

International Affairs (IA) Club Meeting: April 20, 2020

Hi folks,

In preparation for our next meeting (Monday April 20 at 2:30 pm), read the following three short articles I have assembled. All three events broke on April 16, 2020. First, let's discuss the geopolitical significance of these events – especially in terms of Preponderance Theory. Those who have taken POS 205 can take the lead on this discussion of state behavior (those states satisfied with the status quo vs. the revisionist states). Second, let's discuss the apparent synchronicity of the events. Third, let's consider whether or not they are related to the Coronavirus Pandemic.

Here is the link to our next meeting: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87879702157>

Meeting ID: 878 7970 2157

This collection of articles (below), and a link to our Zoom meeting can also be found on the **IA Club website:** <http://www.ianfeinhandler.com/iaclub/>

Iranian Speedboats Conduct ‘Dangerous And Provocative’ Maneuvers Near U.S. Warships

By Scott Neuman

NPR: April 16, 2020 [Link to Article](#)



Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps vessels approach U.S. military ships in the Persian Gulf near Kuwait on Wednesday. U.S. Navy/AP

Nearly a dozen small craft operated by the naval wing of Iran's Revolutionary Guard carried out harassing maneuvers dangerously close to U.S. warships conducting exercises in the Persian Gulf, Navy officials said Wednesday.

Video of [#IRGCN](#) vessels conducting dangerous & harassing approaches on U.S. naval vessels in the international waters of the North Arabian Gulf. pic.twitter.com/zL9VKQ0eiQ

— U.S. 5th Fleet (@US5thFleet) [April 15, 2020](#)

“The [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps navy] vessels repeatedly crossed the bows and sterns of the U.S. vessels at extremely close range and high speeds, including multiple crossings of the [USS Lewis B.] Puller with a 50 yard closest point of approach (CPA) and within 10 yards of [the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter] Maui's bow,” the U.S. Navy's Bahrain-based 5th Fleet said in a [statement](#).

The Puller, an expeditionary mobile base vessel, and the Maui are part of a larger U.S. flotilla conducting joint integration operations with U.S. Army AH-64E Apache attack helicopters in the international waters of the North Arabian Gulf — also known as the Persian Gulf — according to the Navy.

“The U.S. crews issued multiple warnings via bridge-to-bridge radio, five short blasts from the ships’ horns and long range acoustic noisemaker devices, but received no response from the IRGCN,” the Navy said. “After approximately one hour, the IRGCN vessels responded to the bridge-to-bridge radio queries, then maneuvered away from the U.S. ships and opened distance between them.”

The Navy said the actions of the Iranian vessels were “dangerous and provocative” and “increased the risk of miscalculation and collision.”

Iranian officials did not immediately comment, but the country’s semiofficial Fars news agency acknowledged the incident, according to The Associated Press.

The close approach at sea came as armed Iranian speedboats boarded and then briefly detained the Hong Kong-flagged chemical tanker [SC Taipei](#) in the Gulf of Oman, directing it to Iranian waters before allowing it to proceed.

“The vessel was approached 48nm (nautical miles) offshore Fujairah and hailed by four skiffs carrying armed Iranian coastguard personnel,” British maritime security company [Ambrey Intelligence](#) said. “The vessel’s crew were ordered to lower the ladder and were then boarded. The vessel was later directed to Kooh Mobarak, Iran, but quickly released with crew and vessel now confirmed safe.”

In a series of incidents last year, the U.S. accused Iran of [attacking tankers in the Persian Gulf](#) and Iran [seized the British-flagged tanker Stena Bulk](#) and held it for several weeks. The British Royal Marines [later seized an Iranian tanker](#), the Grace 1, in waters near Gibraltar.

Russian jet's inverted maneuver in front of US plane risked collision, Navy says

By John VanDiver

STARS AND STRIPES: April 16, 2020 [Link to Article](#)



A P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol and reconnaissance aircraft flies over the Atlantic Ocean, March 29, 2020. A Russian fighter jet's intercept of a P-8A over the Mediterranean Sea on Wednesday risked a collision, the U.S. Navy said. Photo Credit: U.S. NAVY

STUTTGART, Germany — A Russian fighter jet risked a midair collision when it intercepted a Navy aircraft at close range over the Mediterranean Sea on Wednesday, U.S. military officials said.

A U.S. P-8A Poseidon aircraft, used for tracking submarines, was flying in international airspace when a Russian SU-35 performed a high-speed, inverted maneuver 25 feet in front of the Navy plane, U.S. Naval Forces Europe-Africa said in a statement.

The encounter with the Russian fighter, which caused turbulence aboard the P-8A, lasted for 42 minutes.

“Unsafe actions increase the risk of miscalculation and potential for midair collisions,” NAVEUR said. “The U.S. aircraft was operating consistent with international law and did not provoke this Russian activity.”

In Europe, risky encounters with Russian military aircraft have occurred on occasion in recent years, most notably in the Black Sea. But the latest action also comes as the U.S. military contends with the coronavirus.

