



Mediterranean Sea CRISIS WATCH (16-22 APR 18)



Assessment:

While many times Greek officials reiterate illegal detention of 2 Greek soldiers who claim to have unwittingly violated Turkish border, Turkish side calls Greece to show respect rule of law in Turkey. But this is the first time Erdogan directly links the two cases of two Greek Soldiers detained by Turkey and 8 Turkish soldiers applied for asylum in Greece, verifying fears they could be used as a bargaining chip. But more important thing is that Erdogan's direct involvement into legal process of 2 Greek Soldiers comes right after his calling snap elections for June 24. It is very strong indicator of that Erdogan will use consciously 2 Greek Soldiers in his election campaign as a propaganda tool. It means that at the best two Greek soldiers will be released after Turkish general election.

Secondly, Imia islands and also other outstanding Aegean issues between Greece and Turkey could be toolled by current Turkish Government for its election campaign. Coming 2 months have great potential risk of increasing tension in Aegean.

On the other hand, US warships activities and especially the entrance of Truman Strike group to Mediterranean is a show of deterrence while Russia seems to heal the wound of the previous Air Strikes with feeding the Syrian Defence with S-300 missile systems.

- Press Release Regarding the 2018 Turkey Country Report:** 17 APR. It is totally wrong and unacceptable that the EU is positioning itself as a competent arbitrator or a court and attempting to render a judgment under the pretence of "Union solidarity" with regard to the disputes related to sovereignty. The Kardak (Imia) Rocks and their territorial waters and airspace above them are exclusively under Turkish sovereignty. mfa.tr
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs announcement on Imia:** 18 APR. While the European Union calls on Turkey to respect European law, Turkey responds with an announcement that provocatively violates it. It reiterates a flagrantly illegal stance, ignoring the fact that the legal status of the Aegean is fully enshrined in international law. We call on Turkey to come to its senses and to use the findings of the Commission's report as a useful tool for self-criticism in improving its image in public opinion and in the international community. mfa.gr
- Turkey's Erdogan declares early elections on June 24:** 18 APR. President Erdogan on Wednesday called snap elections for June 24, saying economic challenges and the war in Syria meant Turkey must switch quickly to the powerful executive presidency that goes into effect after the vote. The presidential and parliamentary elections will take place under a state of emergency that has been in place since an attempted coup in July 2016.
- MEPs call on Turkey to release two Greek soldiers:** 19 APR. EP calls on the Turkish authorities to "swiftly conclude the judicial process and release the two Greek soldiers and return them to Greece" and to "scrupulously follow legal proceedings and fully respect, for all those concerned, the human rights enshrined in international law, including the Geneva Convention. MEPs quizzed on Tuesday evening Commissioner Stylianides on the steps to be taken for the two soldiers to be released and strongly criticized Turkey for not respecting fundamental rights and the rule of law. Euparliament
- No quid pro quo for soldiers detained in Turkey:** 22 APR. In an interview with private broadcaster NTV on Saturday (21 APR) Erdogan appeared to float the possibility of handing over the two soldiers if Greece returned the eight Turkish commandos. Greece on Sunday rejected any suggestion of a trade-off for the release of two Greek soldiers it says are being unjustifiably held by Turkey in a case that has deepened strains between the two NATO allies. reuters

