"Russia's Lake": The Black Sea Fleet vs. the New Ukraine-Turkey Naval Coalition

Kiev and Ankara have become official military partners

By Svytavoslav Knyazev
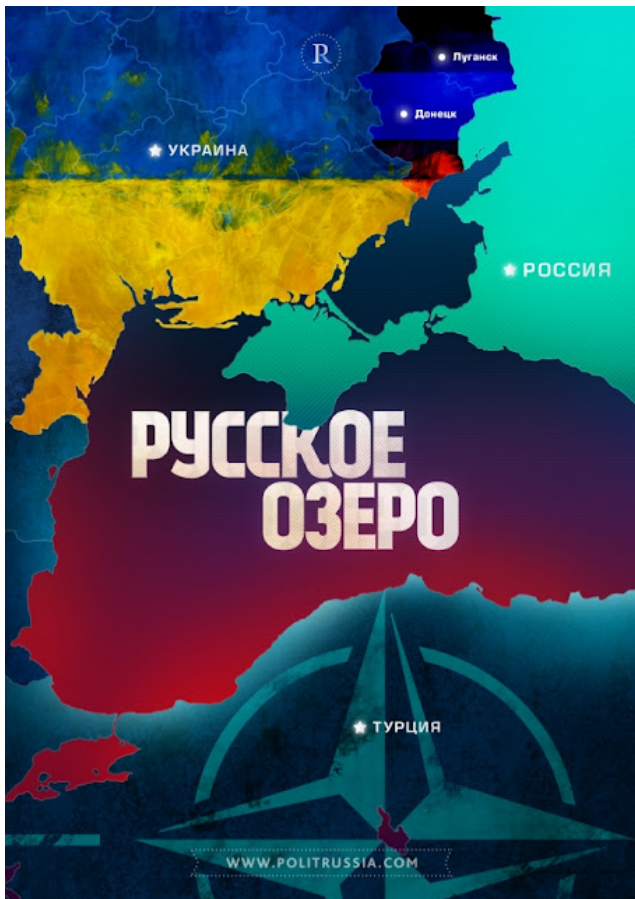Global Research, May 20, 2016
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On May 17th, 2016, news agencies reported the quite interesting news that Kiev and Ankara have become official military partners. The Implementation Plan of Military Cooperation has been signed between the armed forces of Turkey and Ukraine which defines the direction and scope of cooperation until 2020. The document deals with general as well as rather specific problems and issues in the sphere of defense planning, advisory and consultative assistance, and cooperation between their armed forces in general and individual sectors in particular.

Kiev has stressed that cooperation with Turkish military is a step in the direction of "NATO integration." Experts say that this is not so much about Ukraine preparing to join the alliance as it is about NATO's "supervision" of Ukraine's armed forces through the medium of the Turkish military. In the coming months, in addition to the conventional "Sea Breeze" exercises in a "Ukraine-NATO" format (to be held in the Odessa and Nikolaev regions), Ukrainian-Turkish naval maneuvers will be organized in the Black Sea after which both countries plan to switch to joint patrols along their costal zones.

As far as is known, this could be a dress rehearsal for the activities of a future NATO Black Sea fleet, the creation of which is planned to be discussed on July 8th-9th at the alliance's summit in Warsaw. The Black Sea member states of NATO and their Ukrainian and Georgian partners have supported the idea.

Following the formal approval of such a project, the American, German, Italian, and Turkish navies' ships and aircraft will join the ranks of such a feet along with Ukraine and Georgia's participation. All of this will, to put it mildly, cause a disturbance at Russia's borders.

If an examination is made of those who have already joined the "Maritime Alliance" which has a clearly anti-Russian character, then from the point of view of arms the only existing threat to Russia is presented by Turkish forces.

Ukraine: one frigate and a lot of junk

Ukraine's naval forces formally consist of 17 combat ships, but, judging by media reports, only the "Hetman Sadaydachny" frigate and a few boats are combat-capable. Ukraine's naval aviation is essentially a fiction, represented by but a few obsolete planes and helicopters based in the village of Chornobaevka near Kherson. The Ukrainian coast guard exists mainly on paper. The only real force of the Ukrainian navy are the marines and special forces. There is a brigade of marines from Nikolaev actually serving in Mariupol, and there's the 73rd marine center for special operations of the Ukrainian navy (in the city of Ochakov) and the 801st separate detachment for combatting underwater saboteur forces (based in Nikolaev).

