

Black Sea turns into a battlefield: A Turkish-operated tanker carrying Russian oil was hit

Bar?? Demir
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The crude oil tanker *Altura*, owned by Turkish company Pergamon Shipping and en route from Russia, was struck by an armed unmanned maritime vehicle (UMV) on Thursday, 26 kilometres (16 miles) from the entrance to the Bosphorus Strait.

No one has officially claimed responsibility for the attack, which occurred in the fifth year of the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine. Carried out during the US-Israel war of annihilation against Iran, Türkiye's eastern neighbour, the attack underscores the danger of escalation and expansion in the Ukraine war.

An explosion occurred on the bridge of the Sierra Leone-flagged tanker carrying 140,000 tons of crude oil, and the engine room began to take on water. Following an emergency call, rescue tugs belonging to the General Directorate of Coast Guard were dispatched. It was reported that the 27-member Turkish crew are in good health and that no injuries were sustained.

Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Öncü Keçeli said Thursday evening that the attack within NATO member Türkiye's Exclusive Economic Zone in the Black Sea was "in violation of international law," adding, "To prevent the war from spreading to the Black Sea and escalating further, we are continuing our contacts with the relevant parties."

Neither Ukraine nor Russia has so far issued an official statement. Alexander Kotz, a reporter for the Russian state television network NTV, said, "This is not the first time Ukrainian drones have attacked civilian ships in the Black Sea. Throughout the conflict, Kyiv has systematically shifted its military operations to international shipping lanes; this poses a threat not only to Russia but also to NATO countries, including Türkiye."

After being acquired by Pergamon Shipping in November 2025, the targeted tanker was renamed *Altura*. According to a report by the *Cumhuriyet* newspaper, the tanker was added to the European Union's (EU) sanctions

list in October, to Switzerland's and Ukraine's in December, and finally to the United Kingdom's in February. The report claimed that the vessel was linked to Muhammad Hussein Shamkhani, the son of Ali Shamkhani, the former Secretary-General of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, who was killed by Israel in February.

Five UMV have been found along Türkiye's Black Sea coast over the past one and a half years. Most recently, on March 21, an armed UMV was detected off the coast of Ordu, a city in the Eastern Black Sea region. According to a statement made Thursday by Rear Admiral Zeki Aktürk, spokesperson for the Ministry of National Defense, this UMV is "of US origin and is believed to have drifted ashore due to a current after its engine malfunctioned." It was "safely destroyed by teams from the Underwater Defense Command." The UMV was reportedly carrying two tons of ammunition.

The situation in the Black Sea escalated after the Trump administration presented a 28-point plan to Kiev on November 20, calling for a negotiated resolution to the conflict with Russia.

On November 28, two tankers—the *Kairos* and the *Virat*—en route to Russia were attacked in waters under Türkiye's jurisdiction off the coasts of the provinces of Kocaeli and Kastamonu. On December 10, the Comoros-flagged tanker *Dashan* was struck in the Black Sea by a Ukrainian-made unmanned maritime vehicle named *Sea Baby*.

These targeted tankers had been listed among vessels sanctioned after the war began in 2022. Following its invasion, Russia has used a "shadow fleet" of hundreds of tankers—many sailing under different flags—to evade Western sanctions, especially those targeting its oil exports.

The attacks in the Black Sea are being carried out with NATO's knowledge and approval. In early December,

NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte implied that they had approved such attacks, stating: “We are strengthening our support for Ukraine and increasing pressure on Russia. This includes countering Russia’s Shadow Fleet and other measures to pose strategic dilemmas for the Kremlin.”

Meanwhile, the UK military will be sent to board ships suspected of being part of Russia’s sanctions-evading “shadow fleet.” According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies, Belgium, Finland and France have all seized or detained tankers; Germany, Italy, Latvia, Norway and Sweden have boarded or detained cargo and bulk vessels.

Russia also announced that Ukrainian forces had carried out more than a dozen attack attempts this month on facilities supplying the TurkStream and Blue Stream natural gas pipelines, both of which pass through the Black Sea, and that these attacks had been repelled.

According to Reuters calculations based on market data “at least 40% of Russia’s oil export capacity is at a halt following Ukrainian drone attacks, a disputed attack on a major pipeline and the seizure of tankers.” It reported that this month Russia’s major Western oil export ports, including Novorossiysk on the Black Sea and Primorsk and Ust-Luga on the Baltic Sea, were hit.

On Thursday, the French daily *Le Figaro* wrote that the major concern of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky’s regime, which fully supports the US-Israel war against Iran, is “becoming an indirect victim of the war in Iran,” while acknowledging that “Since the very first day of the US-Israel coalition’s intervention, the wars in Iran and Ukraine have been closely intertwined.”

The newspaper highlights the Ukrainian government’s disappointment that the military aid it had expected from the US has been redirected toward the war against Iran, noting that this occurred in the midst of Ukrainian forces’ largest territorial gains in the past two years—an area of 250 square kilometres (155 square miles)—since February.

Both the Zelensky regime and the European powers are opposing the Trump administration’s attempt to end the war in Ukraine through a separate agreement with the Kremlin—one that would allow it to reap the spoils alone—as well as its reduction of arms shipments. European powers, on the one hand, seek to recoup their investment in the war in Ukraine and, on the other, support escalating the conflict with Russia to enhance their military capabilities independently of the US to advance their predatory imperialist interests.

Türkiye, which has strong ties to both Ukraine and Russia, advocates for a negotiated solution between Kiev and Moscow out of concern that an escalation of the war would harm the interests of the Turkish bourgeoisie. The risk of the US-NATO war against Russia expanding is accompanied by the danger of Türkiye being drawn into an imperialist war against Iran.

After the attacks against Iran began, it was alleged that Iran had fired missiles at Türkiye on three occasions. Although Iran denied targeting Türkiye, NATO, Ankara and the Turkish media quickly issued statements condemning Iran. Last week, Ankara, along with allied Azerbaijan, Pakistan, and Arab regimes, signed the Riyadh statement condemning Iran while remaining silent on the illegal war of aggression waged by the US and Israel.

NATO is bolstering its forces in Türkiye as it openly prepares to join the war against Iran. Using the alleged missile launches from Iran as a pretext, Patriot air defense systems were deployed to the Incirlik Air Base in Adana and the Kürecik Radar Base in Malatya, both of which are used by the US.

NATO is establishing a new corps in Türkiye called the Multinational Corps Türkiye (MNC-TÜR). The news was confirmed by the Ministry of National Defense on Thursday.

Spokesperson Aktürk stated that the Ministry of National Defense has launched “efforts to establish a Corps Headquarters in 2023 under the NATO Southeast Regional Plan” and added: “Efforts to transform the headquarters into a multinational structure are being carried out in coordination with NATO authorities; however, since NATO procedures have not yet been finalized, the approval process is ongoing.”

Speaking to the daily *Evrensel*, political scientist Dr. Hakan Şahin said, “Türkiye will be the only country with two NATO corps. ... Especially after Russia’s annexation of Crimea, NATO established these multinational corps—comprising Eastern Bloc and Baltic countries—in Poland and Romania. They were established under the pretext of preventing attacks on countries bordering Russia.”



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