Mediterranean Sea CRISIS WATCH
(21-27 MAY 2018)

1. Nearly 1,500 migrants rescued in Mediterranean in two days 26 May. Around 1,500 migrants were rescued in the Mediterranean on Thursday and Friday in operations involving the Italian navy and ships chartered by NGOs and the EU border agency Frontex, the Italian coastguard said. In recent months the Libyan coastguard has taken responsibility for a growing number of rescue operations, subsequently returning those rescued to Libya. The new arrivals are in addition to 10,800 migrants already registered in Italy since the start of the year, according to International Organisation for Migration (IOM) figures. (tribute)

2. Spain rescues hundreds of migrants from Mediterranean 27 May. UN refugee agency calls for urgent measures amid spike in arrivals with hundreds dying en route. Spain’s maritime rescue service said its crews had rescued 293 people from nine boats on Saturday. On Sunday, a further 250 migrants were rescued from eight boats, three of which were in poor condition and later sank, they added. The migrants were from various countries in North and sub-Saharan Africa. According to statistics from the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) 21,468 migrants and refugees arrived in Spain by sea in 2017, with 224 people dying during the journeys.

3. Fifteen people die as migrant boat sinks near Greek island in Aegean Sea 17 May. Fifteen people, including at least five children, drowned on Saturday when the small boat they were travelling on capsized in the Aegean Sea, Greek coast guard officials said. The incident occurred off Greece’s Agathonisi island, which is close to the Turkish coast. The identity and nationality of the victims was not immediately known.

4. Refugees/Migrants Emergency – Europe 25 May. IOM, respected, and refugee-migrant crisis. IOM, which reported that the first 143 days of 2018, with about 38 percent arriving in both Italy and Greece, and almost all the remainder (23%) arriving in Spain, excluding 47 migrants registered as arriving in Cyprus. This compares with 60,518 arrivals across the region through the same period last year and about 193,333 at this time in 2016. Also worth noting: in the month of May arrivals to Italy rank third – trailing both Spain and Greece, which recorded nearly two and a half times more arrivals than Italy. (IOM)

5. The Battle For Energy Dominance In The Mediterranean 27 May. The recent major gas discoveries may have permanently altered the energy map of the region. If they play their cards right, Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, and Cyprus may soon go from energy importers to major exporters within a fortnight. Four of the six Eastern Mediterranean countries have seen their fortunes change overnight due to these two discoveries. Two countries, however, have been left out: Turkey and Syria. While Damascus remains united by its raging civil war, Ankara is desperate for a potential discovery. (oilprice)

6. Total wants to expand gas search off Cyprus coast 21 May. An official of French energy giant Total said on Monday that the company wants to expand its search for gas off the south coast of Cyprus. Speaking after a meeting with Cyprus President Nicos Anastasiades and Energy Minister Yiorgos Lakkotrypas, Total’s Middle East exploration chief Stephane Michel said the company has applied for an exploration license in Block 8 where Italian company Eni has already secured a license to drill. This will be the third block, after 6 and 11, where the French and Italian companies will cooperate. (ekathimerini)

7. Erdogan pushes Abbas to reconcile with Hamas 21 May. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas was hospitalized in the West Bank city of Ramallah and was unable to attend the May 18 Organisation of Islamic Cooperation summit in Istanbul. The host, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, was thus obliged to tell Palestinian Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah what he had planned to tell Abbas: that the Palestinian Authority (PA) must take an active part in saving the Gaza Strip. (al-monitor)

8. Reactions To Putin’s Announcement On Constant Kalib Cruise Missile Deployment In The Mediterranean Sea 28 May. Military Expert Sivkov “Even in case the war starts and the Americans destroy our intelligence gathering ship (operating as a part of the regiment), the ship will have enough time to pass the coordinates of aircraft carrier group to the headquarters. This is the point when Kalib missiles will be useful. (menrini)

9. Russia will maintain its naval grouping in Mediterranean 27 May. The Russian Navy will support the composition of the grouping in the Mediterranean Sea at an efficient and balanced level, the commander-in-chief of the Navy Vladimir Korolev told reporters at the ceremony of the Poltava’s launching. (almasdarnews)

10. USS Harry S. Truman arrives at Soud 23 May. Aircraft carrier USS Harry S. Truman has arrived at the US naval base in Souda Bay, Crete. The nuclear-power Nimitz-class carrier, which has been at the center of the US Navy’s strikes against the Islamic State, will remain docked in Souda until May 18. 11. Operation Sophia in Mare Aperto 21 May. Ships of Operation EUNAVFOR MED – Sophia, were involved in “Mare Aperto 18-1” (EUNAVFOR MED).
Asia Pacific CRISIS WATCH
(21-27 MAY 18)

Assessment:
The ongoing dispute centres around China’s continued presence and build-up of military infrastructure in the Spratly Islands. It is an initial response to China’s continued militarisation of the South China Sea. The US has downgraded the PLA Navy from the 2018 Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) Exercise.

