *Russian Federation Presidential Edict* on 5 February, 2010”, [Online: web] Accessed 4 September 2011, URL: http://www.sras.org/military_doctrine_russian_federation_2010

² “Russia signs \$1.7 bln deal for 2 French warships”, *RIA Novosti*, June 17, 2011, [Online: web] Accessed 4 September 2011, URL: <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20110617/164684636.html>

³ Ibid.

⁴ “Mistral LHD, a ship designed for joint and coalition operations”, *DCNS, France*, [Online: web] Accessed 4 September 2011, URL: <http://en.dcnsgroup.com/naval/products/mistral-family-lhd/?product-category=force-projection-vessels>

Need for Russia to Import Strategic Weapons

The big question is why would Russia, one of the world's largest exporter of weapons and possessing a huge military industrial complex (MIC), opt to buy a foreign product? In the past Russia has always taken pride in meeting its own military requirements and exporting weapons of all kinds; from the lightest Kalashnikov rifles to the sophisticated Sukhoi fighter jets. It would have been unthinkable for the Soviet Union and even Russia to import high profile weapons. The answer to this question is complex and lies, amongst other reasons, in the pragmatic foreign policy orientation of the country and Russia's ageing MIC. It is also an indication of changing global dynamics.

Russia's Ageing Military Industrial Complex and Foreign Military Collaboration

Russia's conflict with Georgia in 2008 highlighted many serious problems within the military sector of the country. Outdated weaponry, lack of efficient command and communication capabilities and absence of effective amphibious assault ships during the war laid bare the hollowness of the establishment's promise of providing the military with the best technology in the world.⁵ Russian Navy Commander Admiral Vladimir Vysotskiy's statement, that having a ship like Mistral "would have allowed the Black Sea Fleet to accomplish its mission in 40 minutes, not 26 hours, which is how long it took us"⁶ (during the Georgia crisis) is supposed to have inspired the idea of looking abroad to augment Russia's naval capabilities.

Russia's decision to go ahead with the Mistral deal arises from the inability of its domestic weapons industry to meet the modern requirements of its armed forces, even though many Russian analysts hotly contest this proposition and feel that Russia has the capabilities to construct this ship. The growing obsolescence of its military industrial plants with a majority of them being more than 30 years old coupled with a paucity of a new generation of scientists with the required technical knowhow are the principal factors responsible for the current state of affairs.⁷ It has been estimated that shipyards in Russia will take at least ten years to build a ship similar to the Mistral; France will supply them within four years.⁸ These factors have forced Russia to actively scan western arms markets for sophisticated weapons systems, purchase Israeli Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) and seek German help in designing combat training centres. Moreover, Russia has also been in negotiations

⁵ Renz, B. (2010), "Russian Military Reform: Prospects and Problems", *RUSI Journal*, 155(1): 58-62.

⁶ "Mistral class amphibious assault ship", *GlobalSecurity.org*, [Online: web] Accessed 4 September 2011, URL: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/russia/mistral.htm>

⁷ Galeotti, M. (2010), "Force Projection", *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 22(2): 24-27.

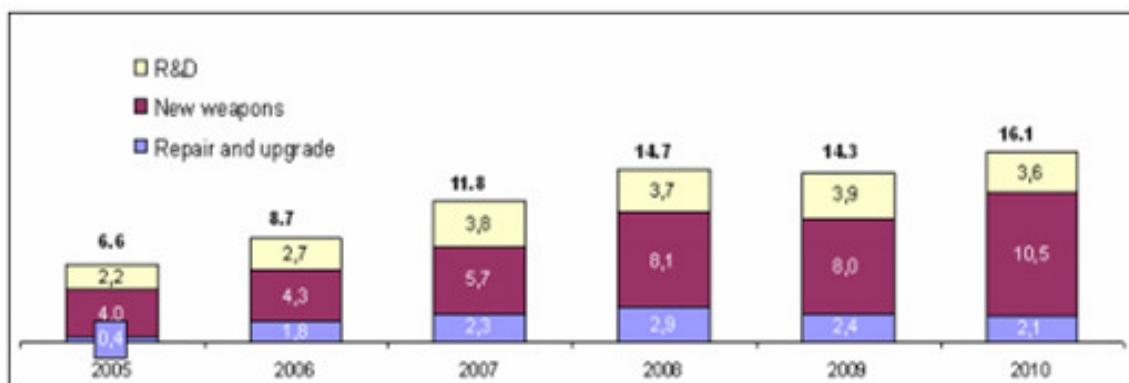
⁸ "Russian military justifies purchase of Mistral ships", *RIA Novosti*, February 10, 2011, [Online: web] Accessed 4 September 2011, URL: http://en.rian.ru/military_news/20110210/162543317.html

for infantry armoured kits and light armoured vehicles with France and dual capable helicopter engines with Italy.⁹

