

# Egypt to conduct naval drills with Russia in Black Sea

Author:

Sat, 2020-10-10 22:18

CAIRO: For the first time, Egypt will participate in joint naval drills with Russia in the Black Sea before the end of 2020, the official Russian news agency TASS reported.

To reach the Black Sea, Egypt's vessels will pass through Turkey's Bosphorus Strait. There have been tensions between the two countries since the late Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi was ousted in 2013.

In the Russian city of Novorossiysk, delegations from the Russian and Egyptian navies "held a three-day conference on preparing and holding the joint exercise Bridge of Friendship -2020," TASS reported.

During the exercises, the navies, with the support of aircraft, will train to defend sea lanes against various threats.

The exercises will include maneuvers to deploy troops and return supplies at sea, and search suspicious ships.

The navies will conduct training in all types of defense at sea, launching missiles and artillery using shipborne weapons.

TASS reported that the exercises aim to enhance naval cooperation in a way that serves security and stability at sea, and to exchange experience in fighting various threats in busy shipping lanes.

Turkey has said it intends to conduct military drills in the Black Sea on Oct. 13-16. Video footage showed the Turkish military's transfer of Russian S-400 air defense systems to Samsun province on the Black Sea coast.

Mohamed Soliman, a researcher at the Washington-based Middle East Institute for Political Studies, said this is the first time that Egypt will send military vessels to the Black Sea. He added that this sends a message to Turkey.

This view was echoed by Egyptian military expert Nabil Muharram, who said Cairo wants to send a message that its navy is present to create balance in the region and is ready to defend Egypt's interests. Muharram added that Egypt's navy has had strong relations with Russia's since the 1950s.

Ayman Salama, a member of the Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs, said his country's participation in the drills comes at an important time amid tensions in the Mediterranean due to Turkish efforts to control energy resources.

He added that the strengthening of Egyptian-Russian strategic relations is a

source of concern for Ankara, whose relationship with Moscow has deteriorated due to Turkish interventions in Libya and the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict.

Moussa Mostafa Moussa, head of Egypt's Al-Ghad Party and a former presidential candidate, said Russia wants to send a strong message to Ankara against its interference in Kyrgyzstan and the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Egypt – Russia military drill](#)

Russia sponsors Nagorno-Karabakh cease-fire talks  
Egypt begins trial of ex-student in case fueling #MeToo wave

---

## [Aden seaport authorities demand hire charge before dumping fertilizers](#)

Author:

Sat, 2020-10-10 21:32

AL-MUKALLA: Seaport authorities in Aden continue to store urea fertilizer despite an order to dump the hazardous material, government officials said Saturday.

In August, a committee assigned by Yemen's attorney general to investigate reports of thousands of tons of ammonium nitrate being stored at the port found that the material was in fact a different fertilizer, urea. It ordered the seaport authority to get rid of it as it could explode if mixed with other materials.

The investigation followed a media report about ammonium nitrate gathering dust at the port that could cause a massive explosion, similar to the one that ravaged Beirut on Aug. 4.

The story caused uproar and panic in Yemen, prompting lawmakers, government officials and the public into demanding a quick investigation.

When asked why the judiciary order had not been followed, Mohammed Amzrabe, chairman of the Yemen Gulf of Aden Ports Corporation, told Arab News that the case was in court, without giving further details.

But, according to two local government officials familiar with knowledge of the case, seaport authorities are demanding that a local trader who imported the materials pay hundreds of thousands of dollars in hire charge for storing the urea.

"The seaport authorities seek a financial settlement with the trader," one of the officials, who requested anonymity, told Arab News. "The materials have expired and no longer pose a threat to anyone."

The Saudi-led Arab coalition and the internationally recognized government have asked local traders to get permission before importing urea fertilizer, widely seen as an explosive material that could be used by the Houthis for military purposes.

Last month, a busted arms ring that had supplied the Houthis with weapons from Iran confessed to importing tons of urea fertilizer for the rebels.

