



## Russian Media Analysis

### *Russian Perspectives on Western Military Activities*

*Nov. 18 – Dec. 5, 2021*

*CNA Russia Studies Program*

## Abstracts

### 1. [The Ukraine crisis](#)

The continuing crisis between Russia and NATO over Ukraine has remained the dominant topic of Russian media coverage during the reporting period, with 17 articles on the topic published in the Russian press. The articles can be grouped into two broad areas. The first highlights Western military assistance to Ukraine and the extent to which this assistance is threatening to Russia. The second focuses on Western claims that Russia is preparing an invasion of Ukraine, with most articles suggesting that these claims are overblown.

### 2. [US-Russia and NATO-Russia relations](#)

Several articles address developments in relations with the US and NATO, including the December 1 NATO Foreign Ministerial in Riga, where the draft Strategic Concept document, which sets the goals for the alliance until 2030, was discussed. Articles also address the December 7 video conference between presidents Joe Biden and Vladimir Putin which, while dominated by the topic of Ukraine, also touched on the Iran deal, bilateral relations, and cybercrime. Examining NATO-Russia relations writ large, two longer op-eds express frustration at Washington's lack of meaningful engagement with Moscow.

### 3. [Ret. Gen. Kartapolov discusses Russia's relations with US and NATO](#)

In an interview with Fyodor Lukyanov for *Russia in Global Affairs* and the TV show *International Review*, Andrey Kartapolov—the former deputy minister of defense and now chair of the Defense

CNA Occasional Paper | 1



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Committee of the Russian Duma—discusses the current security situation and Russia’s relations with the West. The discussion focuses on the Ukraine situation and thoughts about the nature of the NATO threat to Russia.

#### **4. NATO nuclear weapons and US-Russian arms control**

Numerous articles discuss NATO secretary general Jens Stoltenberg’s November 19 statement about the possibility of NATO placement of nuclear weapons “east of Germany” if the new German government decides to withdraw them. Separately, Aleksandr Yakovenko argues that prospects for US-Russian arms control are slim.

#### **5. Threats to Russia from US missile defense and space policies**

Several articles in trade publications discuss US policies on missile defense and in space as a potential threat to Russia. A set of articles by Vadim Koziulin profile US global missile defense efforts, arguing that the architecture as it is evolving is acquiring offensive capabilities and thus presents growing a threat to Russia. Vladimir Kozin discusses US space policy, US space policy documents, and the X-37B space plane as feeding Moscow’s perception that “Washington is taking practical steps for a stable growth of its military strike potential in space.”

#### **6. Reaction to US/NATO military exercises**

A number of articles draw attention to recent US and NATO military exercises. One article analyzes US STRATCOM’s Global Thunder exercises, held November 2-10, characterizing strategic bomber maneuvers near the Russian border as “far from peaceful” and suggesting that the Pentagon plan future exercises more responsibly. Other articles discuss NATO exercises Winter Shield (Latvia), Cyber Coalition (Estonia), Steadfast Noon (Southern Europe), and Castle Forge (Romania, Bulgaria, and Greece). Additional articles address capability and personnel enhancements at NATO and US bases in Europe, including modernization of tactical nuclear weapons and the reactivation of the 56th Artillery Command.

#### **7. The growing importance of information warfare**

The information space is the subject of two long articles in Russian newspapers, both of which argue that the issue of cybersecurity and digital vulnerabilities is only going to grow in importance in the coming years, especially as it concerns great power politics. The first article focuses on the growing importance of cybercrime to undermining the security of major powers, while the second sketches out the ongoing information war waged by the West against Russia.



## 8. [Scandinavian geopolitics and integration with NATO](#)

Political and foreign policy developments in Scandinavia have been noted by Russian commentators in recent weeks. Several articles note recent statements by Norwegian officials expressing disinterest in raising the military stakes with Russia. Also appearing is analysis comparing the differing viewpoints of the Scandinavian countries with regard to assessing Russia's threat level. All in all, Russian writers argue that while all the Scandinavian states are ultimately in the US-centric camp, their geopolitical views are more nuanced than those of other alliance members and regions in Europe.