New State Armament Procurement Programme

The Mistral deal is a wake-up call for the ailing defence industrial complex to set its house in order. President Medvedev has assured the armed forces the most advanced technology even if it involves importing western arms. As per the new State Armament Program for 2011-2020 (GPV-2020), the levels of new armaments in the armed forces will rise from the current level of 10 per cent to 30 and 70 per cent of the inventory in 2015 and 2020 respectively.¹⁰ In December 2010, Russia's Defence Ministry had submitted a 22 trillion rouble (\$730 billion) arms procurement spending plan for 2011-2020 to the government.¹¹

Russia' Defence Procurement over the last Six Years, US\$ billion at current prices



	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Total	6.6	8.7	11.8	14.7	14.3	16.1
R&D	2.2	2.7	3.8	3.7	3.9	3.6
New weapons	4.0	4.3	5.7	8.1	8.0	10.5
Repair and upgrade	0.4	1.8	2.3	2.9	2.4	2.1
Exchange rates, roubles / USD	28.31	27.14	25.55	24.89	31.76	30.38

Source: Moscow Defence Brief.

⁹ Vasiliev, D. (2011), "Russian arms trade in 2010", *Moscow Defence Brief*, 1(23) [Online: web] Accessed 4 September 2011, URL: <http://mdb.cast.ru/mdb/1-2011/item2/article1/>

¹⁰ "Russia to prioritize modern weaponry in new arms acquisition programme", *RIA Novosti*, March 11, 2011, [Online: web] Accessed 4 September 2011, URL: http://en.rian.ru/military_news/20110311/162956743.html

¹¹ Ibid

Multiple Benefits of the Ships

Creation of Advanced Ship Building Infrastructure

Several arguments have been raised in support of the Mistral acquisition. Russia's ship building industry is in deep crisis marred by decades old neglect. Russia will have to re-build its ageing infrastructure in order to meet the technological challenge of building the 21,000 tonne Mistral class ships, on a scale last seen during Soviet times. The experience thus gained can be used to build new warships as part of the massive military modernization plan.¹²

New Military Doctrine

The new *Military Doctrine* of Russia (2010) calls for rapid deployment of armed forces to quickly reach potential targets.¹³ The Mistral with its quick power projection capabilities in transporting amphibious ships, helicopters and armoured vehicles perfectly fits the bill.

Projecting Russia's Soft Power

By utilizing these ships for humanitarian missions, multinational peace keeping and anti-piracy operations, the Mistrals can be employed to project Russia's soft power.¹⁴ They can be modified to become floating hospitals and evacuate close to a thousand people if need be. They can also be used to make strategic port calls in displays of naval power, especially in the Asia Pacific region; an area which Russia has increasingly turned its attention to.¹⁵

Russia-NATO Rapprochement

The Mistrals should also help bring Russia closer to NATO and the EU. Events of 2010, which include the Russia-NATO summit in Lisbon, Deauville talks, Russia-EU summit and OSCE meeting in Astana, indicate a gradual rapprochement between the two erstwhile foes. Military cooperation can go a long way in building trust and gaining knowledge

¹² Plans are afoot to build new shipyards for construction of Mistrals on Kotlin Island near St. Petersburg. The new infrastructure built will be used to construct commercial bulk ships and large combat ships: "Russia plans to build new shipyards for Mistral construction", *RIA Novosti*, January 12, 2011, [Online: web] Accessed 4 September 2011, URL: http://en.rian.ru/military_news/20110112/162110808.html

¹³ "The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation approved by Russian Presidential edict", *The School of Russian and Asian Studies*, February 20, 2010, [Online: web] Accessed 4 September 2011, URL: http://www.sras.org/military_doctrine_russian_federation_2010

¹⁴ In the Russian National Security Strategy to 2020, emphasis is laid on the role of soft power as an essential counterpart to purely military aspects: Barabanov, M. (2009), "New Russian National Security Strategy to 2020", *Moscow Defence Brief*, 2(16), [Online: web] Accessed 4 September 2011, URL: <http://mdb.cast.ru/mdb/2-2009/item2/article1/>