- Statement by the President of the Republic Mr. Prokopios Papillpoulou:** 22 APR. "Yesterday's statements of Turkey's President Tayyip Erdogan for the peaceful coexistence of our peoples are welcomed. Only such statements are of importance and value when accompanied by practice. presidency.gr
- Erdogan adviser says 'all Greek flags' taken down:** An adviser to Turkish President Erdogan boasted in a recent television interview that Turkish military forces not only infiltrated 55 kilometers into Greek territory, but took down flags from a cluster of small islets in the southeastern Aegean as well. Alternate Defense Minister Fotis Kouvelis on Monday refuted claims made by an adviser to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan that Turkish soldiers took down Greek flags from a cluster of islets in the southeastern Aegean. Ekathimerini
- Truman Strike Group Enters Mediterranean Sea** 19 APR. The Harry S. Truman Carrier Strike Group entered the U.S. 6th fleet area of operations Wednesday. The Truman CSG left Norfolk on April 11 for a regularly scheduled deployment to both the 6th Fleet and 7th Fleet areas of operation. Usni
- Is a thick gaseous cloud hiding Russia's first S-300 delivery to Syria?** 19 APR. As Israel celebrated its 70th anniversary, a Russian ship unloaded a suspect military cargo from a freighter at the Syrian port of Tartous. On 17 APR, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Moscow had refused Syria's demand for the advanced S-300 missiles, but since the "appalling act of aggression" committed by the US, France and Britain, "Moscow was ready to consider any means to help the Syrian army curb further aggression." According to our military sources, the Russian vessel was sighted crossing through the Bosphorus near Istanbul on Monday, i.e., just two days after the Western strike on Syria's chemical sites. debka **Russia sends 2 additional warships to Syria on 21 APR.** Two guided-missiles warships of the Russian Black Sea fleet are on their way to Syria to reinforce the flotilla based at Syria's port city of Latakia. UAWIRE
- USS Mount Whitney Arrives in Croatia/ USS New York, 26th MEU Arrive in Gaeta, Italy** 21 APR. Blue Ridge-class command and control ship USS Mount Whitney (LCC 20), arrived in Rijeka, Croatia, April 19, 2018. CGF The San Antonio-class amphibious transport dock ship USS New York (LPD 21) and embarked Marines from the 26th Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) arrived in Gaeta, Italy on 21 APR. CGF



Asia Pacific CRISIS WATCH

(16-22 APR 18)



- 1. USS Bonhomme Richard Departs Sasebo, Concludes Forward-Deployed Service:** 18 APR. The amphibious assault ship USS Bonhomme Richard (LHD 6) departed Sasebo, Japan, capping six years of forward-deployed service in the Indo-Pacific. Bonhomme Richard has been the flagship of the Amphibious Force 7th Fleet since April 2012 and now transits to its new homeport in San Diego for follow-on operations and eventual upgrades to become F-35B Lightning II capable. (C7F)
- 2. USS Milius Departs San Diego to forward deploy to 7th Fleet:** 19 APR. USS Milius (DDG 69), a ballistic missile defense (BMD) capable guided missile destroyer, will leave her homeport of San Diego, April 20, to join the Forward Deployed Naval Forces-Japan. Milius will be forward deployed to Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka, Japan and is scheduled to arrive at the end of May. (C7F)
- 3. Wasp ESG arrives in Okinawa to offload 31st Maritime Expeditionary Unit (MEU):** 21 APR. The ships of the Wasp Expeditionary Strike Group (ESG) arrived in Okinawa, Japan, capping nearly two months of operations in the Indo-Pacific with the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit. The Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyers USS Dewey (DDG 105) and USS Sterett (DDG 104) served as the destroyers attached to the Wasp ESG. Both ships will return to San Diego for upkeep, maintenance, and continued training. (C7F)
- 4. USNS Brunswick arrives in Malaysia:** 21 APR. Sailors participating in Pacific Partnership 2018 (PP18) aboard Military Sealift Command expeditionary fast transport USNS Brunswick (T-EPF 6) made their third stop of the mission in Tawau, Malaysia. The mission in Tawau will continue through May 4. (C7F)

Assessment:

USS Wasp will probably be the flagship of the Amphibious Force 7th Fleet after USS Bonhomme Richard's departure from Japan. USS Wasp is already upgraded F-35B Lightning II stealth fighter jet capable. USS Bonhomme Richard may have an extended overhaul period in San Diego which also includes improving to become F-35B Lightning II capable.

USS Milius has recently received significant upgrades to the Aegis Combat System, undersea warfare, and electronic warfare suites. Additionally, Milius completed their capstone certification events in engineering; undersea, air, surface and electronic warfare; and ballistic missile defence. So, it will bring some of the most technologically advanced warfighting capability to the Indo-Pacific region.