There has been fighting between government forces and the Houthis in the northern provinces of Jouf and Marib and the western province of Hodeidah for the second consecutive week, leaving dozens dead on both sides.

Yemen's Defense Ministry said on Friday that coalition warplanes targeted a gathering of Houthi fighters in Marib, killing dozens of rebels and destroying vehicles. The rebels had been heading to battlefields in the province as reinforcement.

Coalition warplanes also hit Houthi military forces and equipment in Marib's Serwah district.

Army troops and allied tribesmen on Friday announced seizing control of new areas in Khab and Sha'af district in Jouf, days after securing a strategic military base and neighboring areas.

Backed by coalition air support, government troops in Jouf have been pushing forward to recapture Hazem, the provincial capital that fell to the Houthis in March.

Fighting subsided in Hodeidah on Saturday, days after government forces foiled Houthi attacks in Hays and Al-Durihimi districts and in contested districts in Hodeidah city.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Aden](#)

[Aden seaport](#)

Yemen sides meet to discuss Hodeidah on a ship335 Yemenis receive treatment at KSRelief prosthetic center in Aden

---

## [Three dead as forest fires burn in Syria, Lebanon](#)

Author:

AFP

ID:

1602354335369271200

Sat, 2020-10-10 18:17

DAMASCUS: Forest fires in Syria and neighboring Lebanon have killed three people and burned swathes of land since Thursday, state media and officials said.

Syrian state television on Saturday morning broadcast scenes from the affected areas, where firefighters were working to extinguish the blazes. It said hundreds of hectares had burned in the countryside of Syria's coastal Latakia and Tartus provinces, and in the central Homs province.

The health ministry said three people had died in Latakia province since Friday as a result of the fires, and that 70 people were taken to hospital suffering breathing difficulties.

Dozens of fires were burning, including "45 in Latakia and 33 in Tartus," Syria's Agriculture Minister Mohammed Hassan Qatana told a radio station late Friday.

The Latakia fire brigade said they were "facing the largest series of fires seen in Latakia province in years."

Official news agency SANA said fire burned homes in Baniyas, in Tartus province.

In neighboring Lebanon, there have been more than 100 fires across the country since Thursday, according to George Abu Musa, head of operations for the country's civil defense.

"The situation is crazy, there are fires everywhere," Abu Musa told AFP.

"We have mobilized 80 percent of our personnel and almost all our centers in Lebanon," he said.

He said most of the blazes had been extinguished but some were still burning in the mountainous Chouf region in the south, and in Akkar in the north.

Military helicopters were assisting firefighters in "hard-to-reach" areas, he added.

Abu Musa was unable to identify the cause of the blazes, but said wind and high temperatures were helping them spread.

On Friday, authorities reported several fires across northern and central Israel and the occupied West Bank as temperatures soared, forcing thousands to evacuate.

Dozens of fires hit Lebanon in mid-October last year, amid unusually high temperatures and strong winds.

The government faced heavy criticism and accusations of ill-preparedness over its response to the 2019 blazes.

Days after Lebanon's 2019 fires, mass protests broke out, triggered by proposed tax hikes but quickly transforming into months-long demonstrations against the ruling class, deemed by protesters as inept and corrupt.





Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Syria](#)

[Lebanon](#)

Lebanon registers sharp rise in number of COVID-19 cases  
Syrian victims of chemical attacks file case with German prosecutors

---

## [Crackdown on Turkey's pro-Kurdish party raises concerns among opposition](#)

Fri, 2020-10-09 22:36

ANKARA: The latest crackdown on Turkey's pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) has raised concerns about the government's underlying motives and the risk posed to opposition parties.

Four members of the HDP – including Sevin Alaca, the co-mayor of the eastern province of Kars – were arrested on Oct. 8 in relation to protests in 2014, bringing the number of recent arrests over the incident to 16.