¹⁵ Borodavkin, A. (2011), "Russia's Eastern policy: summing up and looking forward", *International Affairs (Moscow)*, 2(57): 28-32

about each other's actual operational capabilities, and this includes existing Russia-NATO military cooperation over Afghanistan in transit along the Northern Distribution Network and combating drug trafficking.¹⁶ Russia has unrivalled expertise in maintaining and operating helicopters and transport aircraft in the region which is now being gradually tapped into by the alliance.¹⁷

Russia-France Strategic Bilateral Relationship

The Mistral sale is an indication of Russia's improving ties with France. Russia had appreciated President Sarkozy's initiative in finding a solution (acceptable to Russia) to the Georgian crisis of 2008. Trade has grown 25 per cent annually since 2006 and in 2009 French investment in Russia exceeded 10 billion Euros.¹⁸ More significantly French companies are major investors and partners in key sectors of Russia's economy; be it energy, aerospace, pharmaceuticals, cosmetics and chemical industry¹⁹ which is in line with the 'modernization' agenda of President Medvedev. The relationship has been further strengthened through a growing trend of military cooperation. Russia has signed a deal for the licensed production of Thales Catherine thermal imagers for its T-90 tanks and a framework agreement with Safran and Thales for outlining prospects for joint development of electronic systems.²⁰ It is also in negotiations for buying the French FELIN infantry combat suit. With French Presidential elections due next year, the Mistral deal is estimated to secure employment for at least a thousand people in France over the next five years.²¹

Benefits for Military Industrial Complexes of Europe

At a time when a majority of European countries are cutting down on their defence budgets and Russia is about to implement its weapons modernization programme, the Mistral deal can pave the way for similar military agreements with other European states and thereby strengthen Russia- Europe ties.²²

¹⁶ Interview of Mikhail Dmitriev (2009), Director of Russia's Federal Service of Military and Technical Cooperation published in *Moscow Defence Brief*, 3(17), [Online: web] Accessed 4 September 2011, URL: <http://mdb.cast.ru/mdb/3-2009/item5/article1/>.

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ Zvereva, M. and N. Arzakanyan (2011), "Three hundred years of cooperation", *International Affairs (Moscow)*, 57(1): 22-43.

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Vasiliev, D. (2011), "Russian Arms Trade in 2010", *Moscow Defence Brief*, 1(23), [Online: web] Accessed 4 September 2011, URL: <http://mdb.cast.ru/mdb/1-2011/item2/article1/>

²¹ "Russia signs \$1.7 bln deal for 2 French warships", *RIA Novosti*, June 17, 2011, [Online: web] Accessed 4 September 2011, URL: <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20110617/164684636.html>

²² Many European defence companies, most notably Germany's Thyssen Krupp Marine Systems and Rheinmetall Defense, Italy's Finmeccanica and Britain's BAE Systems have expressed an interest to share defense and dual-use technology with Russia: Kalika, A(2011), "France and Europe interested in Mistral contract with Russia", *RIA Novosti*, May 31, 2011, [Online: web] Accessed 4 September 2011, URL: http://en.rian.ru/valdai_op/20110531/164340746.html

US Reaction to the Mistral Deal

Interestingly, there has been a mixed reaction in the US to this military agreement. The US House Foreign Affairs Committee Chair, Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen has criticized it on the grounds of affecting regional stability and giving Russia the capability to challenge its neighbours.²³ Former Defence Secretary Robert Gates had expressed his concern to France on the sale of the Mistrals, but overall the official US line appears to one of accepting the proposed Mistral sale as being in line with the American “Reset”.²⁴

Criticism of the Deal

Many in Russia have questioned the need for purchasing the Mistrals. Experts have argued about the wisdom of spending more than a billion Euros at a time when even the most basic of military equipment (helmets, ammunition, etc.) is scarce.²⁵ Moreover, the Mistral does not have an effective self-defence suite and has to rely heavily on escort ships for protection.²⁶ Therefore commissioning the Mistrals would involve either more investment in maintaining a plethora of attack ships like frigates, destroyers and corvettes or confine the Mistrals to simple humanitarian, anti-piracy and power projection roles. There has also been criticism from nationalist circles who believe the State should support the ailing MIC. Russia’s track record of maintaining its existing ships along with its ability to integrate French technology into its own systems have also been seriously questioned.²⁷

