

# Russian Perspectives on Western Military Activities

October 1–10, 2021

*Dmitry Gorenburg, Mary Chesnut, Anya Fink, Julian Waller*

## Abstracts

### **Russian reactions to the AUKUS Indo-Pacific alliance**

An in-depth analysis of the AUKUS (United States, Australia, and United Kingdom) alliance, published in *Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie*, argues that the alliance is part of an ongoing US strategy to reduce the influence of China and, to a lesser extent, Russia in the Indo-Pacific region. But given the long timeline for the construction of Australia's new nuclear submarines, the alliance will not change the strategic balance in the region any time soon. Enhancing US effectiveness in this confrontation was considered worth the risk of serious tensions with France. Other articles argue that it will take time for France and the US to restore mutual trust, given the severity of the offense.

### **Russian analysts discuss New Cold War, space deterrence**

Two recent articles discuss the ongoing evolution in the US-Russia strategic relationship from very different perspectives. In an article in *Slon*, Aleksandr Golts argues that Moscow and Washington will be forced into a policy of "peaceful coexistence" like the one during the Cold War in order to make the world safer in the face of a possible nuclear war. An article in *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er* warns of an evolving US policy of deterrence against Russia and China that, in addition to nuclear and non-nuclear deterrence, now also encompasses the space domain.

### **NATO's expulsion of eight Russian diplomats and reduction of mission**

Several Russian publications covered the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO's) October 6 announcement that due to "malign" Russian activity, eight Russian diplomats will be expelled from the permanent observer mission to the alliance, and its maximum size will be cut from 20 to 10 diplomats. One *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* article by Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC) President Igor Ivanov suggests that these decisions were politically motivated ahead of the formation of NATO's new Strategic Concept. A *Kommersant* article discusses how Moscow may respond to these decisions, including through reductions of the NATO military liaison mission in Moscow.

### **Potential US role in Iranian tensions with Azerbaijan and Israel**

Several recent articles address the United States' alliance with Israel in relation to rising Israeli-Iranian tensions. Relations between Iran and Azerbaijan have deteriorated in recent weeks, particularly due to Iranian claims that Israel has a military presence inside Azerbaijan close to its border. Azerbaijan rejected these claims as "totally baseless." Two *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* articles examine the potential for escalation in the region, what the role of the US or NATO in such conflicts could be, and what it might mean for Russia (particularly if conflict spills over into Syria).

### **Russian analysts discuss the US withdrawal from Afghanistan**

Multiple Russian commentators have recently written on the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. An article in *Krasnaya Zvezda* uses the US military leadership's own words to suggest that the collapse of the Afghan armed forces took the US and its allies by surprise, a testament to a general trend towards underestimating the challenges of nation-building in the country. An article in *topwar.ru* provides an overview of the 20-year conflict, arguing that the stated goal of defeating international terrorism was a cover for controlling the global drug trade and securing strategic positioning at the center of Eurasia.

### **Washington views the Arctic as a platform for a global show of force**

A commentary in *Krasnaya Zvezda* discusses the establishment of a new regional center at the Pentagon that will focus on assuring US national security in the Arctic region. The article argues that the center is part of a continuing US effort, driven by both Republican and Democratic administrations, to assure US dominance in a key region that is seen by the Pentagon as a corridor for expanding great power competition in the Indo-Pacific and European regions, a possible launching pad for potential conflicts, and a platform for global shows of force.

### **Morale problems in the US military**

An article in *topwar.ru* assesses the state of the US military as it deals with internal issues related to military culture, social inequality, and criminality. It argues that crime is a major issue in the US military, a problem exacerbated by a pervasive lack of respect among service members, and by the way that gang members and extremist groups use the military to train and learn military science. The article also notes the military's increased attention to the problems of sexual violence and suicide, which had previously been ignored.

### **Russia-Turkey presidential summit impact**

Two articles touch on Russia-Turkey relations in the aftermath of the summit between Vladimir Putin and Recep Tayyip Erdogan in late September, focusing on how the relationship balances Western influence in the region, despite Turkey's status as a NATO member. The first article discusses the potential expansion of Russian military sales to Turkey, including military aircraft and possibly submarines, and its potential influence on the US-Turkey bilateral relationship. The second addresses the Russia-Turkey relationship in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the war in Syria, but also the relationship's utility in balancing what the author considers malign Western influence.

