

Anglo-American Tripwire Traps Russian Bear

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The Russian President Vladimir Putin has stated in black and white during a nationally telecast interview on June 30 that the [mysterious incident](#) a week earlier involving a British guided missile destroyer HMS Defender off Crimea in the Black Sea was an act of ‘provocation’. Putin called it an Anglo-American operation.

In Putin’s words,

“This is, of course, a provocation, which is absolutely clear. What did these provocateurs want to show and what goals did they seek to achieve? First of all, it [the provocation] was comprehensive and was staged not only by the British but also by the Americans because the British warship ventured into our territorial waters in the afternoon while early in the morning, at 07:30, a US strategic reconnaissance plane took off from a NATO airfield in Greece, from Crete, I believe. I later received a report on that. We saw and observed it clearly.”

Putin added,

“It was obvious that the destroyer intruded in pursuit of military aims, trying to find out with the help of a reconnaissance plane what our armed forces’ countermeasures to this sort of provocations might be, to see what facilities are activated, where they are located and how they work. We did see that and knew that, so we disclosed only the information that we found appropriate. Possibly, I’ve blabbed out a secret, my apologies to the military.”

Putin spoke with deliberation one full week after the incident of June 23. He probably wouldn’t have spoken if the Deep State in the UK and US hadn’t needed him and made him look ‘weak’. The Deep State forced him to speak up. [read more](#)

According to the Britain’s Daily Telegraph, the decision to allow HMS Defender to pass near Crimea was made at the highest level of British government by Prime Minister Boris Johnson. It is improbable that US President Joe Biden was kept in the dark, considering that the provocation was planned against the backdrop of a US-led massive military exercise in the Black Sea with the participation of many NATO countries currently under way, which [Moscow says](#) is ‘is provocative muscle flexing... conveys an obvious anti-Russian message’ and was

“coordinated’ with the incident involving the British destroyer’ — ‘a clear indication NATO is pushing ahead with its aggressive policy towards Russia.’

Three days before Putin spoke, London cooked up a melodramatic event of ‘classified’ British defence documents containing details about HMS Defender having been ‘found’ in a ‘in a soggy heap behind a bus stop’ in Kent in southern England, which apparently disclosed — per the BBC who had the exclusive right to propagate the information — that the warship’s transit ‘close to the south-west tip of Crimea’ was indeed an audacious act ‘conducted in the expectation that the Kremlin might respond aggressively.’ [read more](#)

The Brits literally mocked at the Kremlin. The episode was staged, in other words, to expose that the Kremlin bark actually has no bite — that Moscow lacks the grit to take on a NATO power militarily.

On the contrary, Putin disagrees. He saw a ‘political component’ in the entire episode, which didn’t exactly ‘put the world on the brink of a global war’. He paid back in the same coin, claiming that even if Russia had sunk the British warship, ‘those who did this’ wouldn’t have gone to war as they’d know ‘they could not win a war like that’ against Russia.

Putin thinks that the provocation aimed at ‘emphasising that these people do not respect the Crimeans’ choice to join the Russian Federation.’ This puts Moscow in a dilemma in terms of international law — akin to what Beijing faces in the South China Sea.

The fact is, the international community at large does not recognise Russia’s annexation of Crimea. A centerpiece of modern international law is that territory changes hands between states only by consent. Of course, Russia is a veto-holding Permanent Member of the UN Security Council and a thermonuclear power and the international community’s response to the Russian annexation of Crimea has been muted.

The international law has no policeman. Nonetheless, arguably, if Russia had used force to sink the British vessel or board the warship, it would have amounted to an act of war with profound consequences. [read more](#)

This issue is not ending here. The Kremlin senses that Washington and London have fired the opening shot to test the Russian resolve. It is like poking the bear in its den. Quite obviously, as if in anticipation of shape things to come, in a [presidential decree](#) [in Russian] published on the Kremlin’s website on July 1, Putin has allowed the Russian military to block the territories and waters around protected facilities to stop attempts of illegal infiltration.

Interestingly, the explanatory note to the document says that the Russian National Guard protects the waters of the Kerch Strait, the bridge over it and the water area around the Russian power grid link with Crimea.



Map of Sea of Azov, Kerch Strait and the Crimean Peninsula

In addition, the decree provides legal underpinning for Russian armed forces to cordon these areas during attempts of 'illegal crossing and infiltration' into the surrounding water area and attempts to leave it. This has come exactly a week after the the British destroyer HMS Defender allegedly entered the 'Russian territorial waters' in the Black Sea. The British position is that the destroyer made a peaceful passage through Ukraine's territorial waters in accordance with international law and there were no warning shots fired.

Thus, Russia has de facto taken control of the Kerch Strait via domestic legislation. Whereas, the Kerch Strait is jointly controlled by Russia and Ukraine under a 2003 treaty. With the presidential decree, Moscow will henceforth control all access to the Sea of Azov (which is an inland sea under international law with passage to the Atlantic Ocean going through the Black, Marmara, Aegean and Mediterranean seas.)

To be sure, a new flashpoint has appeared due to Moscow's escalation, as the economic lifeline of Mariupol, a crucial Ukrainian industrial port city with a population of around 500,000 located on the shore of the Sea of Azov turns into a choke point. The Kerch Strait is of crucial importance for the export of grain and steel from Ukraine.

Putin has flagged that if any repetition of of the July 23 provocation will be duly dealt with, but Russian reaction may be 'asymmetrical'. This latest decree could be a telling example of the new thinking. The international community will not accept that Moscow has created another fait accompli in the Ukraine dossier but cannot do much about it, either. [read more](#)

It is entirely conceivable that the plot to poke the bear in its den would have been a grand design of British ingenuity aimed at ensuring that the EU's sanctions against Russia over Ukraine since 2014 will remain indefinitely pending a settlement of the Crimea question. Trust post-Brexit UK to continue to set the EU's agenda.

The big question is, what did Putin gain out of the Geneva summit? His acolytes hailed that he 'won'. But it appears Biden walked away laughing. The fact of the matter is that the high-level decision in Washington and London to needle the Kremlin could have been taken either in the run-up to the Geneva summit or in its immediate downstream. Either way, it defines the summit.

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