Outside Russia, the sharpest criticism of the Mistral deal has come from Georgia which believes that the sale will forever alter the balance of power in the region and give Russia the ability to coerce smaller powers into submission.²⁸ Thus some analysts believe that

²³ Ms Lehtinen Introduced House Resolution 982, which called on the President and Secretaries of State and Defence to urge France and the other NATO and European Union member states to refrain from selling major weapons systems or any offensive military equipment to Russia, unless Russia meets certain conditions. Committee on Foreign Affairs (US Government), “Ros-Lehtinen says French sale of assault ships to Russia threatens regional security”, Committee News, Committee on Foreign Affairs (US Government), [Online: web] Accessed 4 September 2011, URL: http://foreignaffairs.house.gov/press_display.asp?id=1871

²⁴ US Department of State, “Interview of Philip H Gordon, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs”, Moscow, October 26, 2010, [Online: web] Accessed 4 September 2011, URL: <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/rm/2010/150132.htm> & Socor, V. (2010), “Franco-Russian warship deal meeting little resistance”, *Atlantic Council*, April 1, 2010, [Online: web] Accessed 4 September 2011, URL: http://www.acus.org/new_atlanticist/franco-russian-warship-deal-meeting-little-resistance

²⁵ Barabanov, M. (2009), “The Mistral Problem”, *Moscow Defence Brief*, 3(17) [Online: web] Accessed 4 September 2011, URL: <http://mdb.cast.ru/mdb/3-2009/item1/article1/>

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Ibid

²⁸ “Georgia worried by French warship sale to Russia”, *RIA Novosti*, January 24, 2011, [Online: web] Accessed 4 September 2011, URL: <http://en.rian.ru/world/20110124/162270934.html>

Russia is more interested in the advanced SENIT-9 combat system and SIC-21 fleet command system, two of the most sophisticated command and communication technologies in the world.²⁹ The Georgian crisis had brought to light gaping holes in the communication ability of the Russian forces³⁰ and technology on board the Mistral will strengthen these capabilities in the Russian navy. The Baltic States are also apprehensive about the deal and have suggested defence relationships with the Nordic States in response.³¹ With major NATO and EU members, most notably France, Germany and Italy, consistently improving their military cooperation with Russia, the solidarity of NATO may be at stake.³²

Where will the ships be based?

The four important fleets in the Russian navy are the Black Sea Fleet, the Baltic Sea Fleet, Northern Fleet covering the Murmansk region and the Pacific Fleet. Initially it was believed that each of the four big fleets would receive a Mistral each. However, reports emanating from the Ministry of Defence suggest that the first two Mistrals will be handed over to the Pacific Fleet.³³ Russia may hesitate to place the Mistrals in the Baltic Sea, as its relationship with NATO and EU is improving. The question is - where should Russia commission the Mistrals in order to derive maximum advantage from such an expensive acquisition?

Pacific Ocean

Russia is increasingly looking East due to the global shift of power to Asia and the need to develop Russia's Far East by integrating it with the economies of the Asia Pacific region.³⁴ All major powers have a stake in the Asia-Pacific and Russia must act now or be forced to play a marginal role in the future.³⁵ Russia has thus established a concrete relationship

²⁹ "Russia to use Mistral-class carrier as command ship- source", *RIA Novosti*, February 26, 2010, [Online: web] Accessed 4 September 2011, URL: <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20100226/158015225.html>

³⁰ Galeotti, M. (2010), "Force Projection", *Jane's Intelligence Review*, 22(2): 24-27.

³¹ Lithuania seeks regional debate on French warship sales to Russia", *RIA Novosti*, January 19, 2011, [Online: web] Accessed 4 September 2011, URL: <http://en.rian.ru/world/20110119/162207296.html>

³² Three major NATO members (France, Spain and Netherlands) had participated in the tender for Russia's amphibious assault ships. The question is did they even attempt to remove the apprehension of smaller states who are opposed to the Mistral deal.