### **Strategic capabilities of the Swedish military**

An article in *topwar.ru* analyzes the strategic and industrial capabilities of the modern Swedish military. It argues that though Sweden is a neutral state, it perceives an increased threat from Russia and has therefore increased its investments in military construction in addition to revising its strategic concepts. Sweden is also preparing for conflict with an eye to the medium- and long-term vision of geopolitical competition, which informs its development approach.

### **NATO activity on Russia's borders**

The Russian military newspaper *Strazh Baltiki* notes an increase in NATO air reconnaissance activity on Russia's borders in September in conjunction with Zapad-2021. It also discusses NATO's Namejs-2021 exercise, held in Latvia. The article suggests that the Latvian military and government are incompetent, while NATO forces do not care about Latvian civilians and generally display a low level of professionalism.

## Russian reactions to the AUKUS Indo-Pacific alliance

Although it was announced in mid-September, the newly formed AUKUS alliance remained the most frequent topic for commentary on Western military activities in the Russian press in early October. An in-depth analysis was published in *Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie*. The article argues that the alliance is part of an ongoing US strategy to reduce the influence of China and, to a lesser extent, Russia in the Indo-Pacific region. The author argues that the confrontation with China is the absolute priority for the Biden Administration and probably will be for future US governments. Enhancing US effectiveness in this confrontation was considered worth the risk of serious tensions with France.

But given the long timeline for the construction of Australia's new nuclear submarines, the AUKUS alliance will not change the strategic balance in the region any time soon. The Australian military is currently considered the 19th most powerful in the world, placing it between Spain and Israel. Despite the efforts of Washington and London, it is unlikely to move up in that ranking in the next several decades. Instead, the author suggests that the announcement was part of a relatively unsuccessful effort by the Biden Administration to deflect attention from the US failure in Afghanistan.

Russia has felt a certain degree of anxiety over the new military union. The author quotes Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov as saying that the alliance is part of a continuing effort by the United States to create new military blocs and dividing lines in the world. Lavrov also noted that this was a reaction to discussions in Europe about the continent's strategic autonomy in the aftermath of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan.

The author argues that the way the alliance was formed and announced reflects the America First policy. If friendly relations and existing obligations in some parts of the world hamper US national interests, then the US feels it can safely ignore them. The damage to US-French relations is provided as an example of this US policy. He quotes Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova, "When the US, Great Britain and Australia, without asking anyone, in one day came up with a new triple alliance, which is changing international alignments, collective security and international stability. Here, for some reason, these new rules, which were so interesting yesterday, turned out to be not so tempting." Zakharova suggests that the conflict among Western allies over the AUKUS union reflects an ongoing battle over the new rules of the game, which even the authors do not fully understand.

One problem caused by the sale of the nuclear submarines is the precedent it creates for the international non-proliferation regime, since countries such as South Korea and Japan might also seek access to critical nuclear technologies. The author notes that China has already responded by suggesting that it might not retain its policy of no first use of nuclear weapons and would follow a more confrontational policy vis-à-vis the United States.

The confrontation with France that resulted from the formation of the AUKUS alliance and the cancellation of the sale of French diesel submarines to Australia was the subject of two additional articles during the reporting period. The first article, in the Communist Party newspaper *Pravda*, focuses on calls by the French Communist Party for France to leave NATO's military command structure in order to restore France's independence in defense and foreign policy. In discussing the French party's statement, the author also discusses the potential implications the sale of nuclear submarines to Australia might have for the international non-proliferation regime. He highlights the role of NATO and its member states in increasing international tensions and provoking a new worldwide arms race.

The second article, in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, discusses whether France and the United States will be able to restore mutual trust in the aftermath of the AUKUS agreement and its fallout. The article argues that despite the Biden Administration's efforts to repair the damage by sending political heavyweights such as Anthony

Blinken and John Kerry to Paris, the offense taken by France is too great for an immediate return to positive relations. Although the meeting between Emmanuel Macron and Blinken did not fully restore trust, it did help to resolve the initial tension and allow for Macron and Biden to meet directly on the sidelines of the G20 Afghanistan summit at the end of October. The author believes that France will take some time to respond, but is unlikely to take a major action such as leaving NATO. However, the situation is forcing Macron to think about how much to focus on maintaining trans-Atlantic solidarity when it conflicts with French national interests.

Sources:

Vladimir Ivanov, "AUKUS – Indo-Pacific frontier of a global NATO," [AUKUS – индо-тихоокеанский рубеж глобального НАТО], *Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie*, September 30, 2021, [https://nvo.ng.ru/gpolit/2021-09-30/1\\_1160\\_aukus.html](https://nvo.ng.ru/gpolit/2021-09-30/1_1160_aukus.html).

