



CNA Russia Studies Program

THIS WEEK'S ABSTRACTS

1. NATO-RUSSIA RELATIONS

NATO's relations with Russia were a dominant topic of discussion in Russian media during the reporting period. The conversation covered a range of issues, including the continuing deterioration of diplomatic relations, perception of the new NATO Concept for Deterrence and Defense of the Euro-Atlantic Area, NATO military activities near Russia's borders, the framing of continuing efforts at Russian-Belarusian defense integration as a response to such activities, and the possibility of separate EU security structures being established. The overall tenor was one of concern about the increase in hostility between NATO and Russia, combined with reassurances that Russia's nuclear arsenal is sufficient to prevent the outbreak of war.

2. US AND ALLIED POLICIES TOWARD UKRAINE

The Russian media extensively discussed US and allied policies toward Ukraine—specifically, the recent visit of Ambassador Victoria Nuland to Moscow, the visit of Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin to Ukraine and Georgia, and the UK sale of naval systems to Ukraine. Commentators speculated about the reasons for Ambassador Nuland's visit, and on whether the main reason really was Ukraine, noting that the visit regrettably did not improve the consular crisis between the US and Russia, which only has the potential of getting worse. The coverage of Secretary Austin's visit to Ukraine noted that US policy on Ukraine favors the status quo despite rhetoric to the contrary. Commentators also discussed UK efforts to improve Ukraine's naval security as well as the claims that Ukraine's top military academy has engaged in training members of neo-Nazi organizations.

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This publication was funded by the Russia Strategic Initiative, U.S. European Command. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily represent the views of the Department of Defense or the United States government.

3. INFORMATION OPERATIONS AND COGNITIVE WARFARE

Several Russian articles recently reported on US and NATO stances towards information warfare. The first article is a lengthy piece that details the alleged “new forms and methods of ideological aggression” carried out by the United States and its allies. The second article argues that NATO is shifting some attention to “cognitive warfare” and “is clearly interested in using the means of such a war.” A third article addresses unofficial allegations in the US and German media that Russia is to blame for the “Havana Syndrome” which has been plaguing US diplomats abroad.

4. MILITARY COMPETITION IN EAST ASIA

A set of recent articles by Russian military commentators have reviewed the state of US-China competition and rivalry in East Asia, the rearmament of the Japanese navy, and the recent Seawolf submarine collision. Noting that the military and political situation in the region has further deteriorated, recent events have largely been framed as part of the broader rise of China and of the US reaction to this development, including alliance building, increasing military offensive and defensive capabilities, and expanding naval reconnaissance.

5. US HYPERSONIC WEAPONS DEVELOPMENT

Two articles address recent US developments in the field of hypersonic weapons. The first article discusses the US Army’s announcement of the development of a new mid-range-capability battery called “Typhon,” which will be able to field the hypersonic variant of the SM-6 missile by FY 2024. The second article addresses a recent announcement that the US Space Development Agency has approved the design of a new generation of satellites capable of detecting launches and tracking the flight path of hypersonic missiles.

6. INCIDENT WITH THE DESTROYER USS CHAFEE

Several Russian publications reported on an incident that took place in the Sea of Japan on Friday, October 15. According to the articles, the US destroyer USS *Chafee* “came close to the territorial waters of Russia and made an attempt to cross the state border,” prompting the Russian Ministry of Defense to send the destroyer *Admiral Tributs* to escort the vessel away. Reportedly, the ships came within 60 yards of each other. The Russian Ministry of Defense condemned the US action, describing it as a “gross violation” of international maritime law.

7. RUSSIA-TURKEY RELATIONS

Russian foreign policy commentators have assessed relations with Turkey in recent weeks, paying particular attention to the potential for new arms deals. Two articles in *BMPD* discussed the possibility of selling Russian combat aircraft to Turkey and Turkish interest in acquiring F-16 fighters. An opinion piece in *Topwar.ru* briefly reviewed the history of Russian-Turkish military relations as well as its recent diplomatic overtures to regional neighbors, suggesting that Turkey is an unreliable partner whose goals of influence expansion must be watched. Also, an article in *Voенно-Промышлenny Kuryer (VPK)* discussed the potential content of Putin and Erdogan meeting in Sochi in late September.

8. DEVELOPMENT OF AN ARCTIC ALLIANCE

An article in *Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie* discussed the development of a new alliance between the Scandinavian countries of Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. Reviewing recent agreements for closer cooperation, the piece lamented the drift away from de facto neutrality on the part of Sweden, as well as the potential for this new military alliance to become NATO's "daughter" alliance for Northern Europe.