Over the course of the patrol, the ESG-MEU team conducted operations and certification exercise to be fully certified and ready to respond to contingency. The patrol was also a first-of-its-kind deployment as an "Up-Gunned ESG," combining two San Diego-based destroyers and the MEU's F-35B Lightning II stealth fighter jet, which underwent its first operational employment from a U.S. Navy ship. And 2 Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyers, USS Dewey and USS Sterett may have major upgrades in San Diego such as USS Milius.

The US administration has demanded from Australia to participate in FONOPs. It is evident that Australia accepted to involve in FONOPs in the South China Sea and China has taken a stance against Australian ships like the other FONOPs.

Chinese naval exercises and parade in South China Sea can be evaluated in terms of the answer to the FONOPs. Additionally, the exercise right after the sea parade last week is possible a message by showing of strength to the countries in the region, particularly within the scope of the current problems for Taiwan. And the increasing number of naval exercises support the words of the Chinese President "China is building a first-class Navy."

South Korea and North Korea leaders will have a historical summit on Friday 27th April. The annual exercises between South Korea and the US will be held in low profile compare to the exercises in the previous years due to the summits to be made between South and North Korea leaders. It's also possible the exercise will be temporarily stopped on Friday.

- 5. Australian warships challenged by Chinese military in South China Sea:** 20 APR. HMAS Anzac and HMAS Success recently travelled through the South China Sea after leaving Subic Bay in the Philippines, while HMAS Toowoomba also went through the disputed waters after departing from Kota Kinabalu in Malaysia. China's naval vessels encountered Australian naval ships in the South China Sea. Three Australian warships were challenged by the Chinese military as they travelled through the disputed South China Sea. (ABC Net)
- 6. China's Aircraft Carrier Formation Conducts Exercises in West Pacific:** 22 APR. A Chinese navy formation featuring aircraft carrier Liaoning conducted confrontation exercises in the West Pacific. Also including missile destroyers, J-15 fighters and shipboard helicopters, the drill aims to test the combat operation of the formation in high seas. The Chinese Navy spokesman said that the drill was a routine arrangement as part of the navy's annual training plan and it focused on the joint operation of vessels and shipboard aircraft in unfamiliar seas, tested the establishment and maintenance of the formation's attack and defense system, and has achieved expected goals. (China Defense Ministry)
- 7. Korea, US to kick off Annual Military Exercise "Key Resolve" as Scheduled:** 22 APR. South Korea and United States will hold their annual Key Resolve training exercise starting on 23rd April as scheduled and the simulation-based, command-post drill between the two allies will run for the next two weeks. (Korea Herald)



Horn of Africa CRISIS WATCH (16-22 APR 18)

- CCTF 151 Visit to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia – Strengthening Counter-Piracy Coordination:** 16 APR. Commander Combined Task Force 151 (CTF 151), Rear Admiral Daisuke Kajimoto, Japan Maritime Self Defence Force, has returned from a visit to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) where he met key members of the Royal Saudi Naval Force and Armed Forces in order to develop maritime security and counter-piracy coordination. Rear Admiral Kajimoto began his visit in Jeddah, meeting with the Commander of the Western Fleet. The visit continued to Riyadh where Rear Admiral Kajimoto met with the Chief of General Staff and the Commander of the Royal Saudi Naval Forces. (CMF)
- FS La Fayette in Support of CTF 150 Seized About 400 Kgs of Heroin and 2000 Kgs of Hashish:** 17 APR. FS La Fayette seized 413 kgs of heroin (with a street value of over \$96 million USD) during a patrol in support of Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) in the international waters of the Arabian Sea on April 11 and seized 1940 kgs of hashish (with a street value over \$75 million USD) in her second seizure on April 17. All the illegal drugs were catalogued and transferred to La Fayette to be destroyed safely at sea. Since December 2017, multinational assets in support of CTF 150 have seized over 30 tonnes of hashish and 2.5 tonnes of heroin, valued in excess of \$2.3 billion USD. (CMF)
- Power-mad Putin ‘plotting to build naval base in east Africa near key Suez trade route in muscle flexing with West’:** 18 APR. Russia is plotting a game-changing naval base in a breakaway east African state in bid to dramatically expand his military might in the Middle East, according to reports Talks are reportedly underway between Moscow and leaders in Somaliland for a 1,500 man base to support its warships and hunter-killer submarines to operate in the volatile region and busy shipping lanes carrying most of Europe’s goods. If realized, this would be Russia’s first base in Africa since the Cold War and be a major step forward for Vladimir Putin’s ambitious modernization programme to revive his country’s once proud navy. The rumored location of the base is outside of Zeila city, in the self-declared republic of Somaliland. It is also on the border with Djibouti - nearby the location of China’s first overseas base in modern times which opened last year. (thesun)



