

Black Ops in the Black Sea

By [Craig Murray](#)

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Sometimes it is worth stating the obvious. The United Kingdom does not have a coast in the Black Sea. British warships are not infesting the Black Sea out of a peaceful intent, and there is no cause for them to be entering disputed waters close to anybody's coast. This is not a question of freedom of navigation under the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea. There is nowhere that a British warship can be heading from the UK under the right of innocent passage that would require it to pass through coastal waters by Crimea. The Black Sea is famously a cul-de-sac.

There is certainly a right to pass to the Ukrainian port of Odessa – but that in now way requires passing close to Crimea. This is therefore not “innocent passage”. There is a right of passage through the Kerch strait, which Russia has to date respected. Russia has not just a right but a duty to enforce sea lanes for safe navigation through the strait, exactly as the UK does off Dover.

I expect we will now be in for a mad frenzy of Russophobia, yet again. I shall comment further once I have more details of why and exactly where Russia was firing warning shots. But just remember this, it was not Russian warships near the British coast, it was British warships in an area where they had no business other than ludicrous, British nationalist, sabre-rattling.

The UK needs to lose its imperial delusions. Sending gunboats to the Crimea is as mad as – well, sailing an aircraft carrier expressly to threaten the Chinese. There are those who see this activity as evidence of the UK's continued great power status. I see it as evidence of lunacy.

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