9. CONCERN ABOUT NORDSTREAM PIPELINE SABOTAGE

An article in *topwar.ru* raises the possibility that the United States might direct one of its East European allies to sabotage the Nordstream-2 pipeline. The author suggests that Poland or Ukraine, both of which have well trained naval special forces, could take such an action. It would be difficult for Russia to prove responsibility for any potential act of sabotage.

1. NATO-RUSSIA RELATIONS

NATO's relations with Russia were a dominant topic of discussion in Russian media during the reporting period. The conversation covered a range of issues, including the continuing deterioration of diplomatic relations, perception of the new NATO Concept for Deterrence and Defense of the Euro-Atlantic Area, NATO military activities near Russia's borders, the framing of continuing efforts at Russian-Belarusian defense integration as a response to such activities, and the possibility of separate EU security structures being established.

DETERIORATION OF NATO-RUSSIA DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

Russian media also continue to discuss the closure of Russia's NATO mission in response to the previous month's NATO decision to reduce the size of the mission and expel eight Russian diplomats. An October 21 article in *Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie* notes that Russian officials blame Brussels for not fulfilling its promises to build a dialog between equals. It asks how Jens Stoltenberg could possibly be surprised that Russian military diplomats serving in Brussels might be intelligence agents, though it argues that such agents work in an entirely aboveboard manner. It goes on to say that while Stoltenberg repeats the mantra that one must communicate with Russia, he does the opposite. As a result, the freeze in relations has now become a full break. Moscow's response, to close the NATO information bureau and military mission in Moscow, is logical and consistent.¹

The result, according to Andrey Kortunov as quoted in *Kommersant*, is effectively a decision by the two sides to permanently end the partnership of previous decades. He believes that the impetus came from Brussels, as "a new NATO strategy is currently being prepared, which will be adopted at the next summit of the alliance, and the former partnership with Russia no longer fits into its concept." He continues:

However, ... it was important for Brussels to lay the blame on Moscow.... By expelling Russian diplomats, Brussels deliberately provoked Moscow to take drastic steps, which... would have allowed Secretary General Stoltenberg to throw up his hands: they say, we were still ready for interaction, but Moscow turned out to be unprepared. The fact that the Russian side ultimately played this game by taking retaliatory steps confirms that Moscow also considers its partnership with NATO to be exhausted.²

According to Vasily Kashin, Russian officials believe that "the continued existence and expansion of NATO after the end of the Cold War was the main cause for the collapse of the entire complex of relations between Russia and the West.... The continued existence of a Russian mission at NATO weakens Russia's position and casts doubt on its resolve."

Two articles discuss the evolution of NATO-Russia relations. A lengthy article in *Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie* discusses the history of NATO-Russian military cooperation. It highlights Russia's successes in joint operations with NATO in the Balkans and how those operations led to planning and concrete efforts to increase interoperability between the two sides' military forces. It also suggests some potential actions that the Russian military might take so as to prepare for possible future opportunities to resume cooperation.³

Writing in *Topwar.ru*, Yevgeniy Fedorov describes the gradual deterioration of the diplomatic component of the relationship. He argues that diplomacy generally worked relatively well until 2014, but after the annexation of Crimea, contacts became purely formal, with Brussels seeking to strengthen its military

position in order to dominate any dialog—a form of interaction that obviously did not appeal to Moscow. The closure of Russia’s NATO mission means that even purely formal dialog will now cease and the only remaining channel of communication will be at the level of senior military officials. Fedorov highlights the closure of NATO’s information bureau in Moscow as a positive development, since it “carried out in Russia openly propagandistic, if not subversive, activity.” He concludes by noting that while the current situation was initiated by NATO’s decision to expel Russian diplomats, neither side was particularly interested in maintaining the diplomatic relationship, which elicited irritation from both sides and was primarily used as a bargaining chip in endless confrontations.⁴

RUSSIA’S REACTION TO THE NEW NATO DEFENSE STRATEGY

Russian media extensively covered the NATO defense ministerial meeting in Brussels. An article in *Novye Izvestiya* highlights the adoption of “a new strategy for deterring Moscow” (referring to the Concept for Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area, or DDA), focusing on NATO plans to increase force presence in the Black Sea region and to work more closely with Ukraine and Georgia. It notes that in response to the German defense minister highlighting Russia’s aggressive behavior in that region, Russian deputy defense minister Andrey Rudenko warned NATO that “any further step towards Ukraine’s membership in the alliance will have serious consequences.” It also notes that together with the DDA, NATO adopted a four-year implementation plan that would build up NATO’s air defense, cyberwarfare, and intelligence capabilities.⁵

The article goes on to quote political scientist Vladimir Batyuk in saying that the tension in Russia-NATO relations is at the highest level since the Cold War:

After the US and NATO left Afghanistan, it is very important to show their European allies their importance, their necessity. In my opinion, this does not mean at all that they are preparing for a big war with Russia. Of course, after the meeting in Brussels, NATO, as promised, may increase its presence in the Black Sea and Baltic regions. But, imagine that in the same Eastern Europe, NATO has only four ground battalions. This, apparently, is the limit that they can afford at present. Russia will have to react to any provocations. But in the age of nuclear missile weapons, no one will start a war with us.