Andrei Dultsev, "To leave NATO!" [Выйти из НАТО!], *Pravda*, October 7, 2021, <https://kprf.ru/international/capitalist/205891.html>.

Editorial, "Will France and the US be able to restore trust?" [Удастся ли Франции и США восстановить взаимное доверие], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, October 6, 2021, [https://www.ng.ru/editorial/2021-10-06/2\\_8270\\_editorial.html](https://www.ng.ru/editorial/2021-10-06/2_8270_editorial.html).

## Russian analysts discuss New Cold War, space deterrence

Some of the coverage in the Russian commentariat has focused on the evolution of deterrence approaches in the US-Russian relationship.

In an October 4 article in *Slon*, Aleksandr Golts starts by saying that though it is not "formally acknowledged" that the US and Russia are in a New Cold War, it is not questioned by many. He argues that though both countries took steps to destroy the extensive network of arms control agreements developed during the (original) Cold War, they will be forced into a "policy of peaceful coexistence" aimed at ensuring that mutual conflicts do not become "hot" or lead to open warfare that could result in an escalation to nuclear weapons use.

He posits that the first signs of this new peaceful coexistence were visible during the Geneva summit, where US and Russian representatives agreed to create two working groups to explore strategic stability issues. The focus of the groups is so conceptual, he argues, that it is reminiscent of 1969 when the two sides first met to understand the agenda. Like back then, the sides are putting forward positions that may be unacceptable to one another. For example, Russia is trying to focus on developing the "security equation" that encompasses offense and defense, is arguing that missile defense is destabilizing, and is fighting for the inclusion of strategic conventional weapons, space, and cyber security on the agenda. The United States, in turn, is seeking to retain limits on Russia's strategic nuclear offensive forces and also its boutique nuclear capabilities and nonstrategic nuclear weapons. Golts notes that the latter in particular could be a nonstarter for Russia.

Despite these challenges, Golts argues that the most promising element of this peaceful coexistence could be the potential restoration of the institution of continuous US-Russian negotiations that persisted throughout the 1970s–1980s. The relations between the two countries could eventually center on these negotiations, and the need for mutual survival could justify this shift because the "present Russian government is definitely not 'worse' from the perspective of countering democratic values than the Soviet one."

In an October 5 article in *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er*, Aleksandr Bartosh warns of an evolving US policy of deterrence against Russia and China that, in addition to nuclear and non-nuclear deterrence, now also encompasses the space domain. He argues that the US strategy in the space domain is deterrence by denial and explores elements of that strategy.

Bartosh begins by exploring US concerns about the security of its assets in space, noting that the 2020 US space strategy posits that space is an area for the conduct of military actions and views Russian and Chinese counter-space capabilities—particularly in low-Earth orbit—as a threat. Bartosh continues that the 36th Space Forum that took place in August in Colorado Springs “demonstrated the more apparent tendencies toward space militarization.” He quotes Space Command Commander Gen. Jim Dickinson as stating that the new Space Command strategy will define “military power in space” and the ability to “achieve and maintain space superiority, when, where, and for how long we need it.” Some military officials, he posits, believe that the US Space Force needs to “publicly demonstrate to Moscow and Beijing” the ability to disable and attack satellites.

A recent RAND report titled *Tailoring Deterrence for China in Space* defines *space deterrence* as the ability to “deter interference” into space or space support systems and notes the differences in potential US approaches to deterring Russia and China. Bartosh argues that a cornerstone of the US deterrence approach is working with allies in Europe and the Pacific and that, by pooling deterrence resources with allies, the US “gets an additional opportunity to concentrate their own resources on the development of more advanced weapons of deterrence through punishment.” He notes that because the “failure of the US and NATO in Afghanistan significantly undermined” trust among European states toward the US, such a collaborative approach toward deterrence “carries political and diplomatic benefits for the consolidation of NATO.” The rest of the article then lists the recommendations of the RAND study on US strategy toward deterring China in the space domain.

Bartosh concludes by saying that the US focus on deterrence approaches in space and the pursuit of space superiority “is creating new threats for international and Russian security.” In addition: “The threatening reality of new challenges and threats in outer space makes it necessary for Russia to develop a comprehensive counteraction program, developed on the basis of a unified methodology for assessing and analyzing the synthesis of the doctrines of deterrence, compellence and deterrence by denial, embodied in the strategy of hybrid war.”