³³ "Russia plans to send first Mistral ships to protect Kurils", *RIA Novosti*, February 9, 2011, [Online: web] Accessed 4 September 2011, URL: http://en.rian.ru/mlitary_news/20110209/162525263.html

³⁴ Moore, P. (2007), "Russia: On the margins of the Pacific rim", *Radio Free Europe*, September 11, 2007, [Online: web] Accessed 4 September 2011, URL: <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1078625.html>

³⁵ Lukyanov, F. (2011), "Between East and West: Explaining Russia's Foreign policy", *International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS)*, February 18, 2011, [Online: web] Audio Transcription Accessed 4 September 2011, URL: <http://www.iiss.org/events-calendar/2011-events-archive/february-2011/between-east-and-west-explaining-russias-foreign-policy/>

with ASEAN³⁶ and with APEC, strengthened its ties with China³⁷ and improved trade with both South Korea and Japan.³⁸ Russian high level visits to Asia have included President Medvedev's attending the ASEAN-Russia summit (Vietnam, 2010), the G-20 summit (South Korea, 2010), Mongolia and Singapore (2009). Russia will also host the 2012 APEC Summit in Vladivostok.

Positioning Mistral in the Asia-Pacific region may also be seen in the context of the unresolved Kuril Islands issue between Russia and Japan, the region being rich in natural resources, and with Russian elections soon due.³⁹

Black Sea

The Mistral could have a significant impact in the Black Sea region also. Russia's scope for action during the crisis of 2008 was somewhat limited due to the absence of amphibious landing assault capabilities.⁴⁰ The ships will give Russia overriding military superiority over the littoral states and alter the balance of power in the region.

Moreover, Russia has been attaching significant importance to the Black Sea region. The Black Sea is a major transit route for drug and weapons smuggling from Afghanistan and separatist enclaves such as Transnistria and Nagorno Karabakh.⁴¹ The operational zone includes the Mediterranean Sea and the Gulf of Aden where Russia can participate in anti-piracy operations. Having formally recognized Abkhazia, Russia now has an extensive maritime sphere of influence in the region. The addition of two frigates, three submarines⁴² and the new Mistral can be the proverbial game changer. Therefore, Russia can be expected to place at least one of the Mistral with its Black Sea Fleet.

³⁶ Lavrov, S. (2010), "Russia and ASEAN can do a great deal together", *International Affairs (Moscow)*, 6: 13-22.

³⁷ Xing, W & W. Chenyan (2011), "Russia beginning to look eastward more for trade", *China Daily*, June 18, 2011, [Online: web] Accessed 4 September 2011, URL: http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2011-06/18/content_12727577.htm

³⁸ "Russia, Japan double volume of trade", *The Voice of Russia*, February 2, 2011, [Online: web] Accessed 4 September 2011, URL: <http://english.ruvr.ru/2011/02/02/42435835.html>

³⁹ Announcements that the Mistral will be with the Pacific Fleet could well be aimed at stoking nationalist sentiments back home.

⁴⁰ "Mistral class amphibious assault ship", *GlobalSecurity.org*, [Online: web] Accessed 4 September 2011, URL: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/russia/mistral.htm>

⁴¹ Sanders, D. (2009), "Maritime security in the Black Sea", *European Security*, 18(2): 101-124.

⁴² "Russia's Black Sea Fleet to receive new frigates, subs by 2015 - Admiral", *RIA Novosti*, February 5, 2010, [Online: web] Accessed 4 September 2011, URL: <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20100205/157787857.html> Accessed

Northern Fleet

Despite the technical challenge of strengthening the Mistral hulls in order to withstand the combat freezing waters of the Arctic, the option of placing the Mistrals in the Northern Fleet is a possibility in view of Russia's strategic objectives in the Arctic region, which is said to contain massive energy reserves.⁴³ Russia has just signed a maritime delimitation agreement with Norway, paving the way for the settlement of a decades old dispute over the geographical exploration of resources in the region.⁴⁴ With Russia's oil and gas production estimated to decline from 2030 onwards,⁴⁵ Russia needs to have control over the Arctic in order to secure its energy supplies. High oil prices and equally high global demand, improvements in technology and the impact of climate change in reducing the ice-cover over the Arctic have made it possible to exploit the Arctic's undersea resources. Given the strategic importance of the region, countries like Canada, USA, Denmark, Norway and of course Russia have all laid claim to the resource rich region. Russia in fact has claimed vast swathes of the Arctic Ocean Sea floor as an extension of its continental shelf which is not acceptable to the other players in the region.⁴⁶ There have been reports of even China actively considering joining the race for the Arctic's rich resources.⁴⁷ Therefore, lack of clarity over demarcation of the continental shelf has brought about a real possibility of confrontation in the Arctic between bickering states over exploitation