The article concludes by suggesting that Jens Stoltenberg believes the conflict between NATO and Russia will never end, because of hostile relations between Russia and East European states:

It turns out that “the tail wags the dog.” It turns out that the junior NATO partners—the Poles and the Balts, who have their own phobias, their age-old complexes with regard to Moscow—determine the policy of the leading powers of the world. Are we going to be in conflict with the West because the Poles and Lithuanians don’t like us? If this is the case, then the conclusion suggests itself: with NATO as an organization, as an institution, it is pointless to conduct any kind of dialogue. Russia will talk with those states that make up the backbone of NATO’s military might, primarily with the United States. And there will be no war.

Two articles in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* focus on current NATO military exercises as a way of highlighting NATO’s focus on conflict with Russia. The Steadfast Noon 2021 exercise is discussed as a test of how NATO might use tactical nuclear weapons in a war scenario, with details about the damage that a B61 bomb launched from an F-35 aircraft might inflict on civilian populations and how it might be able to evade Russian air defense systems. It quotes Russia’s ambassador to the United States as saying that NATO’s plans to use such weapons are “overtly provocative and run counter to Washington’s assurances of striving for

complete nuclear disarmament.”⁶ The second article highlights the Castle Forge exercise in the Balkans, suggesting that NATO is looking to use B-1B bombers with LRASM missiles to threaten all of central Russia and the Black Sea region. It then highlights NATO’s expanding deployment of Aegis Ashore systems and Jens Stoltenberg’s statement that all NATO members are increasing their military expenditures, including for new weapons systems such as the SM-6, noting that US air defense launch systems could also be used to launch attacks with Tomahawk missiles. The article also notes that it is especially worrying that NATO has approved a 1 billion euro innovation fund and is starting to work on an artificial intelligence strategy.⁷

RUSSIA-BELARUS DEFENSE INTEGRATION

Russian media framed recent advances in defense integration between Russia and Belarus as a response to continuing aggressive actions by NATO. A joint defense ministry collegium held on October 20 in Moscow announced a new military security doctrine that *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* describes as having the effect of “turning Belarus into a western security buffer for Russia.” The document will highlight concerns about NATO pressure near the two countries’ western borders. As described by Sergey Shoigu,

Stockpiles of weapons, military equipment and materiel are being created, and measures for the transfer of troops are being worked out. An armored brigade of the United States Ground Forces and four multinational battalion tactical groups have been deployed to Poland and the Baltic states. The headquarters of the alliance's coalition divisions have been formed in Romania, Poland and Latvia. The capacity of port and airfield infrastructures is increasing.⁸

As described in an article in *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, Shoigu went on to highlight the increase in the strength of the alliance’s rapid-reaction force, the deployment of Aegis Ashore with its potential for launching rapid-strike missiles, more frequent forays by NATO reconnaissance and tactical aviation assets, and an increase in the frequency of NATO and partner exercises near Russian and Belarusian borders. He also expressed concern about US modernization of its tactical nuclear weapons, their storage in European countries, and the training of pilots from nonnuclear states in operating such weapons.⁹

While Russia does not need to be concerned about a direct attack because of its nuclear arsenal, it nevertheless views a stronger military union with Belarus as a base for repelling a potential Western attack. To this end, the two sides announced that the draft joint military security doctrine had been completed and would be signed in the near future. They also signed an extension of agreements for existing Russian military facilities in Belarus, which are described as being needed less for defense purposes and more as a signal of cooperation. In addition, according to *Krasnaya Zvezda*, the two sides approved a defense cooperation activity plan for 2022 and a plan for the Union Shield 2023 exercise. Going forward, the two countries are implementing a military cooperation plan based on a five-year strategic partnership program.¹⁰

EUROPEAN SECURITY STRATEGY

Finally, several articles discuss the possibility that in the aftermath of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan and the establishment of the AUKUS alliance in secret, Europe might no longer trust the United States to provide for its security needs. These articles focus on the possibility of the European Union deciding to establish a unified European military structure, separate from NATO. An article in *VPK* discusses how the EU has long sought to expand its strategic autonomy and defense ties among its member states. It notes a recent statement by Josep Borell, the EU high representative for foreign affairs and security policy, about the EU’s discontent over the lack of consultation regarding the AUKUS agreement. It also suggests that

Germany is tired of serving as a host for such a large contingent of US troops, given both the resultant financial expenditures and the likelihood that this status would make it a primary target in the event of a nuclear war. It notes that France and Germany are both eager to create a unified defense control center, while Czechia and Hungary also support a defense union. Among EU members, only Poland and the Baltic States are strongly opposed.¹¹