It is the third time that the Chinese Navy has taken part in the biennial Komodo multilateral naval exercise. During the week-long exercise, the two Chinese warships participated in fleet review, drills of engineering civic action program (ENCAP) and medical civic action program (MEDCAP). Also, the news of the Chinese ships return from the Komodo Exercise is simultaneously that the US declared that China will not be invited to the RIMPAC exercise.

At present, Russian three Boreis, also known as Project 955s. Yuri Dolgoruky is the only one assigned to the country’s Northern Fleet, with the other two boats being part of the Pacific Fleet. It can be assessed that Borei class submarines in Pacific Fleet also have the same capability and each one can carry up to 16 Bulavas. So, the test is an important milestone for both the Borei-class and the Bulava, both of which have suffered delays and other difficulties.

Relations between Taiwan and China have worsened since Tsai took office in May 2016. Tsai and China’s People’s Liberation Army (PLA) have been conducting “biggest ever” military parade on May 19. The Chinese military parade is assessed to have increased its investments in the defense sector and has given priority.

The AWD program is a further demonstration of the important role that industry plays as a fundamental input into capability for Defence. The Royal Australian Navy’s 3rd air warfare destroyer will have an anti-missile capability added as concerns over North Korea and air threats in the region grow. The operations were part of a routine and regularly scheduled patrol. The port visits by US warships strengthen alliances, partnerships, and multilateral cooperation throughout the region. The US 7th Fleet assets provide a combat-ready force that protects and defends the collective maritime interests of its allies and partners in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region.

1. US withdraws China’s invitation to the 2018 Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) Naval Drills: 24 May. The US military had invited China to a multinational military exercise (RIMPAC) to be held this summer in the Pacific as “an initial response” to what it called “China’s continued militarisation of the South China Sea”. The US’s move comes just days after the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) Air Force disclosed that its highly advanced H-6K strategic bomber landed for the first time on an island reef in the South China Sea, which the US Defense Department immediately denounced. (Reuters)

2. Chinese naval task force returns from KOMODO 2018 multilateral exercise: 22 May. The task force, comprised of the Chinese guided missile destroyer Changsha and the guided-missile frigate Lianzhou, set sail from Sanya on April 25, and anchored in waters near Indonesia’s Lombok Island on May 3 to participate in the KOMODO 2018 multilateral naval exercise hosted by Indonesian Navy. Following the completion of exercise, the Chinese naval task force arrived at a naval port in Sanya City, South China’s Hainan Province.

3. Russia’s Borei-Class Test Fires 4 Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missiles: 23 May. Russian Ministry of Defence said that Russia’s Project 955 Borei-class strategic nuclear submarine Yuri Dolgoruky has successfully test fired four Bulava intercontinental ballistic missiles from the White Sea to hit designated targets at the Kuril range in the Far Eastern Kamchatka region. This marks the first time that a Borei-class submarine launched Bulava ballistic missile in rapid succession.

Russia has three Borei-class submarines and has been working on an improved version that is expected to be available for the Russian navy in 2019. The Russian Ministry of Defence said, “Plans are to build six additional Borei II-class (also designated Borei-A) SSBNs in addition to five already ordered, which eventually will bring up the total number of Borei-class ballistic missile sub to 14.” (TASS)

4. Taiwan reaches preliminary deal to upgrade 2 diesel-electric submarines: 25 May. The Taiwanese Ministry of National Defense announced earlier this week that it has reached an agreement with Dutch maritime systems integrator RH Marine for the upgrade of two Hai Lung-class (improved Dutch Zwaardvis-class) submarines — the Hai Lung (Sea Dragon) 793 and Hai Hu (Sea Tiger) 794 currently in service with the Republic of China Navy (ROCN). A contract is slated to be signed next year and the modernization work itself will reportedly be carried out between 2020 and 2022.

