The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Ukraine Accuses Russia of Shutting Off Black Sea Access, Harassing Ships

April 16, 2021



Ukraine claims that Russia will close parts of the Black Sea toward the Kerch Strait, which connects southern Russia to annexed Crimea. **EPA / TASS**

Russia has shut off access to the Black Sea and is harassing Ukrainian warships amid Moscow's wider military buildup in the area, Ukraine said Thursday.

Ukraine's foreign ministry said in a statement that Russia will close from next week until October parts of the Black Sea toward the narrow Kerch Strait, which connects southern Russia to annexed Crimea, for military drills.

Related article: Growing Russia-Ukraine Tensions: A Timeline

"Russia's actions are another attempt in violation of the norms and principles of international law to usurp Ukraine's sovereign rights as a coastal state," it said.

Moscow has not yet commented on either claims of closures or obstructions.

Russia is able to control access between the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov with a recently built bridge that straddles the Kerch Strait. Tensions escalated there in 2018-19 after Russia parked a giant cargo ship under the bridge and captured three Ukrainian naval ships, wounding several sailors.

Also on Thursday, Ukraine's military accused Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) boats of attempting to block its vessels.

"Russian FSB boats once again attempted to obstruct the legitimate actions of the Ukrainian Navy's boat group on combat duty tonight," it said.

"Despite the Russians' provocations and the targeted actions, the Ukrainian Navy submarine tactical group continued to perform its tasks."

The United States' Mission to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe on Friday condemned Russia's "most recent provocation" with the reported restrictions on maritime traffic.

"Russia's continued occupation and militarization of the Crimean Peninsula has implications far beyond Ukraine's borders; it threatens Transatlantic security," Chargé d'Affaires Courtney Austrian said.

Related article: U.S. Cancels Black Sea Deployment of 2 Warships – Turkey

Russia said it has deployed several armies and airborne units near the Ukrainian border for two-week readiness exercises in response to NATO's threatening activities on its border.

The Russian military, which this week transferred 15 Caspian Flotilla warships to waters off Ukraine, announced some 4,000 drills throughout the month of April for so-called "winter period control checks."

The deployments come amid renewed deadly incidents between Ukraine's government forces and pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine.

The reported Kerch Strait closures come on the day that the U.S. Navy canceled this week's planned deployment of its USS Roosevelt and USS Donald Cook destroyers to the Black Sea. Observers had linked Washington's since-canceled move to a show of solidarity with Kiev.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2021/04/16/ukraine-accuses-russia-of-shutting-off-black-sea-access-harassing-ships-a73616