A second article, in *Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie*, is far more skeptical of the possibilities for an independent European military structure. It argues that French president Macron is the only leader pushing for a stronger EU role in security and that various documents suggesting an independent EU role in security and defense will soon be shelved. The EU and its member states simply do not have the capacity to build separate command centers and strategic communications and intelligence. They also lack adequate naval and airlift capacity, leaving them dependent on the United States for mobility and logistics.¹²

2. US AND ALLIED POLICIES TOWARD UKRAINE

A major issue covered by the Russian media during this time period is US and allied policies toward Ukraine—specifically, the recent visit of Ambassador Victoria Nuland to Moscow, the visit of Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin to Ukraine, and the UK sale of naval systems to Ukraine. Commentators speculate about the reasons for Ambassador Nuland’s visit, and whether the main reason really was Ukraine, noting that the visit regrettably did not improve the consular crisis between the US and Russia, which only has the potential of getting worse. The coverage of Secretary Austin’s visit to Ukraine notes that US policy on Ukraine favors the status quo despite rhetoric to the contrary. Commentators also discuss UK efforts to improve Ukraine’s naval security as well as the claims that Ukraine’s top military academy has been training members of neo-Nazi organizations.

VISIT OF AMBASSADOR VICTORIA NULAND TO MOSCOW

Gennady Petrov writes in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* that the October 11-13 visit by Ambassador Victoria Nuland to Moscow was not marked by any achievements, perhaps because “the Biden team is very limited in its possibility to maneuver on the Russia issue.” He quotes Putin’s press secretary, Dmitry Peskov, who argued that it wasn’t a disappointment that there were no breakthroughs because “It is hardly possible. The Augean Stables are too large in our bilateral relations. You can’t rake them right away.” Petrov argues that the US did not bring any new proposals to the table and instead both sides agreed on Minsk agreements as the path forward. He also laments that the visit did not bring any resolution to the suspension of consular services by the US embassy in Moscow, noting that the Biden administration perhaps had less room to maneuver because of a congressional proposal to cut staff at the Russian embassy in Washington by 300 people if the Russian government did not cancel its prohibition on the hiring of local staff by the US embassy in Moscow.¹³ In yet another *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* article, Vladimir Vasil’yev quotes Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov as saying that there is a “potential for exacerbation” in the relationship if the US position does not evolve, potentially even the freezing of all work by the diplomatic missions.¹⁴

In Topwar.ru, Alexander Staver wonders whether the real topic of the conversation between Nuland and her Russian counterparts was Belarus. He writes, “Ukraine today isn’t that much of interest to Washington. A colony is a colony.” He also notes that his theory is supported by the recent article authored by former Russian president Dmitry Medvedev that posited the need for a halt to all diplomatic relations between Ukraine and Russia until Ukraine has a new leadership. He further notes that it may be possible that Nuland

“will test the waters for the conclusion of some agreement that would keep Russia out of a possible conflict between China and the United States and remove the tension in the Russia-NATO relationship,” and adds, “The task, I must admit, is very difficult and hardly realizable.” The article then goes on to extensively discuss how the opposition protests in Belarus were organized by Polish and Baltic intelligence services, and how politicians from those countries were seeking to trigger a NATO-Russian war using border security as a pretense. “Maybe seeking to diffuse this latter issue is Nuland’s mission in Moscow,” Staver suggests.¹⁵

DEFENSE SECRETARY LLOYD AUSTIN’S VISIT TO UKRAINE AND GEORGIA

In another article in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Petrov previews Austin’s visit to Ukraine and Georgia, with the backdrop of intense US domestic criticism about the withdrawal from Afghanistan. He notes that in Kyiv, Austin will also meet with Ukrainian president Vladimir Zelensky, a “heated proponent of the increase of NATO presence in the Black Sea” and discuss US efforts to re-equip Ukrainian naval forces. He posits that it is possible that during Nuland’s visit to Moscow, her discussions with Russian counterparts focused on Russia’s spring buildup on the Ukrainian border and the “conditions under which this wouldn’t happen again” and thus it is possible that Austin would discuss this with his Ukrainian counterparts. He further states that Austin will conduct meetings with political and military officials in Georgia, although those meetings are more delicate due to Georgia’s internal political situation and the arrest of former Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili.¹⁶

