

Will NATO forces appear in the Sea of Azov?

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Many people now are interesting in the answer to this question. But the solution of this problem depends on specific political personalities who have not been distinguished in recent times by logic and predictability. Namely – from the result of political confrontation of Moscow and Kiev.

Let us try to remind the main events of the last month that occurred in the region.

October 12, President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko signed a decree number 320/2018. This document activated the decision of the National Security and Defense Council on the protection of the interests of Ukraine in the Azov and Black Seas, as well as in the east and south of Ukraine.

The Ukrainian leadership declared the intention to unilaterally break the agreement with Moscow of April 23, 2004 on the recognition of the Sea of Azov as inland waters of Ukraine and Russia. It is reported that after that Ukraine intends to determine itself the so-called demarcation line, which will have to become the state maritime border. At the same time, it turns out that the Taman Peninsula will be separated from the Crimea by the Ukrainian territorial waters.

From one side this decree may seem political bravado. Apparently with the goal of giving weight to this document, P. Poroshenko issued a decree on the creation of a Regional Directorate for Maritime Security in the Black and Azov Seas.

The unit must be formed before the end of the current year. In accordance with the plan, the entire length of the border from the Odessa region (Izmail) to the Donetsk region (Mariupol) will be included in its responsibility zone. The maritime

border drawn by Kiev will also fall within its area of responsibility.

This statement does not seem to be an empty air shake. The information was confirmed by the chairman of the State Border Service of Ukraine, Colonel-General Peter Tsigikal. He also reported on the imminent increase in the number of the border guards. For the service of border guards in the airspace over the Sea of Azov, Ukraine intends to purchase 24 Airbus helicopters from France. And it is very similar to the fact that the Ukrainian president has enlisted foreign support. And if they take the promised decisions, the NATO leadership is unlikely to miss the great moment to put pressure on Russia and introduce, at least with a friendly visit, its warships to the Azov Sea. Yes, large ships of the 6 Fleet will not enter the water area due to the characteristics of the fairway. But to demonstrate the presence it is not necessarily to enter the aircraft carriers or destroyers. The rocket boats or small anti-submarine ships available from the same Romania or Bulgaria will be enough to exert political pressure on the opponent. And it is not known how politically maneuvering Turkey will behave in this case. Istanbul has already shown that it can change partners when it is profitable.

Well, what about Moscow? After all, Russia is unlikely to look at NATO ships near its Taganrog or Krasnodar? Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov expressed his great concern about this possible outcome. In an interview with the French publications RT, France, Le Figaro and Paris Match, he announced Ukraine's intention to invite NATO ships to the Sea of Azov to participate in the exercises. He also said that the termination of the agreement with Ukraine requires mutual agreement, which the Kremlin does not intend to give.

But what Moscow will actually do if NATO ships will try to enter the Kerch Strait. And is Russia ready to gain a real confrontation with NATO?

Apparently, this was what the high overseas officials wanted to check a month ago, sending two auxiliary unarmed vessels of the Ukrainian Navy, the «Donbass» and «Korets» from the Black Sea to the Sea of Azov. From a military point of view that was absolutely not logical.

Russia did not interfere, but the escort identified a serious medium reconnaissance ship of Project 864 «Priazovye», border guard ships «Amethyst» and «Don», anti-sabotage boats like «Raptor», boats of the Coast Guard of the FSS of the Russian Federation. Total – up to 10 units. Multipurpose Su-30SM fighters of the Russian Air Force were also involved.

NATO forces also did not stand aside. What was happening was closely watched. It's no wonder that the US Air Force Boeing RC-135V reconnaissance aircraft was patrolling the airspace near the Kerch Strait.

From the air, the Ukrainian military transport aircraft An-26 looked out at what was happening.

In general – a lot of units were involved from all sides for observing of such an insignificant event.

The Russian minister, S. Lavrov, said that in case NATO ships will attempt to proceed with the course of the Ukrainian ships Moscow will undertake the defensive measures.

So far, it seems that Russia is consistently fulfilling its promises and threats.

But are the words of the Russian leadership this time, either bluff or unbending determination?

It seems that the study of this issue is actively engaged in the headquarters of NATO. And if they decide that the Kremlin is bluffing, the temperature around the Sea of Azov risks rising sharply.

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