Those arrested are accused of encouraging anti-government protests in

southeastern provinces in October 2014 in reaction to the Daesh siege of Syria's mainly Kurdish border town of Kobane. Demonstrators allegedly claimed that the Turkish government failed to protect Kobane against Daesh.

Some view the recent arrests as an attempt by Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) to weaken the HDP, which gained 13 percent of the votes in the last general elections.

Talking to Halk TV on Oct. 7, HDP's co-chairman Mithat Sancar claimed that the political cost to the government of shutting down the HDP would be too great, but that it is trying to ensure the party cannot function properly.

"The Constitutional Court has been under more and more pressure in recent days and it is being threatened," he said. "Thus, we would not be surprised by the closure of the HDP. But the government does not want to take this path for now because this would have a political cost and would trigger reactions from both global and domestic spheres. That is why the government can adopt a less costly method by making the party a de facto ineffective one."

Berk Esen, a political analyst from Sabanci University in Istanbul, told Arab News there are several reasons why the government would not simply close down the HDP, the main one being that it does not want to create a precedent for party bans, which have hurt the Islamist movement in the past. In 2008, the AKP was on trial and threatened with closure, and its leaders have always promised to oppose banning political parties.

Banning a party would likely incur a severe backlash against the Turkish government from the European Union, Esen added. A committee from Sweden's Left Party, including its chairman, paid a visit to the HDP headquarters in Ankara on Oct. 6 and expressed concerns about the silencing of the HDP, which they considered "a big loss" for the country.

"Keeping the HDP open but severely weakened allows the government to retain the image of a democratic regime in Turkey, even though the political system no longer satisfies even the minimal democratic requirements," Esen said.

Esen added that the HDP also serves as a rallying point for the alliance of the ruling party and its partner, the far-right Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) and helps to keep ultra-nationalist voters behind President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's administration.

"Moreover, the government does not need to close down the party to limit its operations. It has already appointed caretaker administrators to most HDP-controlled municipalities and arrested hundreds of party officials, including its former leader," he said.

In the 2019 local elections, the HDP – Turkey's third-largest party – won 65 municipalities throughout the country, but only six of its 65 mayors remain in office, with the rest removed under terror-related charges and their positions taken up by government-appointed bureaucrats.

"The HDP has taken a huge hit from the government's crackdown and faces enormous organizational challenges in the months ahead. At this point, its

resistance remains primarily at the ballot box, where its loyal voters continue to support it," Esen said.

For Sinem Adar, an associate at the Center for Applied Turkey Studies (CATS) in the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, the latest crackdown on the HDP matches a general trend that has been apparent since Turkey's June 2015 elections: A systematic attack on Kurdish political representation by Erdogan's party and the MHP.

"This trend has included a variety of methods, such as the removal of parliamentary immunity from Kurdish MPs, their criminalization and systematic exclusion from political processes, and – last but not least – the replacement of elected mayors by government-appointed trustees," she told Arab News.

"Nationalist factions within the security apparatus became a part of this trend after the failed coup attempt in 2016. In light of the developments in Northern Syria, with Turkish military interventions, the ruling class is determined to suppress Kurdish political representation and participation," she continued.

There are widespread concerns among other opposition parties, too, that what happened to the HDP might also happen to them.

"We need to stand up against all injustices, regardless of which party, who is experiencing them," Hasan Subasi, a lawmaker from IYI (Good) Party said on Oct. 6 during a televised speech, adding that a Turkish parliament without the HDP would not represent Turkey and would be "anti-democratic."

According to Adar, violating the political rights of the members of the HDP is a tactic that the government has been using to drive a wedge between the HDP and the opposition parties, particularly the main opposition party, the Republican People's Party (CHP). "After all, the March 2019 elections have clearly shown that the Kurds have become king-makers," she said.

Adar said the crackdown could also be part of the government's divide-and-conquer tactics when it comes to the CHP itself.