An article by Evgeniy Fedorov in Topwar.ru notes that Austin’s visit to the region seemed belated, even though “he had more serious problems like, for example, withdrawal from Afghanistan.” On Austin’s visit to Georgia, he concludes that “aside from traditional promises about coming signings of agreements in the NATO-Georgia format and assurances of a ‘NATO open door policy,’ Austin didn’t achieve anything of significance.” He notes that there was an expectation that Austin would take steps to meet with opposition parties to signal the US displeasure with Saakashvili’s jailing, but he did not do so, probably because he “doesn’t feel that confidence in front of TV cameras and microphones.” He then describes Austin’s visit to Ukraine, first noting “another ‘humanitarian’ delivery,” of three total deliveries, that includes mobile hospitals for the Ukrainian military and numerous weapons. Fedorov argues: “In the best tradition of US foreign policy, the weapons are intended solely to repel a mythical Russian aggression. In this regard, Ukrainian forces ahead of the Austin visit” destroyed the Donetsk mechanical plant using a mine-thrower. He further notes that “coupled with kind uncle Austin are the Brits, who promised in the next several years to build naval bases in Ukraine and give it a real ‘mosquito fleet.’” But, he states that because these weapons will not give any decisive superiority against Russian forces, “they will be used [instead] against the peaceful people of Donbass.” He concludes that the modest outcomes of Austin’s trip left his hosts “confused.” But there is nothing to be confused about, he argues, because US policy in the region favors the status quo due to the “growing threat in the Indo-Pacific.”¹⁷ Finally, a short commentary in *Ekspert* points out that Austin “didn’t pay any attention to Black Sea region countries with whom the US has problems,” citing in particular the US and NATO discordant relationship with Turkey and its president Erdogan.¹⁸

UK AND NATO ALLIED EFFORTS TO MILITARILY SUPPORT UKRAINE

Some articles focus on NATO’s allied efforts to improve Ukraine’s security. A blog post by analysts at the Center for the Analysis of Strategies and Technologies (CAST) discusses the news that the UK Ministry of Defense may transfer to Ukraine Brimstone missiles as part of the Ukrainian Naval Capabilities Enhancement Programme that would also see the construction by the UK of eight large missile boats, training of Ukrainian

servicemembers, construction of new military bases, and sale of several used minesweepers. The post notes:

In this way the shipborne version of the missile system Brimstone is to become the base of the missile armament of the eight planned for construction for Ukrainian Navy missile boats designed by the Babcock group based on a small patrol ship Project Protector 50. The use of Brimstone missiles clarifies the repeated reference to British representatives of plans to install on these missile boats “British” missile complex, despite the fact that the UK doesn’t now produce “full-fledged” anti-ship missiles.

It then discusses the history of the missile and its technical capabilities before concluding as follows:

As for the possibility of supplying Ukraine with Brimstone aircraft missiles, it is obvious that the integration of these missiles into Soviet-type aircraft of the Ukrainian Air Force will require a significant amount of R&D and modifications to the onboard equipment of aircraft. At the same time it should be noted that as a relatively massive high-precision means of fighting armored vehicles enemy Brimstone missiles have a certain operational-tactical meaning for the Ukrainian Air Force—if we ignore the issue of the cost of these missiles.¹⁹

An article in Topwar.ru also discusses UK military assistance to Ukraine. The article begins by noting that Ukrainian military analysts conceived of a fight with Russia by drawing on concepts of how Iranian vessels could swarm US naval vessels. Their second bet was to improve coastal defense ability or, if worst came to worst, Ukraine was “depending on the assistance of NATO block members.” The article notes Ukraine’s Strategy 2035 document that has been amended to speed up the adoption of the “mosquito fleet” by 2025 with UK assistance. The author argues that the UK views “any military-technical cooperation with Kyiv ... not only as a means to earn money, but to once again destabilize relations with Russia.” He then discusses the details of the UK-Ukrainian deal, noting that these are not new vessels and that Ukraine can afford them only because of a credit from the UK that, in turn, guarantees some business for the UK defense industry, which is hurting after Brexit. The article then states that, because of the absence of orders, Ukraine’s own shipbuilding industry is in dire straits and the “purchase of ready ships from abroad worsens the industrial crisis inside the country.” It then also notes Ukraine’s purchase from Turkey of four corvettes, without credit, and concludes that these same corvettes were once developed with the participation of its own defense industry.²⁰

In an article in VPK, Valeriy Gromak discusses a Ukrainian probe spurred by a George Washington University (GWU) study that members of a Ukrainian neo-Nazi organization, Centuria, received training from NATO countries in Ukraine’s top military university, the Hetman Petro Sahaidachny National Army Academy, and in those countries. The article highlights the group, which is relatively new to the scene, its links to the ultranationalist Azov movement, and the recruitment of academy cadets and instructors into its ranks, as discussed in the GWU report. It then notes that the US is “facilitating the fascistization of Ukraine” by funding the academy without ensuring that these funds do not go to Azov, Centuria, and related groups. It concludes with a quote from the leader of a Russian Ukrainians movement, saying, “The West isn’t just today noticing these organizations because it has a direct relationship to their creation.”²¹