Sources:

Aleksandr Golts, “Hope for survival. How the Russian and US peaceful coexistence can be arranged in the new cold war framework,” [Надежда на выживание. Как может быть устроено мирное сосуществование России и США в рамках новой холодной войны], *Slon*, October 4, 2021, <https://republic.ru/posts/101856>.

Aleksandr Bartosh, “Pentagon’s high orbit,” [Высокая орбита Пентагона], *Voенно-promyshlennyyi kur'er*, October 5, 2021, <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/64124>.

## **NATO’s expulsion of eight Russian diplomats and reduction of mission**

Several Russian publications covered NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg’s October 6 announcement that eight Russian diplomats will be expelled from the permanent observer mission to the alliance. In addition, NATO leadership decided to cut the maximum size of the Russian mission in half, from 20 to 10 diplomats. These developments follow intelligence reports of “malign” Russian activity, “including killings and espionage.” The diplomats must leave Brussels by the end of October. According to the *Washington Post*,

Russia's mission to NATO was previously reduced from 30 to 20 diplomats following the Novichok poisoning of Sergei and Yulia Skripal in 2018.

One of the articles, titled "Road to Nowhere," is authored by Igor Ivanov, former Russian foreign minister (1998–2004) and current President of the RIAC. Ivanov writes: "What is the purpose of all this? Not hard to guess. The alliance is already in full swing on preparations for the next summit of NATO member states, scheduled for 2022 in Madrid. There it is planned to approve a new Strategic Concept for the alliance to make it 'even stronger.' Solving this task against the background of the failed flight of the bloc's armed forces from Afghanistan is not an easy task. Therefore, persistent efforts are already being made to shift attention to the search for an enemy that will justify the continued existence of the alliance and the next increase in the military budgets of its members. In the Concept, as follows from separate statements, NATO is going to return to its previous rhetoric, considering Russia as a threat, and at the same time China." Ivanov adds, "One gets the impression that the bloc's leadership is consistently continuing the course of destroying everything that has been created by the joint efforts of Moscow and Brussels in the field of strengthening European security over the past two decades."

A *Kommersant* article discusses how the Russian government has already, and will, respond. The article notes Moscow's confusion over the "hypocrisy" of these developments; the Russian president's spokesman Dmitry Peskov commented: "There is an obvious contradiction in the statements of NATO representatives about the desire to normalize relations with our country and in real action. These actions, of course, do not allow us to build illusions about the possibility of normalizing relations and resuming dialogue with NATO. Rather, these prospects are undermined almost completely."

The article notes, "With a high degree of probability, steps will be taken in relation to the NATO Military Liaison Mission in Moscow, operating under the auspices of the Belgian embassy." One of *Kommersant's* anonymous sources suggested that "if the alliance does not come to its senses," Russia itself might withdraw its mission to NATO.

Sources:

"NATO intends to expel eight Russian diplomats," [НАТО намерен выслать восемь российских дипломатов], *Novye Izvestiya*, October 6, 2021, <https://newizv.ru/news/world/06-10-2021/nato-nameren-vyslat-vosem-rossiyskih-diplomatov>.

Igor Ivanov, "Road to nowhere," [Путь в никуда], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, October 10, 2021, <https://rg.ru/2021/10/10/ivanov-v-alianse-hoteli-by-k-sammitu-rasproshchatsia-s-sovetom-rossiia-nato.html>.

Elena Chernenko, "Mission is reducible," [Миссия сократима], *Kommersant*, October 7, 2021, <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5020100>.

Additional source: Reis Thebault and Isabelle Khurshudyan, "NATO expels eight Russian diplomats, alleging they were working as spies," *Washington Post*, October 6, 2021, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/nato-expels-russian-diplomats/2021/10/06/657321ac-26cc-11ec-8739-5cb6aba30a30\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/nato-expels-russian-diplomats/2021/10/06/657321ac-26cc-11ec-8739-5cb6aba30a30_story.html).

## Potential US role in Iranian tensions with Azerbaijan and Israel

Several recent articles address the United States' alliance with Israel in relation to rising Israeli-Iranian tensions. Relations between Iran and Azerbaijan have deteriorated in recent weeks, particularly due to allegations that Israel has a military presence within Azerbaijan close to the Iranian border, and due to fears

that Israel might target Iran's nuclear program. Azerbaijan rejected claims of any third party's presence near the shared border, calling the allegations "totally baseless." The tensions are also related to the return of lands that border Iran and had been occupied by Armenians since the 1990s to Azerbaijan following the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war. If the tensions between Iran and Azerbaijan escalate into war, NATO member Turkey would likely become involved, since it signed a mutual defense pact with Azerbaijan in June. Israel has reportedly also assured Azerbaijan, with which it shares long-standing military technical ties, of its support.