⁴³ It has been estimated that close to 12% of the world's undiscovered hydrocarbons reserves lie in the Arctic. The Yamal Peninsula is part of Russia's Yamal-Nenets region, one of the richest hydrocarbon bases on the planet, with enormous reserves estimated at 61 trillion cubic meters of natural gas. The majority of these reserves lie in Lomonosov and Mendeleev ridges: "Putin opens Arctic to foreign energy firms", *AFP*, September 24, 2009, [Online: web] Accessed 4 September 2011, URL: http://www.khaleejtimes.com/DisplayArticle08.asp?xfile=data/international/2009/September/international_September1252.xml§ion=international

⁴⁴ "Russia to ratify maritime border pact with Norway within month-Lavrov", *RIA Novosti*, March 7, 2011, [Online: web] Accessed 4 September 2011, URL: <http://en.rian.ru/russia/20110307/162902601.html>

⁴⁵ Makivierikko, A (2007), "Russian Oil; a depletion rate model estimate of the future Russian oil production and export", *Energy Delta Institute*, October 2007 [Online: web] Accessed 4 September 2011, URL: <http://www.energydelta.org/mainmenu/edi-intelligence-2/our-topics/energy-scenarios-and-the-role-of-gas/mscs/russian-oil-a-depletion-rate-model-estimate-of-the-future-russian>

⁴⁶ In 2001, Russia made a submission in accordance with the UN Convention establishing a new boundary for its continental shelf. Russia's claim is to an area of approximately 1,199,170 km² that covers waters from the North Pole to the East Siberian Sea and the Chukchi peninsula: *Jane's Intelligence Review*, "Cold Affront- Icy reaction to Russia's Arctic exploration", September 1, 2007 [Online: web] Accessed 4 September 2011, URL: <http://articles.janes.com/articles/Janes-Intelligence-Review-2007/Cold-affront-Icy-reaction-to-Russia-s-Arctic-exploration.html>

⁴⁷ "Russian navy chief warns of Beijing's Arctic ambitions" *Reuters*, October 5, 2010, [Online: web] Accessed 4 September 2011, URL: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2010/10/04/russia-arctic-idUSLDE6931GL20101004>

of the valuable resources.

One needs to look at Russia's *Maritime Doctrine of 2001* to understand Russia's intentions in the region. The doctrine talks about the importance of guarding the State's interests in exploration and development of mineral and biological resources in the exclusive economic zone and continental shelf of Russia in the Arctic, stresses the decisive role of the Northern Fleet to defend the State as well as the increasing importance of the Northern Sea Route to Sustainable Development of the Russian Federation.⁴⁸ With Russia due to submit a new proposal highlighting its jurisdictional area of continental shelf to the UN in 2012, the Mistrals will be a good source of power projection in the North.

Conclusion

With the two ships due to be delivered in 2014 and 2015, the Mistrals could be placed in the Pacific Ocean and the Black Sea and perhaps in the North too. The Mistral agreement is an epic deal between Russia and a key NATO member. The ships will add to the capabilities of the Russian navy wherever Russia decides to deploy them. The fact that Russia has been able to selectively develop its relationship through military cooperation with some of the major NATO players in the region, notably France, Germany and Italy highlights a gradual rapprochement between the two erstwhile foes. How the big NATO players manage to remove the smaller members' apprehensions and convince them about the prospects of engaging Russia will go a long way in determining the future solidarity of the alliance.

Moreover, Russia is poised to witness a massive modernization of its armed forces in this decade. The fact that Russia is willing to purchase weapons from abroad has opened up intriguing opportunities for many countries including India. Russia still retains a very skilled technical labour force but lack of funds has been the bane of this sector for a long time. No country wants to give up reliance on its own industrial complex to meet its security requirements and Russia is no exception to this. Herein lies an opportunity for India to intensify its joint military development of weapons systems with Russia along the lines of the Brahmos and the Fifth Generation Fighter aircraft projects in view of Russia's proven capacity to develop weapons systems with cutting edge technology.

⁴⁸ Government of Russia, "Maritime Doctrine of the Russian Federation 2020", *President of the Russian Federation Approved on 27th July 2001*, [Online: web] Accessed 4 September 2011, URL: http://www.oceanlaw.org/downloads/arctic/Russian_Maritime_Policy_2020.pdf