3. INFORMATION OPERATIONS AND COGNITIVE WARFARE

Several Russian articles recently reported on US and NATO stances towards information warfare. The first article, published in *VPK*, is a lengthy piece that details the alleged “new forms and methods of ideological aggression” carried out by the United States and its allies, which the article claims were developed after Russia’s annexation of Crimea. The article states, “The goal of any information operation continues to be the compromise of the leadership of the Russian Federation (primarily the head of state and persons from his inner circle)” and says that such operations are always backed by state intelligence agencies. The article identifies three phases of this new approach: (1) the “Panama Papers”; (2) the “Argentine Cocaine Case”; and (3) “The Case of the Skripals.” The article concludes by answering the question: “What exactly should be the scheme of a Russian information operation that can compete on equal terms with technologically advanced American counterparts?”²²

The second article argues that NATO is shifting some attention to “cognitive warfare,” noting that the organization is preparing to hold a conference on that topic in Ottawa on November 30. The article also mentions a 45-page, NATO-backed Cognitive Warfare Report published in November 2020 which identifies the “cognitive dimension” as the third major combat dimension, in addition to the physical and information dimensions. According to the paper, while information warfare aims to control the flow of information, cognitive warfare “degrades the capacity to know, produce or thwart knowledge.” The Russian article contends that “NATO is clearly interested in using the means of such a war, since with its help it is possible to defeat enemies without cannons and machine guns. For the Russian Federation, NATO’s attention to these technologies is an alarming signal.”²³

A third article addresses the “Havana Syndrome,” which is mysteriously plaguing US diplomats and CIA employees across the globe. Specifically, there have been several reports of the alleged “sonic attacks” affecting diplomats in the US Embassy in Berlin this month. The article notes that while there have been no official US government charges implicating Russia in these attacks, unofficial allegations in US and German media have appeared. The article states, “[The authors] are trying to impose on readers an absolutely incredible scenario where the Russian special services somehow delivered equipment to Germany and carried out the targeting of American diplomats there. The authors of the pseudo-investigation leave the question ‘why?’ unanswered.” CIA director William Burns also speculated in July of this year that Russia could be behind the attacks, but is withholding definitive conclusions pending a large-scale investigation.²⁴

4. MILITARY COMPETITION IN EAST ASIA

A set of recent articles by Russian military commentators have reviewed the state of US-China competition and rivalry in East Asia, the rearmament of the Japanese navy, and the recent *Seawolf* submarine collision. Noting that the military and political situation in the region has further deteriorated, recent events have largely been framed as part of the broader rise of China and America’s reaction to this development, including alliance building, increasing military offensive and defensive capabilities, and expanding naval reconnaissance.

Several articles in *Topwar.ru* have focused on East Asian issues in recent weeks. One, by Evgeny Damantsev, notes that there has been a “sharp aggravation of the military-political and operational-strategic situation in the Indo-Asia-Pacific region,” largely because of the AUKUS deal and the supposed intention “for a large-

scale strategic aerospace operation to oust the AUG and KUG of the Chinese navy from the ‘9-dotted line’ in the South China Sea,” as well as plans to prevent amphibious landings on Taiwan. Damantsev focuses on the recent deployment of the Iron Dome antimissile defense system on Guam, which he argues has added significantly to US abilities to defend against sudden Chinese aerospace attack.²⁵

In a complementary analysis, an article in *Ekspert* by Tikhon Sysoev and Aleksandr Smirnov reviews the broader escalation dynamics between the US and China in the region, noting that the Biden administration was following in the footsteps of its predecessor and that new alliances such as the Quad and AUKUS were being created in no small part due to the poor usability of the NATO alliance for strategic purposes in Asia. Sysoev and Smirnov argue that while China has no obvious allies in the area and its undeniable revisionism makes a US-led “ring” of alliances and security arrangements plausible, Russia remains a “weak link” in containment and China can certainly assert itself in Taiwan and elsewhere should it truly seek to do so.²⁶

Finally, two articles discuss the collision of the Seawolf-class submarine USS *Connecticut* (SSN-22) with an unidentified object on October 2 in the South China Sea. A piece by Roman Skomorokhov in Topwar.ru suggests that such an accident—especially on a new ship with advanced sonar capabilities—implies that a failure of the crew and their training was likely at fault. He also argues that the collision may have been caused by the US sub not using high-frequency sonar in an effort to avoid detection—which may have led to its collision with nothing less than a Chinese submarine similarly running quietly.²⁷ Writing in *VPK*, Vadim Kulinchenko, a retired captain and veteran submariner, asserts that the collision was certainly between two submarines engaged in naval espionage and reconnaissance practices, and discusses a collision in 1967 in the Barents Sea.²⁸