An October 5 *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* article notes that against the backdrop of Iranian military maneuvers near Azerbaijan's northern border, several military exercises occurred in the region, with participation from servicemembers from Azerbaijan, Georgia, and some NATO countries. The article also notes that the rising tensions were discussed in the October 7–8 NATO Military Committee meeting in Tbilisi. Additionally, the article references the US-Israel alliance and US efforts to pressure Iran, noting President Biden's earlier comments that America "is ready to turn to other options" if diplomacy does not resolve the Iranian nuclear crisis.

Another *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* article published on October 10 explores the potential for the conflict to spill over into Syria, particularly after reports that Iran will expand its strategic partnership with Assad following a visit between heads of state on October 9. The article argues that Israel "is ready to use Azerbaijan, as well as the territories occupied by the Americans in Syria and Iraq, as its footholds." The article quotes retired colonel and military expert Vladimir Popov: "The Pentagon, while reducing its presence in Iraq, continues to concentrate its military forces in the eastern Trans-Euphrates. The United States maintains the Al-Tanf military base in Syria on the border with Jordan. There they are preparing the Syrian armed opposition to fight the Assad regime. And this will be one of the footholds from which the United States will defend Israel if the war with Iran does start."

The article also explores what Russia would do should such a conflict break out in Syria: "If large-scale hostilities begin against the units of the IRGC, which are Moscow's and Damascus' allies in the fight against terrorists in Syria, what will be the position of the Russian Federation? In fact, it will be a war against the Assad regime, which Moscow and Iran support. It is not clear how Moscow will act."

On Wednesday, October 13, Azerbaijan announced that it had agreed to resolve the diplomatic crisis with Iran through dialogue.

Sources:

Vladimir Mukhin, "US and NATO to help Israel in war against Iran," [В войне против Ирана Израилю помогут США и НАТО], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, October 5, 2021, [https://www.ng.ru/armies/2021-10-05/1\\_8269\\_israel.html](https://www.ng.ru/armies/2021-10-05/1_8269_israel.html).

Vladimir Mukhin, "US, Israel and Baku prepare to defend against 'Iranian aggression,'" [США, Израиль и Баку готовятся защищаться от "иранской агрессии"], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, October 10, 2021, [https://www.ng.ru/armies/2021-10-10/2\\_8273\\_usa.html](https://www.ng.ru/armies/2021-10-10/2_8273_usa.html).

Additional source: Zulfugar Agayev and Golnar Motevalli, "Iran, Israel and the Rising Tensions in the Caucasus," *Bloomberg*, October 7, 2021, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-10-07/iran-israel-and-the-rising-tensions-in-the-caucasus-quicktake>.

## Russian analysts discuss the US withdrawal from Afghanistan

An October 4 *Krasnaya Zvezda* article offers a grim assessment of the competence and situational awareness of the US military in Afghanistan. The primary argument is that the collapse of the Afghan armed forces was a surprise to the US, and that “Washington has underestimated many things, including the level of corruption in the military leadership.” The piece extensively quotes US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin and Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Milley at a recent US Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing, citing their own criticisms of the US military’s chaotic withdrawal and failure to ensure a lasting settlement for US-backed forces.

The article quotes Austin as pointing out that “we need to take into account the bitter truth: We did not fully appreciate the degree of corruption and poor leadership in their senior ranks, we did not appreciate the devastating effect of President Ghani’s frequent and inexplicable changes of commanders, we did not anticipate the snowball effect that the deals that Taliban commanders made with local leaders after the Doha agreement, and that the Doha agreement itself had a demoralizing effect on Afghan soldiers.” Quoting Milley, it underlines that the US had incorrectly assessed the situation on the ground, saying that “there were no intelligence assessments that I was aware of that said the government would fall, that the armed forces would fall within 11 days.”

In a second article on October 10 in *topwar.ru*, Aleksandr Samsonov provides a narrative of the Afghanistan War, arguing that although fighting terrorism was the nominal objective, the US had unspoken but malign interests at the heart of the invasion. Samsonov runs through a list of vying reasons for the US presence, primarily control of the drug trade, an internal capitalist crisis of overproduction, and a new strategic entry into the traditional “Great Game” of Eurasia.