Assessment:

Maritime security is a collective effort that requires effective coordination. It can be assessed that CCTF 151 Visit to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a part of Maritime Security Effort, particularly strengthening counter-piracy coordination.

The remarkable success in seizing illegal drugs is a result of unique coordination and cooperation among partner nations within multinational coalition which has committed to maintaining maritime security in this important region, however; the amount of narcotics caught since December 2017 is worrisome.

New naval base attempt of Russia in the region may be considered as a result of Russian Naval doctrine updated 2017 Russian and a need supporting Russian naval activity has been increasing in the Atlantic, Mediterranean and Indian Oceans, and elsewhere.

Military and commercial partnerships are key to preserving the free flow of commerce in this critically important region with three major choke points (Strait of Hormuz, Bab el-Mendeb and Suez Canal). Particularly Strait of Hormuz which as the choke point of Persian Gulf which is a leading oil-producing region, accounts for 30% of global supply. Lucky Mariner allows us to practice naval cooperation and guidance for shipping skill sets, which are essential to maritime security and the global economy.

Eager Lion 2018 is a major training event in the region that provides U.S. forces and Jordan Armed Forces the opportunity to improve their collective ability to plan and operate in a coalition-type environment through scenarios that span from a long-range bomber mission to maritime security operations to a ground force attack of a fictitious adversary.

- Lucky Mariner-18 Annual Exercise Concludes:** 16 APR. U.S. Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT), representatives from Naval Cooperation and Guidance for Shipping (NCGS) and the commercial shipping industry completed exercise Lucky Mariner which is an annual exercise led by NAVCENT, focusing on NCGS skill sets employed against threats to shipping, deconflicting military operations with commercial shipping and maintaining the free flow of commerce in Arabian Sea. The twenty-one day exercise practiced the coordination and mobilization of NCGS and the commercial shipping industry, providing Fleet Commanders assistance in risk management by providing situational awareness and real-time interpretation of the merchant shipping landscape. NCGS also assists in the safe passage of merchant vessels during times of crisis or contingency. (US 5th Fleet)
- Eager Lion Exercise Begins (16-26 April 2018):** 16 APR. The military exercise, Eager Lion 2018 between Jordan and US Armed forces in Gulf of Aqaba has begun with the participation of the amphibious assault ship USS Iwo Jima, the dock landing ship USS Oak Hill and Jordanian assets. Totally 7000 personnel from Army, Navy, Marine and Air Force have participated in the exercise and 3300 of them are from US Armed Forces. Eager Lion 2018 is designed to exchange military expertise and improve interoperability between US and Jordan Armed Forces. This is the eighth iteration of the exercise and this year's version aims at improving operational coordination between JAF and the US army, training on fighting terrorism and border security, evacuation processes and crisis management. (Jordan Times)



Black Sea CRISIS WATCH

(16-22 APR 18)



Assessment:

Aegis Ballistic Missile system is a defence and deterrence systems not only to threats coming from Iran, North Korea and non-state actors, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon but also and mainly against Russia. The corresponding steps of Russia's effort to deploy S-400/S-300 systems to Crimea, Syria and even her new flirt Turkey may be echoing sound of the upcoming new colder era.

Assad's children summer camp is a non-surprising event of two countries standing in the same camp against western powers of US, NATO and EU.