Another article in Topwar.ru by Roman Skomorokhov focuses on the development of the Japanese navy and its airpower component, noting the deployment of new Izumo-class helicopter destroyers and upgrades to this ship class that can allow it to act as a full aircraft carrier. The author is deeply negative about this development, which he views as a plan of the United States to expand its footprint in the Asia-Pacific region as well as to bolster purchases of the F-35B fighter-bomber. He also notes that Japan is “gradually thawing out its own imperial ambitions,” focused on Russia and South Korea, in addition to responding to US goals.²⁹ In a separate article, Skomorokhov reviews the Russian Pacific Fleet and its Project 636 “Varshavyanka” variant of the Kilo-class attack submarine, which he argues would be an important bolster to Russian military capabilities given the threat from the US and Japan.³⁰

5. US HYPERSONIC WEAPONS DEVELOPMENT

Two *Krasnaya Zvezda* articles address recent US developments in the field of hypersonic weapons. The first article discusses the announcement of the development of a new mid-range-capability (MRC) battery called “Typhon” at the US Army Association’s annual conference on October 11-13. According to the announcement, “Typhon” will be able to fire two types of existing missiles (SM-6 and Tomahawk), as well as future hypersonic versions. For context, the Block IB variant of the SM-6 missile is projected to reach hypersonic speeds and have an increased range of more than 200 miles by FY 2024. The first of four “Typhon” batteries is planned to be deployed in September 2023. The article also reports on recent comments by Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering Heidi Shyu that the Pentagon is taking steps to make hypersonic weapons more affordable.³¹

The second article addresses a recent announcement that the US Space Development Agency (SDA) has approved the design of a new generation of satellites capable of detecting launches and tracking the flight

path of hypersonic missiles. The article notes, “The existing satellites of the American missile attack warning system (EWS) are not capable of solving these tasks, since they are too high (in geostationary orbits), and their infrared sensors are designed to detect thermal signatures of ballistic targets, which are much brighter and more noticeable than hypersonic cruise missiles and gliding warheads.” In 2023, eight of these new US “Space Echelon” experimental satellites will be launched into low-earth orbit and will operate in conjunction with the Hypersonic Ballistic Tracking Space Sensors (HBTSS), which the US began developing in January 2021.³²

6. INCIDENT WITH THE DESTROYER USS *CHAFEE*

Several Russian publications reported on an incident that took place in the Sea of Japan on October 15. According to one of the articles, after being in the area for several days, the destroyer USS *Chafee* (DDG90) “came close to the territorial waters of Russia and made an attempt to cross the state border.” The Russian Ministry of Defense announced, “After several warnings about the inadmissibility of such actions, as well as that the destroyer is located in an area closed to navigation due to exercises with artillery firing, the Russian [antisubmarine ship *Admiral Tributs*] headed to displace the intruder from Russian territorial waters.”³³

However, according to reports, the US destroyer did not change course immediately but rather raised colored flags, “indicating preparation for takeoff from the helicopter deck, which means that it was impossible to change course and speed.” When USS *Chafee* was able to change course, the distance between the two ships was estimated at “less than 60 meters.” The Russian Ministry of Defense announced, “The actions of the crew of the US Navy destroyer *Chafee* are a gross violation of the International Rules for Preventing Collisions at Sea and the Russian-American Intergovernmental Agreement on the Prevention of Incidents on the High Seas and in the Airspace Above It, 1972.”³⁴

US Pacific Fleet denied these claims in a press release on Friday, stating the following:

The statement from the Russian Defense Ministry about the interaction between our two Navy ships is false. While USS *Chafee* (DDG 90) was conducting routine operations in international water in the Sea of Japan on Oct. 15, 2021, a Russian Udaloy-class destroyer came within approximately 65 yards of USS *Chafee* (DDG 90) while the ship was preparing for flight operations. The interaction was safe and professional.³⁵

7. RUSSIA-TURKEY RELATIONS

In recent weeks, Russian foreign policy commentators have assessed Russia’s relations with Turkey, paying particular attention to the potential for new arms deals. Two blog posts by analysts at CAST discuss the possibility of selling Russian combat aircraft to Turkey and Turkish interest in acquiring F-16 fighters. An opinion piece in Topwar.ru briefly reviews the history of Russian-Turkish military relations as well as its recent diplomatic overtures to regional neighbors, suggesting that Turkey is an unreliable partner whose goals of influence expansion must be watched. Also, an article in *VPK* discusses the potential content of Putin and Erdogan’s meeting in Sochi in late September.