Samsonov provides several memorable assertions in his article. He notes that “the Anglo-Saxons traditionally oversee the global drug market. Having occupied Afghanistan, the Anglo-Americans have staked out the ‘heroin factory’ for the planet.” More seriously, he provides an instability-based account of the ripple effects of the US intervention in Afghanistan: “By exploiting the instability in Afghanistan, it is possible to influence the key powers of Asia. Disturb the Muslim Xinjiang Uygur region of the PRC, put pressure on Russia through Central Asia, disturb India, etc.”

He also closes with a bracing assessment of what the post-occupation Eurasian strategic world looks like: “Ahead of Eurasia, grandiose shocks await. The US is leaving, but leaving behind a lot of problems and chaos. A new Turkish empire rises. Iran is concerned about the threat from Israel, possibly Turkey, and therefore threatens Azerbaijan. The war continues in Syria. Israel expresses its readiness to start a war so that Tehran does not receive nuclear weapons. China is trying to stabilize and stake Afghanistan by promoting its geopolitical and geo-economic project ‘New Silk Road.’”

Sources:

Mariya Tomilenko, “It Was a Strategic Failure,” [“Это был стратегический провал...”], *Krasnaya Zvezda*, October 4, 2021, <http://redstar.ru/eto-byi-strategicheskij-proval/>.

Aleksandr Samsonov, “Why Did the US Invade Afghanistan?” [“Зачем США вторглись в Афганистан”], *topwar.ru*, October 10, 2021, <https://topwar.ru/187821-zachem-ssha-vtorglis-v-afganistan.html>.

## Washington views the Arctic as a platform for a global show of force

A commentary in the October 8 *Krasnaia Zvezda* military newspaper discusses the establishment of a new regional center at the Pentagon that will focus on assuring US national security in the Arctic region. The article notes that the Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Affairs is expected to be located in Anchorage and to be headed by retired General Randy Kee, who will assume the position of senior advisor to the Secretary of Defense for Arctic security. The center's mission is to build strong international networks to push forward US national security priorities in the Arctic region.

The article argues that the center is part of a continuing US effort, driven by both Republican and Democratic administrations, to assure US dominance in key regions. It says that the Far North is seen by the Pentagon as a corridor for expanding great power competition in the Indo-Pacific and European regions, a possible launching pad for potential conflicts, and a platform for global shows of force. It goes on to note that the Pentagon expects to establish a military presence in the Arctic that will be capable of multi-domain operations. This presence will include a division headquarters, several specially equipped and trained brigades, and a multi-domain task force. This group will conduct operations in extreme climate conditions, and may use space forces in an area with a complex electromagnetic spectrum.

The article then discusses an increase in activity by US naval forces, which have conducted 20 exercises and operations in the Far North in the last year. It notes that both the US Navy and the US Air Force have strategic plans for joint operations in the Arctic over the next two decades. The Air Force is focused on building out infrastructure, expanding its presence, and training its personnel for Arctic operations, with 6 billion dollars earmarked for these purposes this year. The article specifically highlights the use of new low-Earth orbit satellites by the Air Force, which will speed transmission of data at lower cost, as well as the deployment of 54 F-35A aircraft to the region, potentially not just in the US but also in Iceland.

Source: Sergei Nesterov, "Thundercloud over the Arctic does not dissipate," [Грозное облако» над Арктикой не рассеивается], *Krasnaia Zvezda*, October 8, 2021, <http://redstar.ru/grozovoe-oblako-nad-arktikoj-ne-rasseivaetsya/>.

## Morale problems in the US military

An article published in topwar.ru on October 5 by Kirill Ryabov assesses the state of the US military as it deals with internal issues related to military culture, social inequality, and criminality. He argues that crime is a major issue in the US military, a problem exacerbated by a pervasive lack of respect among servicemembers, and by the way that gang members and extremist groups have used the military to train and learn military science. The article also notes the military's increased attention to the problems of sexual violence and suicide, which had previously been ignored.

Ryabov summarizes a number of these themes and argues that these issues are being treated seriously by military leadership—resulting in improvements, even if the problems are not fully solved. He also notes that "the current socio-political agenda in the United States pays great attention to issues of equality, diversity and inclusion." This has underlined attempts to address social inequality in the US armed forces, although at the cost of "both opposition from disgruntled persons and overly active execution that run counter to common sense."