The U.S. has been forced to cancel numerous military exercises and training plans because of the virus, raising concerns that adversaries could use the crisis as an opportunity to test American military readiness.

The latest incident with the Russians comes one week after U.S. Air Force F-22 fighter jets intercepted a pair of Russian maritime patrol planes 50 miles off the western coast of the Aleutian Islands, in what military officials said at the time was a test of U.S. capabilities amid the coronavirus pandemic.

And on Wednesday, 11 Iranian military vessels moved dangerously close to several American ships conducting operations in the northern Persian Gulf, the Navy said.

Last week, as coronavirus cases surged in the ranks, Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Mark Milley issued a warning to rivals.

“I wouldn’t want any mixed messages going out there to any adversaries that they can take advantage of an opportunity, if you will, at a time of crisis,” Milley said. “That would be a terrible and tragic mistake if they thought that.”

Navy crews operating in Europe are taking precautionary measures to guard against the coronavirus, the service said.

This week, Rota, Spain-based destroyers maneuvered in the Black and Baltic seas, while the P-8A Poseidon flew its Mediterranean mission.

“U.S. 6th Fleet remains at sea, ensuring maritime security and demonstrating our continued ability to operate in concert with allies and partners across the European theater,” Vice Adm. Lisa Franchetti said in a statement Tuesday.

China may have conducted low-level nuclear test, US claims

By Julian Borger

The Guardian: April 16, 2020 [Link to Article](#)



A formation of Dongfeng-41 intercontinental strategic nuclear missiles in Beijing last year. The US suspects activities in 2019 suggest China has carried out a nuclear test. Photograph: Xinhua/REX/Shutterstock

State Department report points to activities at China's Lop Nur test site last year, though it does not have proof

The US state department has claimed [China](#) may have secretly conducted a low-yield underground nuclear test, in an accusation likely to further inflame already poor relations between Washington and Beijing.

A report on arms control compliance does not offer proof, but points to circumstantial evidence, of excavations and other stepped-up activity at China's Lop Nur test site.

“China's possible preparation to operate its Lop Nur test site year-round, its use of explosive containment chambers, extensive excavation activities at Lop Nur and a lack of transparency on its nuclear testing activities ... raise concerns regarding its adherence to the zero yield standard,” the state department report, first revealed by the [Wall Street Journal](#), said.

Both the US and China signed the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), concluded in 1996, but neither country has ratified it, and – partly as a result – the agreement has not come into force. However, China has sworn to adhere to CTBT terms and the US has been observing a moratorium on nuclear testing.

If the treaty were in force, it would include a mechanism for on-site inspections of suspect sites.

The US defence intelligence agency leveled similar accusations against Russia in May last year, which were never confirmed. US hawks have been urging the Trump administration to formally break from the CTBT, leaving it free to conduct new nuclear tests of its own.

“Beijing is modernising its nuclear arsenal while the United States handcuffs itself with one-sided arms-control,” Republican Senator Tom Cotton said on Twitter. “China has proven it can’t work with us honestly.”

Jeffrey Lewis, a nuclear weapons expert at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies, said that the available evidence was possibly consistent with a low-yield tests or with “sub-critical tests”, which do not involve nuclear fission, and which are allowed by the CTBT.

“It is worth noting how thin the evidence is for these claims,” [Lewis wrote](#). “US, Russia and China all conduct subcritical tests...From satellites and seismic stations, subcritical tests are indistinguishable from low yield nuclear tests.”

The finding may worsen ties already strained by US charges that the global Covid-19 pandemic resulted from Beijing’s mishandling of a 2019 outbreak of the coronavirus in the city of Wuhan.

The evidence cited by the state department report claimed Beijing’s included blocking data transmissions from sensors linked to an international monitoring center. However, a spokeswoman for the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO), which verifies compliance with the pact, told the Journal there had been no interruptions in data transmissions from China’s five sensor stations since September 2019. Before that, there were interruptions as a result of the negotiating process between the CTBTO and China on arrangements for putting the stations in operation.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian told a daily briefing in Beijing that China was committed to a moratorium on nuclear tests and said the United States was making false accusations.

“China has always adopted a responsible attitude, earnestly fulfilling the international obligations and promises it has assumed,” he said. “The US criticism of China is entirely groundless, without foundation, and not worth refuting.”

A senior US official said the concerns about China’s testing activities buttressed President Donald Trump’s case for getting China to join the US and Russia in talks on an arms control accord to replace the 2010 New Start treaty between Washington and Moscow that expires in February next year.

New Start restricted the US and Russia to deploying no more than 1,550 nuclear warheads, the lowest level in decades, and limited the land- and submarine-based missiles and bombers that deliver them.

“The pace and manner by which the Chinese government is modernising its stockpile is worrying, destabilising, and illustrates why China should be brought into the global arms control framework,” said the senior US official on condition of anonymity.

China, estimated to have about 300 nuclear weapons, has repeatedly rejected Trump’s proposal, arguing its nuclear force is defensive and poses no threat.

Russia, France and Britain – three of the world’s five internationally recognised nuclear powers – signed and ratified the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which still requires ratification by 44 countries to become international law.