

# US Navy to continue Black Sea incursions, brushing aside Russian demands

Thomas Gaist  
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On Friday, United States officials issued contemptuous dismissals of protests by the Russian government over the presence of American naval forces in the Black Sea, which were prompted by the sustained presence of the USS Porter in Black Sea waters.

Russian Official Andrei Kelin had criticized the US patrol, calling it “destabilizing” and insisting, “This is not a NATO area.”

The incident was immediately seized on by the US high command as an occasion for new humiliations against Moscow. US Navy Secretary Ray Mabus contemptuously brushed aside the Russian grievances, without even pretending to care about the possible violations of international law by the US vessel.

“We’re going to be there,” Mabus said, adding, “We’re going to deter. That’s the main reason we’re there—to deter potential aggression.”

Under the Montreux Convention, the navies of non-Black Sea states can remain in Black Sea waters for a maximum of twenty-one days at a time. The US and NATO claim to abide by the convention, but in practice Western naval forces patrol the strategic waters virtually at will.

The deliberately provocative response of the American military is a sharp expression of the historic tensions being generated by the drive of American and European imperialism, as they seek to encircle and wage war against Russia.

Days ago, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) announced plans to develop a more permanent naval presence in the Black Sea. The Black Sea NATO intervention is planned as one element in a comprehensive expansion of NATO operations. The NATO enhancements, to be formally approved at the Warsaw summit in July, are likely to include military interventions across far-flung sections of Eurasia and Africa, from Nigeria to Afghanistan.

Russian foreign officials had already denounced the NATO escalation, and registered outrage over the Black Sea mission in particular. The NATO escalation “directly infringes on our legitimate security interests” and “won’t be

left unanswered,” Russian official Alexander Grushko said in response to the NATO announcements.

“Those measures significantly erode the quality of regional security, in fact turning central and eastern Europe into an arena of military confrontation,” Grushko said.

The US-NATO military encroachments into the Black Sea are justified to the public in the name of preventing Russian control over the region and countering “Russian aggression” in Europe. Russia’s control over Crimea, the predictable outcome of the February 2014 US-backed putsch in Kiev, is claimed to give Moscow a dominant position in the inland sea.

In reality, the Black Sea is already squarely in the grip of the imperialist powers. An array of US and NATO military detachments routinely patrol in and around the Black Sea. The sea’s only entrance, through the Dardanelles, is firmly in the hands of NATO member Turkey. This week, the alliance announced a new ground force tasked with patrolling the Black Sea coastline, a so-called “framework brigade” to be led by Romanian forces.

Washington has been aggressively building up its military capacity around the Black Sea for years. Since 2010, the US Black Sea Rotational Force has organized continuous operations in the region, working with Romanian, Georgian, Ukrainian, and Bulgarian militaries out of Romania’s Airbase Mihail Kogălniceanu. The US Black Sea Force has steadily expanded and now includes more than 500 US Marines and a Combined Arms Company, complete with battle tanks.

In April, Washington reinforced its Black Sea presence with a squadron of F-22s, the Pentagon’s most advanced war plane.

Rather than countering supposed “Russian aggression,” the breakneck pace of militarization of the Black Sea is rooted in objective economic and political processes, which are driving the US and European powers into a ferocious struggle for control of the Eurasian landmass.

American government planners have been increasingly fixated on the Black Sea since the dissolution of the Soviet

Union cleared the way for renewed imperialist intervention. Numerous strategy papers make clear that Washington and its NATO allies have understood for years that the Black Sea is an indispensable naval launching pad for projecting power against Russia, against the Balkans, and across the Caucasus into Central Asia.

“The Black Sea is the perfect platform through which to project military power into the very heart of Russia,” the think tank Stratfor wrote in “The Black Sea: A Net Assessment.”

From positions in the Black Sea, NATO can strike rapidly against the Russian capital city and simultaneously cut off energy supplies to Russia’s military by seizing Russia’s oil production centers in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, Stratfor wrote.

“If a naval operation were to project power from the Black Sea toward the Don River corridor between Rostov-on-Don and Volgograd (better known by its former name, Stalingrad), Moscow would be cut off from the Russian Caucasus and the region’s immense energy resources,” the think tank noted.

Beyond its value for invading and conquering Russia, the Black Sea is central to broader efforts of the American ruling class to defend its hegemony through further wars against China, Iran and any other powers the US sees as being in its way.

As the Heritage Foundation noted in “US Strategy in the Black Sea Region:” “The Black Sea region is an important platform for military, reconstruction, and stabilization operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, and possibly Iran, as well as for the protection of energy shipping lanes between the Caspian region and Western markets.”

The Black Sea and its environs host some of Eurasia’s decisive commercial throughways, including the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipelines, which are critical for the daily flow of huge quantities of energy and other commodities from the Caucasus into European markets.

“During the Soviet era, all energy transit routes led from the oil and gas fields of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan to the Russian Federation,” Heritage writes. “Russia has turned a generous profit as the middleman between cheap Central Asian oil and gas and energy hungry economies in the West. By selling Central Asian oil and gas at a premium abroad, Russia has earned windfall profits.”

At the most basic level, the Black Sea is a resource goldmine, with massive untapped oil reserves embedded in the sea floor and a surrounding Black Sea Basin that is replete with natural gas.

“With the discovery of rich hydrocarbon resources in the

Caspian Sea basin, the geopolitical importance of the wider Black Sea region, as a transportation corridor for oil and gas from Central Asia to markets and because of its reserves, has increased. Many analysts consider the Black Sea and the Caspian region as the third source of oil and gas in the world after the Persian Gulf and Western Siberia,” noted a report by Turkey’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs titled “The New Geopolitical Order in the BSEC Region.”

“After the dissolution of the USSR, with the emergence of the newly independent states at the shores of the Black Sea, this region was rediscovered by Western powers,” the report states. “The wider Black Sea region, stretching from southeastern Europe into the western shores of the Caspian Sea, has moved from the periphery to the center of the attention of world politics. The region’s geostrategic position as a natural link between Europe and Asia and between Central Asia and the Middle East constitutes a vital trade link as well as an important transit route for energy.”

Inherited from the USSR, Russia’s control over the trans-Eurasian commercial nexus, centered on the Black Sea, is incompatible with the designs of Washington and its allies, who are seeking to impose direct administration by Western capital over the entire Eurasian economy, large sections of which were inaccessible to finance capital during much of the 20th century due to the Russian and Chinese Revolutions.

The Black Sea region, together with all of Eurasia’s main strategic centers—the Persian Gulf, the Caucasus, Central Asia, etc.—faces new rounds of predatory intervention by the capitalist cliques in Washington, New York, London and Brussels. While American imperialism plays the leading role, all of the former colonial powers in Europe are intent on sticking their hands into the fleshpots of Eurasia. This new imperialist partition of the globe is dragging mankind toward catastrophe.



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