The piece suggests that diversity and related social issues in the military are less troublesome than the US military leadership seems to believe, which is creating a mismatch between military preparedness and fitness goals and leadership views on insufficient promotion of social justice in the armed forces.

Ryabov concludes with foreboding concerns over sustained morale problems emanating from failures in US military and political leadership, including the chaos of the withdrawal from Afghanistan, the State Department's failure to evacuate Afghan translators and other support personnel, rumors that the US Navy's fleet expansion is being put on hold, and the continued rise of China as a serious military competitor. Overall, the piece suggests that the US military is doing better on issues related to crime, sexual violence, and suicide, while it faces turbulence in its approach to newer directives on diversity and inclusion, and has concerns over morale issues due to failures and frustrations in major activities abroad.

Source: Kirill Ryabov, "Unhealthy Atmosphere: Social and Moral Issues in the US Armed Forces," [Нездоровая атмосфера: социальные и моральные проблемы в вооруженных силах США], Topwar.ru, October 5, 2021, <https://topwar.ru/187736-nezdorovaja-atmosfera-socialnye-i-moralnye-problemy-v-vooruzhennyh-silah-ssha.html>.

## Russia-Turkey presidential summit

Several articles address Russia-Turkey relations, particularly discussing how the relationship balances Western influence, despite Turkey's status as a NATO member. The articles appeared following a meeting between Erdogan and Putin in Sochi in late September.

The first article, published in *Novye Izvestiya*, discusses the potential expansion of Russian military sales to Turkey, including military aircraft and possibly submarines, which was discussed during Erdogan's meeting with Putin. The article reports that following the meeting, the United States warned Turkey of additional risks to bilateral relations if Ankara does not stop buying weapons from Russia. The article reminds readers that in 2017, Turkey signed a contract for four Russian S-400 divisions for \$2.5 billion, which led the United States to suspend the sale of F-35 fighters to Ankara.

The second piece is a TopWar article that discusses several other aspects of the Russia-Turkey relationship, particularly managing relations in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and the war in Syria. Parts of the piece discuss the value of the bilateral relationship in balancing US and NATO influence in the region. The author states, "No matter how hard the Americans tried, no matter how the NATO bloc put pressure on the Turkish president, the Turks do not bend under American and European politicians....Digging even deeper, it seems to me that the President of Russia and the President of Turkey, despite all the differences and obstacles, have one strategic goal. And this goal is simple and clear to everyone. Prevent further destruction of Asian states by the West. And if it's even simpler, the West must leave Asia and not dictate its terms to the governments of Asian countries."

Sources:

Alexander Staver, "Relations between Russia and Turkey," [Отношения России и Турции], topwar.ru, October 5, 2021, <https://topwar.ru/187660-tak-sojuznik-nam-turcija-ili-konkurent.html>.

"The United States threatened Turkey with consequences for buying weapons from the Russian Federation," [США пригрозили Турции последствиями за покупку оружия у РФ], *Novye Izvestiya*, October 1, 2021, <https://newizv.ru/news/world/01-10-2021/ssha-prigrozili-turtsii-posledstviyami-za-pokupku-oruzhiya-u-rf>.

## Strategic capabilities of the Swedish military

Writing in an October 9 piece for topwar.ru, Kirill Ryabov analyzes the strategic and industrial capabilities of the modern Swedish military. Ryabov argues that though Sweden is a neutral state, it has increased its

investments in military construction as well as revised its strategic concepts. Sweden is also preparing for conflict with an eye to the medium- and long-term vision of geopolitical competition, which informs its development approach.

Ryabov notes that regarding strategy, the Swedish military has had to reverse its pivot to a smaller, humanitarianism-oriented institution—which had been the course of its evolution in the 1990s and 2000s. “The result was a major change in basic strategies and plans, a reduction in defense spending and a reduction in the army, the rejection of the draft, etc.” This approach, however, has proven insufficient in the wake of the Crimean crisis and rising concerns about the threat of Russia to Swedish and regional interests. He thus notes that since the mid-2010s, Sweden has turned towards significant cooperation with NATO, joint ventures with Finland, and renewed defensive and strategic doctrines.

The article recounts Sweden’s revision of its defense doctrine in 2015, as well as problems with the plan, especially regarding personnel shortages. Ryabov writes that Sweden has increased and better targeted its defense spending, in addition to reactivating shuttered military bases such as the Muskö Naval Base near Stockholm and reestablishing a regiment on Gotland. The article describes the process of restoring and reestablishing units that had been disbanded two decades ago in detail. Similarly, Ryabov points out that the strength of the Swedish defense industrial complex has allowed for a smoother rebuild than might otherwise have been possible, although the use of foreign materiel—such as Patriot PAC 3+ anti-aircraft systems from the United States—is also a component.