5. Australia launches 3rd air warfare destroyer: 21 May. Australia launched its third and final Air Warfare Destroyer (AWD), HMAS Sydney on May 19. The AWDs will provide air defense for accompanying ships as well as land forces and infrastructure on nearby coastal areas. They will also provide self-protection against attacking missiles and aircraft. The Aegis Weapon System incorporating the phased array radar, AN/SPY 1D(V), in combination with the SM-2 missile, will be capable of engaging enemy aircraft and missiles at ranges in excess of 150 kilometers. The AWDs will also carry a MH-60R Seahawk ‘Romeo’ naval combat helicopter. The three AWDs HMAS Hobart, HMAS Brisbane and HMAS Sydney are expected to be in service for over 30 years. (The Diplomat)

6. US Navy activities in Asia Pacific: 22 May. The replenishment oiler USNS Rappahannock (T-AO-204) conducted an underway replenishment (UNREP) with a guided-missile frigate of the Indonesian Navy at Indonesian territorial waters in the South China Sea.

22 May. The Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Mustin (DDG 99) arrived at U.S. Fleet Activities (FLEACT) Yokosuka, to become part of the Forward Deployed Naval Forces (FDRN) in Japan.

23 May. USNS Brunswick (T-EPF 6) and Royal Thai Armed Forces conducted a series of exercises centered on humanitarian assistance/disaster relief (HADR) during Pacific Partnership 2018, (CTF)

7. China opposes US warships’ entry into Chinese territorial sea: 27 May. China’s MOD has said two US warships’ entry into China’s territorial waters around the Xisha Islands in the South China Sea is serious infringement on China’s sovereignty. Wu Qian, spokesperson for the ministry mentioned that two U.S. warships, the guided missile cruiser Antietam and the destroyer Higgins, arbitrarily entered on May 27 China’s territorial waters around the Xisha Islands without permission of the Chinese government.
1. The Black Sea region: a critical intersection 25 May. Many experts believe that whoever controls or dominates the Black Sea can easily project power to the European continent, mainly in the Balkans and Central Europe, but also in the Eastern Mediterranean as well as the South Caucasus and the northern Middle East. The latest and probably most serious threats to the European security architecture, openly challenging the established world order, have occurred in the Black Sea region: Russia’s conflict with Georgia in 2008, its illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its continuing destabilising activities in eastern Ukraine. Beyond using conventional military force, Russia is playing asymmetrical means of warfare in this region, aimed at disturbing and incapacitating the nations’ sovereign decisions and their processes of democratisation and Euro-Atlantic integration. NATO

2. Volatile security situation to persist in Black Sea Extended Region: May 28. The volatile security situation in the Black Sea Extended Region, marked by the existence of conflict potential, would persist on the short and medium term, Romanian President Klaus Iohannis underscored in a message on Monday. According to the message, the regional geostrategic landscape is also influenced by a series of current threats and challenges, such as international terrorism, hybrid war, frozen conflicts, migration crisis, cyber and communications attacks, and the transnational nature of those threats to security requires the cooperation of the riparian states in the Black Sea area. “No country has the power or resources to solve on its own the complex issues the contemporary world is confronted with,” said Iohannis, voicing his support for the efforts to promote regional partnerships and initiatives devoted to identifying and efficiently approaching the security challenges the Black Sea region is confronted with.

3. Belarus interested in transport and logistics projects in Black Sea region 29 May- Belarus would like to participate in transport and logistics projects in the Black Sea region, Chairman of the Belarusian Chamber of Commerce and Industry Vladimir Uliakhovich said at the business forum, “Partnership and development of trade and economic relations largely depend on smart transport policy, proper organization of deliveries of our products and those of partners. Implementing logistic projects within the framework of international organizations presents an opportunity to minimize transportation costs, increase the goods turnover between the countries,” he said. eng.belta.by

4. Russia to commission new missile ship 30 May. The Russian Navy’s Black Sea Fleet is set to commission its new Vyshny Volochok missile ship in Sevastopol on 1 June, the Russian Ministry of Defence announced on 28 May. Vyshny Volochok is the sixth ship of the Buyan-M class under Project 21631. Built at the Zelenodolsk shipyard, the ship keel was laid on 29 August 2013 and floated out on 22 August 2016. Another five Project 21631 ships are currently under construction at the Zelenodolsk shipyard. With a displacement of about 1,000t, the ship has a maximum speed of 23kt and is able to carry more than 50 people. With an endurance of ten days without refuelling, the multipurpose ship is equipped with high-precision missile, artillery and anti-aircraft weapons, shepardmedia

5. A Counter-Sabotage Ship of the Russian Navy Headed for Syria 24 May. The anti-sabotage ship “P-433” of the Black Sea Fleet on Wednesday proceeded through the Black Sea straits to the Mediterranean Sea, heading for Syria, Istanbul Internet portals reported publishing photos of its passage through the Bosphorus. According to the Russian classification, the anti-sabotage boat of project 21980 “Grachonok” is intended for the protection of water areas of naval bases of the Russian Navy, for combating sabotage and terrorist forces and facilities in the basin water areas and close approaches to them.In addition, on Wednesday a large amphibious ship of the Russian Navy Nikolai Filchenkov entered the water area of the Mediterranean. According to the Istanbul websites, the Black Sea Fleet warship Nikolai Filchenkov goes to the Syrian port of Tartus, where the logistics base of the Russian Navy is located in the Mediterranean. maritime herald