The prospects for multiple arms deals are the subject of two recent pieces in *BMPD*. On October 13, the blog discussed the Turkish government’s recent request to the US for 40 Lockheed Martin F-16C / D (F-16V) Block 70 fighters, which would amount to \$6 billion. The entry argues that the sale would “be a kind of compensation after the US refused to supply Turkey with the fifth-generation Lockheed Martin F-35A

Lightning II” after Turkey purchased Russian-made S-400 anti-aircraft systems in April of this year. It notes that this request would act as a “trial balloon” to reassess the limits and possibilities of Turkish-US arms deals, given the new state of relations.³⁶

A second article in *BMPD* discusses the possibility of alternative Russian-Turkish fighter deals should the F-16 request fall through on the US side. An entry on October 19 highlights a statement from Ismail Demir, the head of the Turkish Defense Industry Department, in which he notes the potential to “reopen” the idea of purchasing Russian-made Su-35 and Su-57 fighters. While tempting, the discussion suggests that floating the prospect is part of the informal negotiation game between Turkey and the United States—and that should it fail, the Turkish leadership would try other options, such as the Eurofighter or Chinese fighters, rather than immediately going for Russian supplies.³⁷

An article in *Topwar.ru* on Russian-Turkish relations by Roman Skomorokhov overviews the place of Turkey in regional diplomacy from a historical and contemporary perspective. The author underlines the untrustworthiness of the Turkish side throughout history, noting that Turkey “takes [weapons] from anyone who gives without any embarrassment,” and that there is no universe in which “friendship” with Turkey can be taken seriously beyond core, mutual interests. Skomorokhov further suggests that Turkey’s medium- and long-term goals are empire-building in the Middle East, which naturally would be opposed to Russian interests in Syria especially.³⁸

Finally, an article in *VPK* on October 12 discusses the possible content of recent discussions between Putin and Erdogan during their meetings in Sochi on September 29. The author, Stanislav Ivanov, a researcher at IMEMO, suggests that the meeting likely included important issues such as renewed fighting in Syria’s Idlib province between Assad and Iranian proxies. Ivanov argues that Turkey seemed successful in convincing the Russian side that the escalation there was not in Russia’s interest. Yet he also notes, “There is no reason to expect that Turkey or Iran will contribute to a peaceful solution to the Syrian conflict.”³⁹

8. DEVELOPMENT OF AN ARCTIC ALLIANCE

An article in *Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie* discusses the development of a new alliance between the Scandinavian countries of Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. Reviewing recent agreements for closer cooperation, the piece laments the drift away from de facto neutrality on the part of Sweden, as well as the potential for this new military alliance to become NATO’s “daughter” alliance for Northern Europe.⁴⁰

The author, Yury Banko, suggests that the new alliance, while ostensibly coming into being because of perceptions of Russian actions in recent years, is mostly a result of the growing place of the Arctic as a “confrontation zone.” Banko reviews recent military acquisitions for the Scandinavian states, as well as the upcoming NATO military exercise Gold Response in 2022. He argues that “Russia should not underestimate the Air Forces of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark or the level of their combat training.”

Framing US-Scandinavian military cooperation as provocative, the article also notes the considerable capabilities and competence of Norwegian ground forces in particular. The author relays anecdotes about touring the Porsanger battalion in the 1990s, as a way to emphasize the importance of taking seriously the turn towards hostile relations between Russia and her northern neighbors. The overall tenor of the piece provides a negative vision of growing Scandinavian military cooperation with increasingly advanced and updated military equipment and materiel as an important source of danger to Russia in the coming decades.

9. CONCERN ABOUT NORDSTREAM PIPELINE SABOTAGE

An article by Vasily Savin in Topwar.ru raises the possibility that the United States might direct one of its East European allies might try to sabotage the Nordstream-2 pipeline. The author suggests that Poland or Ukraine, both of which have well trained naval special forces, could take such an action. He highlights Ukraine's 73rd naval center for special operations, which includes underwater diversionary activity as one of its missions. He also discusses Poland's Formosa special operations unit and its submarines' capability to deliver underwater divers to areas up to 50 meters depth. The pipeline is located in such shallow areas near the Finnish and German coasts, and also near Bornholm and Gotland. The author notes that in April 2021 Poland used its naval forces to hinder pipeline construction and has the capabilities and area knowledge to carry it out, while Ukraine is motivated because it blames Russia for explosions on its gas pipelines in 2014. He concludes by highlighting the difficulty of proving responsibility for any potential act of sabotage and recommends covering all shallow areas through which the pipeline passes with sensors and requesting permission from Germany, Denmark, Sweden, and Finland to allow Russian maritime border guard patrols in these sectors of their territorial waters.⁴¹

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This newsletter was written by CNA's Russia Studies Program - Strategy, Policy, Plans, and Programs Division (SP3)

Approved February 2022:



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Russia Studies Program / Strategy, Policy, Plans, and Programs Division

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

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DNL-2022-U-031724-Final4

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