Ukraine has one naval base in Odessa and two anchor points in Nikolaev and Ochakov. But even the existing, modest fleet can't really make it anywhere. All comfortable places in the waters of Odessa are occupied by commercial projects while Nikolaev and Ochakov are on the Dneproburgsky estuary from which it is a long and difficult process for ships to

disembark which, moreover, if so desired, could be easily blocked.

In theory, there is a base for reviving military shipbuilding in Ukraine in Nikolaev, where there was the largest shipbuilding complex in the former Soviet Union that, in fact, was the only one capable of producing aircraft carriers. There are two shipbuilding enterprises in Kherson and Kiev, but for 25 years the factories have been plundered and no new cadre have been prepared for them, while the old ones have immigrated around the world.

The leadership of the Ukrainian Navy, however, threatens to revive the Ukrainian shipbuilding industry and put into operation 66 ships before 2020, but this is a fantasy which has nothing in common with reality. In order to realize these ambitions, more sums of money are needed than exist in the entire budget of the Ukrainian state.

Turkey: a powerful but scattered navy

Everything is more complicated in Turkey's case. Turkey boasts 16 frigates, 8 corvettes, and 14 submarines plus a marine corps and navy seals. Such a force is a delight for the enemies of Russia, but here we should make a few important points.

Firstly, comparing the entire fleet of Turkey with the Black Sea fleet of the Russian Federation is wrong. The Turkish navy is divided into the northern and southern naval zones: the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. A large part of the Turkish navy's bases are located away from the waters of the Black Sea and are far behind the rear of Ankara. The bad relations between Turkey and Greece, Cyprus, Egypt, and Syria, the sea flows of migrants, and Russian ships in the Mediterranean Sea are not going anywhere. Ankara thus can't afford to radically strengthen the Black Sea zone.

Secondly, Turkey has nothing in the sea comparable to the Russian "Moscow" missile cruiser.

Thirdly, Ankara's naval aviation is only in an "alright" state of existence while its air force is magnitudes weaker than that of the Russian Federation.

Yet the Ukrainian-Turkish alliance has enough to make trouble for Russia. Kiev can share positions and infrastructure with its new allies as well all of those involved in the NATO fleet.

In particular, for the sake of pleasing their masters and annoying Russia, Kiev could send civilian ships out of Odessa to provide cover for radar and missile systems in the area which are located in the immediate vicinity of Crimea, southern Kherson, and the Zmeiny island. Russia would have little to rejoice about this.

Crimea: an impregnable fortress

In view of existing and emerging potential threats, Russia is now rapidly strengthening the defenses of the Crimean Peninsula. In 2015, the Black Sea fleet added approximately 200 units of military equipment, including 40 ships, 30 aircraft (multi-role SU-30SM's), and Crimea was delivered more than 100 unites of modern armored vehicles. Of all the vessels deserving special attention, there are the three latest diesel-electric submarines of the 636 "Varshavyianka" project and two ships armed with "Kalibr" cruise missiles.

Such weapons are completely solid, and in the near future the strengthening of the Black Sea fleet will be continued. Moreover, Crimea is not only defended by the marine

component. The 27th combined air division is deployed on the peninsula including the deployment of Guard squadrons of long-range Tu-22 M3 bombers, and there are prospects for expanding the group to a regiment. In Dzhankoe, a separate airborne battalion is located which is also planned to convert into a regiment. Near Sevastopol, the missile-attack warning system station has been restored after being given to Ukraine in 1991 and abandoned for the last 10 years. The station just needs to obtain a centimeter range instrument in order to complement the station in Armavir which works with ultra-high frequency. This Sevastopol complex will be capable of tracking our sworn "partners'" cruise missile launches.

In addition, the coast is securely defended by the "Bastion" rocket system which allows one to destroy the ships of any enemy in most parts of the Black Sea within 10-15 minutes. It is very much so for these reasons that Erdogan called the Black Sea a "Russian lake."

It is already clear that despite the mantras of the liberals in the friendly West, peaceful Ukraine, and tranquil Turkey, no one is going to leave us be in peace. In order for Russian citizens to be safe, the good old principle of "Si vis pacem, para bellum" (If you love peace, prepare for war) must be realized in practice. This is what is being done, and properly so, in Crimea in particular.

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