6. Russia Will Not Disclose the Characteristics of the Nuclear Submarine-Drones “Poseidon” Russia will not publicize the characteristics of the nuclear submarine-drones “Poseidon”, which was reported by the Russian president in a message to the Federal Assembly, the head of the United Shipbuilding Corporation Alexei Rakhmanov told Interfax. “In his message, the president only hinted at some features of such devices. And this is one of the cases when a wide publicity of the characteristics of the submarine is not supposed in principle,” Rakhmanov said. In April, he said that the submarine-robot with a nuclear power plant is no longer a prototype. “Unmanned underwater vehicles can be equipped with both conventional and nuclear munitions. This will allow them to hit a wide range of targets, including carrier groups, coastal fortifications and infrastructure,” Putin said. maritime herald

Assessment: NATO sources and Romanian President emphasize the significance of Black Sea for Europe, and her importance in terms of geo-strategic landscape, as being a major crossroads and critical intersection of east-west and south-north corridors.

The influence of current threats and challenges, such as international terrorism, hybrid war, frozen conflicts, migration crisis, cyber and communications attacks, and the transnational nature of those threats are highlighted in order promote the need for cooperation of the coastal states in the Black Sea area.

With her close political stance to Russia, Belarus is also mentioned her interest in the Black Sea region, in relation to transport and logistics issues, pointing out the importance of Black Sea is the most cost-effective and beneficial for the international transportation of goods as a crucial sea route.

Russia tries to seal her presence in the region by commissioning new ships and inventing and publicizing new weapons, besides continuing deployments in East Mediterranean by Black Sea assets.
Caspian Sea CRISIS WATCH  
(21-27 MAY 18)

As there is an expectation highlighted for the hope that the legal status of Caspian Sea to be resolved in the upcoming Astana Meeting at the end of this summer, and the agreement of working group on related several documents this week paved the way on this route. On the other hand, we should not forget that Russian and Iranian sides will not be happy unless they get the best out of it. Their stance against Trans-Caspian Pipeline and occasional statements on the risks of unbalancing the stability of the region can be perceived as a show of stick under the table to convince the stakeholders in the solutions that favour their provisions at the end.

Leading The Maritime Safety Conference in Tehran to promote regional maritime safety and stability in the Caspian Sea and attempts to strengthen bilateral ties with coastal states such as Turkmenistan in the region can be read as Iranian Policy to reinforce her position among the neighbours and on the discussion tables.

On the other side of the chessboard, the third Trans-Caspian Forum is summoned in Washington DC to prosper the relations and projects between the U.S. and seven trans-Caspian corridor countries. Such activities are means that shows that the Caspian Sea is an arena of global powers besides local actors with its internal natural sources and strategic position for the transportation of internal and external products.

4. Iran works to untangle relations with Turkmenistan
Tehran May 23– Issues looming over Iran-Turkmenistan’s economic relations were discussed at Monday’s session of the Iranian Parliament National Security and Foreign Policy Commission, said the commission’s spokesman today. Hossein Naghavi Hosseini said today’s session convened at the Parliament National Security and Foreign Policy Commission aimed to review and find ways to resolve the current issues hindering economic relations between Iran and Turkmenistan.

The session was attended by a number of officials from petroleum and energy ministries, CEO of National Iranian Gas Company, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Central Bank of Iran.

Economic issues in the two countries’ bilateral cooperation, particularly the dispute over gas swap, were discussed at the session, Naghavi Hosseini said. Other topics of discussion included energy transactions between the two sides, from both private and public sectors. The parliamentary official said the participants stressed that these issues need to be resolved as soon as possible. Mehrnews