Ryabov concludes by highlighting “the possible emergence of a new military-political agreement” between Sweden, Denmark, and Norway for the purpose of conducting joint exercises and coordinating combined defense. He notes that the increase in military personnel and equipment is expected to continue through 2025. Medium- and long-term plans, such as a main battle tank set to enter service in the 2030s, are all made with an eye to counter the perceived “Russian threat” (written with quotes) and improve combat effectiveness.

Source: Kirill Ryabov, “Features of defense strategy and military construction in Sweden,” [“Особенности оборонной стратегии и военного строительства в Швеции”], [topwar.ru](https://topwar.ru/187619-osobennosti-oboronnoj-strategii-i-voennogo-stroitelstva-v-shvecii.html), October 9, 2021, <https://topwar.ru/187619-osobennosti-oboronnoj-strategii-i-voennogo-stroitelstva-v-shvecii.html>.

## NATO activity on Russia’s borders

The Russian military newspaper *Strazh Baltiki* noted an increase in NATO air reconnaissance activity on Russia’s borders in September. During that month, a total of 207 air reconnaissance missions were detected by Russian monitors, as well as 51 reconnaissance unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) flights near Russia’s borders. The peak of activity occurred during the Zapad-2021 exercise. Frequent flights on NATO’s behalf were also carried out by the supposedly “absolutely neutral” Swedish forces. US forces conducted a variety of operations as well. The article lays out the types of aircraft used and the locations and frequency of operations, noting that by the end of September, activity had dropped to normal levels.

The article then goes on to discuss NATO’s Namejs-2021 exercise, held in Latvia with participation by 9,000 personnel representing most major NATO countries. The article highlights that the presence of NATO military personnel in Riga may have scared many civilians, including children. It describes a scene in which a crying mother with a child in her arms is begging (in Russian) a NATO soldier standing nearby not to shoot near her because it will scare the child. It suggests that this should not have happened in a civilized country and notes that the Latvian Ministry of Defence had apologized, but also noted that exercises in civilian areas would take place in the future.

The author notes that previous exercises of this type have resulted in fights with local police, attacks on taxis, car accidents, high levels of alcohol consumption, as well as damage to the local environment from the use of foreign military equipment. Namejs-2021 resulted in three Canadian soldiers being hospitalized after causing an explosion while inebriated. Finally, the article notes that during the exercise, the Latvian military lost a UAV. Overall, the article seeks to suggest that the Latvian military and government are incompetent, while NATO forces do not care about Latvian civilians and generally display a low level of professionalism.

Source: Valeriy Komissarov, "Military observer," [Военный наблюдатель], *Strazh Baltiki*, October 8, 2021, <https://ric.mil.ru/upload/site173/Xn7pFpKX5V.pdf>.

## Additional materials of potential interest

The October issue of the monthly periodical *Zarubezhnoe Voennoe Obozrenie* has several articles on technological and doctrinal developments in the US and NATO militaries, including the role of information operations in the US armed forces, the Pentagon's cyber strategy, the doctrine of the US Space Force, US procurement of new transport aircraft, and the development of Baltic air defense systems. The full text of all articles in the issue may be found at <https://zvo.ric.mil.ru/upload/site230/MyevXxXe45.pdf>.

The October issue of the monthly periodical *Voennaya Mysl* has an article entitled "Innovative Technologies in the Automated System of Troop Control as Viewed by the US Department of Defense Leadership." It may be found on page 135 at <https://vm.ric.mil.ru/upload/site178/sstTGCwnOp.pdf>.

Approved October 2021:



Michael Kofman, Research Program Director  
Russia Studies Program - Strategy, Policy, Plans, and Programs

DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A. Approved for public release: distribution unlimited.

**Administrative or Operational Use**

Effective date: January 12, 2022

This work was performed under Federal Government Contract No. N00014-16-D-5003.

*This document contains the best opinion of CNA at the time of issue. It does not necessarily represent the opinion of the Department of the Navy.*

CNA is a not-for-profit research organization that serves the public interest by providing in-depth analysis and result-oriented solutions to help government leaders choose the best course of action in setting policy and managing operations.

Copyright © CNA 2021

3003 Washington Boulevard, Arlington, VA 22201 | 703-824-2000 | [www.cna.org](http://www.cna.org)