"The CHP is known to include various factions that might not necessarily agree with one another on how the Kurdish question should be addressed. The systematic suppression of the HDP can also be a means to (stoke) existing differences within the CHP," she said.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Turkish Kurds](#)

[syrian kurds](#)

Turkish opposition renews attacks on Erdogan for offshore dealings  
Turkish opposition hits COVID-19 donation campaign's lack of transparency

---

## [Iranian diplomat warned of retaliation over Belgian bomb plot trial](#)

Author:

Fri, 2020-10-09 23:03

PARIS: An Iranian diplomat charged in Belgium with planning to bomb a meeting of an exiled Iranian opposition group in France warned authorities of possible retaliation by unidentified groups if he is found guilty, according to a police document.

Belgian prosecutors charged Vienna-based Assadollah Assadi in Oct. 2018 and three others with planning an attack that year on a rally of the Paris-based National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) attended by high profile former US, European and Arab officials.

Assadi, who goes on trial on Nov. 27, was the third counsellor at Iran's embassy in Vienna. French officials have said he was in charge of intelligence in southern Europe and was acting on orders from Tehran. He is one of the first Iranian diplomats to face trial on terrorism charges in the European Union.

Tehran has repeatedly dismissed the charges against Assadi, calling them a "false flag" operation by the NCRI's political arm, the MEK, (Mujahedin-e Khalq), which presents itself as an alternative to Iran's theocracy. Assadi has not commented on the charges and his lawyer has declined to comment on them.

Minutes of a March 12 meeting between Assadi and Belgian police, seen by Reuters and confirmed as authentic by his lawyer, show the diplomat initially set out Tehran's long-standing grievances with the MEK's activities in the past.

He then warned Belgian authorities that his case was being closely watched by undisclosed groups in Iran and neighbouring countries.

"According to ASSADI Assadollah we (Belgium) do not realize what is going to happen, in the event of an unfavourable verdict," the minutes, taken by the Belgian police, say.

Assadi told police that armed groups in Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen and Syria, as well as in Iran, were interested in the outcome of his case and would be "watching from the sidelines to see if Belgium would support them or not", according to the minutes.

He declined to answer when asked by police if any kind of organization was involved.

Asked about Assadi's comments, a spokesman for the Belgian federal prosecutor said: "Such threats can occur, but we always take the necessary security measures." The spokesman declined to comment further or say whether intelligence services had been informed of Assadi's statement.

Assadi said he was making the statement at his own behest and had not discussed it beforehand with the Iranian embassy, according to the record of his 31-minute encounter with police. The embassy could not immediately be reached for comment.

Assadollah's lawyer, Dimitri de Beco, denied his client was making threats. "It is absolutely not a threat of retaliation and if it's understood that way it's a misinterpretation," he told Reuters. "He will explain the sense of his remarks to the court."

Tehran accuses European states of harbouring the MEK, which it deems a terrorist organisation. The group had been based in the Iraqi capital Baghdad under former president Saddam Hussein and was on the U.S. State Department's terror list from 1997 to 2012 when it was taken off it renounced violence. A co-ordinated intelligence operation between French, German and Belgian services thwarted the planned attack in the days prior to the NCRI rally, in which the keynote speech was given by U.S. President Donald Trump's lawyer Rudy Giuliani.

Assadi was arrested while on holiday in Germany and handed over to Belgium, where two of his suspected accomplices had been arrested with 500 grams (one lb) of TATP, an explosive, as well as a detonation device.

France said Iran's intelligence ministry was behind the plot and expelled an Iranian diplomat, while the European Union froze the assets of an Iranian intelligence unit and two of its staff.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Middle East](#)

[Iran](#)

[Belgium](#)

[France](#)

[Free Iran protest movement](#)

Two years after failed bomb plot, Iranian opposition rallies backers onlineSuspects in plot to bomb Iranian opposition rally in France to be sent to Belgium