5. PENETRON Upgrades Caspian Sea Oil Pipeline
May 21. Successful tests of the new pumping stations added to the massive Caspian Pipeline – completed May 2018 – will increase throughput of the crude oil pipeline connecting the oil fields of Kazakhstan with the world market. PENETRON technology was used extensively during the construction of the original pipeline and the ongoing upgrade projects – to maximize the durability of the concrete elements in the valve wells. Construction of the Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC) began in 1992 by the Russian, Kazakhstani and Omani governments (and a number of private shareholders) to develop and build an oil pipeline from Kazakhstan to export routes in the Black Sea. The pipeline was the largest international oil transportation project in the world, at 1,510 km (940 miles) long. prweb
1. EU NAVFOR delivers piracy threat assessment at launch of the 2017 OBP report. 25 May. Understanding piracy and armed robbery of vessels is essential in maintaining maritime security. In addition, quantifying the economic and human costs of piracy is important in comprehending the true impact of piracy and robbery at sea. EU NAVFOR now lies at the centre of a complex network of organisations and partnerships who must work together to ensure piracy remains repressed off the Somali coast. At the 2017 OBP report launch held in London on 23rd May, EU NAVFOR personnel presented their assessment and military analysis of the piracy threat that exists off the Horn of Africa, but also outlined other threat areas that have emerged and emphasised the need for vigilance and adherence to industry agreed protection measures that can help protect seafarers. The 2017 OBP report looks at the effects of piracy and criminal activity across the world and highlights the economic and human cost to world trade. In summary, the report states that the annual cost of Somali-borne piracy shrank slightly last year from $1.7 to $1.48bn. The estimated naval costs fell from approximately $230 to $200m and some 1100 seafarers were in some way affected by maritime security events. The 2017 headlines and link to the full report is found here: EU NAVFOR

2. EU NAVFOR focusses counter-piracy efforts in Mombasa, Kenya. 21 May. EU NAVFOR has been bringing EU and regional partners together to focus on counter-piracy and maritime security as efforts continue to build on a more secure maritime environment. From 17th to 19th May 2018, the flagship of EU NAVFOR’s Operation Atalanta, ITS Carlo Margottini, made a logistic and operational stop in the port of Mombasa, Kenya, after an intense period of counter-piracy patrolling along the coast of Somalia. She hosted a Maritime Security forum on board aimed at supporting and encouraging regional governments that has seen the recent establishment of the Kenya Coast Guard as a good example of the development of maritime capacity. At the end of the visit, the Margottini set sail to continue her mission, with a focus on freedom of navigation to international merchant vessels, maritime security and the deterrence of piracy in the Indian Ocean region. EU NAVFOR

**Assessment:**

EU NAVFOR has focused on counter-piracy activities as in Mombasa and as by delivering a piracy threat assessment report.

Australian ship HMAS Warramunga keeps her high performance in the struggle with drug smugglings under the framework of CMF.

3. Two Seizures in two days for HMAS Warramunga. 25 May. Her Majesty's Australian Ship (HMAS) Warramunga continues the fight to reduce the flow of money to international terrorism by seizing approximately 6.2 tonnes of hashish on two separate interdictions in the space of two days as part of Combined Task Force (CTF) 150 Maritime Security Operations. In the days immediately prior to the change of command, HMAS Warramunga’s Seahawk Romeo helicopter located two separate suspicious vessels in the East Arabian Sea. With CTFT approval, and following the insertion of her boarding team, a professional and thorough search of the first vessel led to the discovery of 147 bags of hashish, weighing in at approximately three tonnes and worth approximately USD115.2 million. Just hours later, a second suspicious vessel was located by HMAS Warramunga’s Seahawk Romeo helicopter. Again, with CTFT approval, the ship’s boarding party was deployed and upon conducting searches uncovered approximately 3.2 tonnes of hashish, worth approximately USD122.45 million. This takes Warramunga’s total seizures to more than 26 tonnes of hashish and approximately two tonnes of heroin, valued at approximately USD1.42 billion. The two busts have occurred just moments shy of the Change of Command from an Australian-led command team to a UK-led command team. During Australia’s six months in command, CTF150 has made a significant impact on the narcotics trade, producing a record number of seizures. CMF

4. Combined Task Force 150 (CTF 150) has appointed a new Commander from the United Kingdom. 24 May. CTF 150 has appointed a new Commander from the United Kingdom, following a change of command ceremony held at the Naval Support Activity (NSA) Bahrain on 24 May 2018. Commodore (Cdre) Steve Moorhouse, Royal Navy relieved Cdre Mal Wise of the Royal Australian Navy at a ceremony attended by VIPs from a number of different nations, overseen by the Commander Combined Maritime Forces, Vice Admiral (VAdm) Scott Stearney, United States Navy. Given the marked successes of the Australian-led CTF 150 over the last 5 months, Cdre Moorhouse’s team have considerable shoes to fill. His predecessor achieved 19 successful drugs busts at sea in the area known as the ‘Hash Highway’ around the Gulf of Aden and the western Indian Ocean, in total worth approximately 2.2 Bn USD street value. As monsoon season approaches, boarding suspect vessels will be increasingly dangerous due to the height of the waves, but the numbers of dhows crossing the Indian Ocean will also decrease. CMF