Russians modernisation issue is a challenging one to deal with, and maybe one of the significant reason not to keep the giant Russian Naval power of the cold war era, since building and maintaining Navy needs enormous amount of energy sources and money. Nevertheless, history and geopolitical realities show that if you want to be a Super/Hegemonic Power you should have an excellent navy in the hand.

3. **Russia's Shipbuilding Program: Postponed Blue-Water Ambitions:** 18 April 2018. Russia's shipbuilding program for 2011–2020, under which the country plans to build over 100 new warships (Military Paritet, February 7, 2012), is reportedly causing "a very bad feeling" among some Russian naval experts (Topwar.ru, August 10, 2016). They describe the current status of the Russian Navy as a "ceremonial fleet" and have suggested that one third of the shipbuilding program has resulted in little more than a "donut hole" (Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie, December 22, 2017; March 3, 2018). The ongoing production difficulties appear linked to insufficient naval shipbuilding capacity and a problematic manufacturing process. Moscow is also trying to build new naval vessels at shipyards in illegally annexed Crimea. Three Karakurt-class corvettes have already been laid down in the More shipyard (TASS, December 19, 2017). Several of these vessels are planned to be built at the Zaliv shipyard as well. But likely, those corvettes will not be commissioned before the end of 2020. Russia's naval construction program continues to suffer from multiple problems, including the shortage or obsolescence of Russian shipbuilding facilities, financial and management problems, as well as technological flaws and lack of access to foreign components—notably Ukrainian-made engines. As a result, a serious gap exists between planned and expected warships. Up to 2020, Russia is likely to operate 5 out of 20 new nuclear submarines, 9 of 20 frigates, 4 of 14 small missile ships, 16–18 out of 41 corvettes and patrol ships, 1 of 6 amphibious ships, 2 minesweepers, and 14 out of 14 fast boats. Such limited numbers of new ocean-going vessels, problems with modernizing older ships (Vz.ru, February 26, 2018), along with reductions to military expenditures (Wek.ru, March 27) may compel Moscow to postpone its blue-water ambitions. Nonetheless, several hundred more long-range cruise and anti-ship missiles deployed to its forthcoming small naval platforms will still likely increase security threats to littoral countries within Russia's neighborhood. (Jamestown)

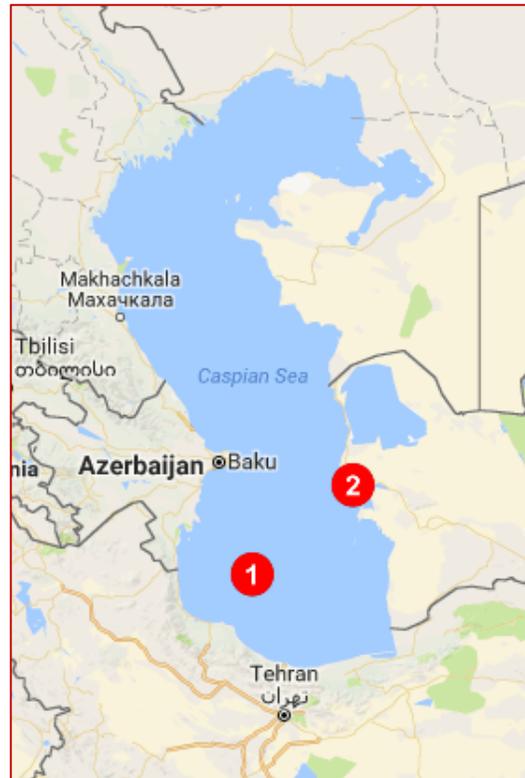
1. **Aegis Ashore Program Focused on Rogue States, Not Russia:** 19 April 2018. With Aegis Ashore ballistic missile defense systems set to operate in Poland by the end of the year and currently active in Romania, all NATO members will be covered against Iran and North Korea's ballistic missile threats, the Romanian ambassador to the U.S. said on 18 April. George Cristian Maior said the need for such new defense and deterrence systems reflects "the overall negative developments" that alliance members saw coming from Iran's growing missile threat. He said Aegis Ashore "provides credible deterrence and defense" against ballistic missiles coming from Iran, North Korea and non-state actors, such as Hezbollah in Lebanon. The two installations "prove NATO is capable of adapting to [changing] threats." It also demonstrates how Europe and the United States work together for the common defense. Before the system became operational in his country in May 2016, NATO's eastern and southern flanks were vulnerable to missile attack from an increasingly aggressive Iran. Maior stressed several times in his formal remarks at the Heritage Foundation and in answer to questions that the Aegis Ashore installations were, "purely defensive." (USNI)

2. **Rare glimpse of Assad family ties to Russia in kids' stay at seaside camp:** 19 April 2018. News that Russia hosted the teenage children of Bashar al-Assad at a lavishly-rebuilt Black Sea summer camp in Crimea last year has given a rare glimpse into the personal lives of the Syrian president's family and his close relationship to Moscow. Nestled on the Crimean coast since 1925, the Artek Seaside camp served for decades as an elite summer holiday resort for children of those favored by the Soviet Communist Party and foreign delegations invited from its satellite states. Russia has given the camp a \$180 million renovation since seizing the Crimea peninsula from Ukraine in 2014. Guests stay in newly-built dormitories by the sea. That Assad's sons Hafez and Karim and daughter Zein had stayed there last year with a group of other Syrian children was made public only this week, when a Russian lawmaker on a delegation to Damascus said Assad had mentioned it. Alexei Kasprzhak, the resort's director, told Reuters (Reuters)



Caspian Sea CRISIS WATCH

(16-22 APR 18)



2. Turkmenistan preparing for opening ceremony of int'l sea port: 15 April 2018. The opening of a new international sea port in the Caspian coast of Turkmenbashi is scheduled for May 2, 2018, the Turkmen government said in a message.

This issue was discussed at the Turkmen government's meeting. The composition of the organizational commission has been approved and the program of the event has been prepared.

Turkmenistan's President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov said at the government's meeting that the country, which is located at an important crossroads of regional and continental transport routes, strives to realize the potential for the common good in this sphere, to make a significant contribution to the formation of a modern multimodal transit-transport and logistics infrastructure and to the revival of the Great Silk Road in a new quality. (Azernews)

1. ORG's studies on Caspian Sea oil, gas reserves promising:
NIOC : 22 April 2018. Norway's ORG Company's result of studies on four blocks in the Caspian Sea is promising for extraction of oil and gas reserves, according to Gholamreza Manouchehri, the deputy for development and engineering at the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC).

ORG submitted the result of its studies related to Sardar Jangal and three other exploration blocks (24, 26 and 29) to the NIOC on Saturday.

ORG and NIOC signed a memorandum of understanding on November 1, 2017 on conducting studies on the blocks and the Norwegian company offered the results in less than the projected 6-month deadline to the Iranian company.

Addressing the meeting on submitting the study results, Manouchehri underlined ORG's experiences in deep-water drilling and cooperation with international energy majors in various projects, adding this would pave the way for technology transfer to Iranian companies.

While extraction of oil and gas from the Caspian deposits requires high technology and huge investment as it needs deep-water drilling, it seems to create an opportunity for Iran to achieve such know-how. (tehrantimes)

Assessment:

- The Caspian sea is an strategic area which has abundance of energy resources. The sea contains large volumes of oil and natural gas reserves(Almost 50 billion barrels of oil and 9 trillion cubic meters gas) both in offshore deposits and in onshore fields in the immediate region. Due to high cost of drill in deep waters and high tech. requirement, Iran couldn't achieve to find oil/gas but as the oil/gas prices go up. the high tech. oil companies` interest in Caspian sea has been increasing everyday.
- Turkmenistan is an crucial country at Caspian Sea area, but due to Russia and Iran`s pressure she can`t make a deal with Azerbaijan to build Trans-Caspian natural gas pipeline. On the other hand, this int. sea port will make a positive contribution to the economy of country.