## 9. [Black Sea threats and provocations](#)

Interest in the greater Black Sea has continued to focus on new NATO and American deployments to the region. Some articles mostly report increased tensions, including a recent reconnaissance flight that induced the Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova to comment. One article also provides a more detailed summary of escalation and threats to Russian security, showcasing a highly aggressive view of American activities in the region.

## 10. [Arms deals and mixed signals in the Indo-Pacific](#)

Russian commentators review the changing state of play in the Indo-Pacific region from multiple angles, with the common through-line of increased US-Chinese tensions and their ripple effects in the diplomatic realm as well as in the shifting correlation of forces. Several focus on the AUKUS security bloc and how it shifts the balance of power in the region, while others report on diplomatic relations between China and the United States.



# 1. The Ukraine crisis

The continuing crisis between Russia and NATO over Ukraine has remained the dominant topic of Russian media coverage during the reporting period, with 17 articles on the topic published in the Russian press. The articles can be grouped into two broad areas. The first highlights Western military assistance to Ukraine and the extent to which this assistance is threatening to Russia. The second focuses on Western claims that Russia is preparing an invasion of Ukraine, with most articles suggesting that these claims are overblown.

## Western military assistance to Ukraine

Russian media have expressed concern about Western provision of military aid and potential deployment of troops to Ukraine. A short article in *Lenta.ru* discusses a proposal by US senators to provide an additional \$50 million in military assistance to Ukraine, increasing the total amount to \$350 million, i.e., \$100 million more than requested by President Biden. The article highlights that \$125 million of this amount would be earmarked for lethal offensive weapons.<sup>1</sup> An article in *Gazeta.ru* highlights a proposal by the Ukrainian defense minister for the UK, Canada, and the United States to deploy tripwire forces to Ukraine to avert a Russian invasion—if necessary, acting outside of NATO. He further notes that these three countries have been far more supportive of Ukraine than France and Germany.<sup>2</sup>

An article by Diana Mikhaylova in *Nezavisimoe Voennoe Obozrenie (NVO)* provides more detail on British military assistance to Ukraine, noting that the UK has recently become the main sponsor of the Ukrainian armed forces. After describing the various forms of assistance being provided, the author focuses on deployment of various missiles, including Brimstone Sea Spear missiles that are currently under development. She notes that these missiles, as well as various Ukrainian missiles that could potentially be deployed near the Russian border, do not present much of a threat in the near term, simply because they are not yet ready for production. She further notes that the various forms of foreign military assistance are likely to have a negative impact on Ukraine's domestic defense industry, which will be squeezed out of its main market and suffer serious economic losses as a result.<sup>3</sup>

An article in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* discusses the possibility that the Pentagon may supply Ukraine with Mi-17 helicopters that the US military withdrew from Afghanistan last summer and is currently holding in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The potential transfer of at least 20 helicopters would almost double the number of military transport helicopters operated by the Ukrainian military, which the author claims would allow it to conduct large-scale airborne operations in the Donbas. He further quotes a retired Russian airborne officer currently living in the Donbas, who notes that the Ukrainian military may already be preparing plans for such an operation with US assistance.<sup>4</sup>

Igor Dunaevsky, writing in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, discusses Canadian military assistance to Ukraine. He notes the possibility, as reported in the Canadian press, that Canada may send hundreds of troops and a number of CF-18 fighter aircraft to Ukraine, as well as a ship to the Black Sea. He questions whether



this deployment would have a deterrent effect or provoke a confrontation. He also suggests that this report is part of an ongoing Western information campaign to create a perception of crisis around Ukraine, noting that regime change is part of the toolkit of the United States and its allies and not of Russia. He reminds readers of the frequency of past warnings about imminent Russian invasions of Ukraine, which have never come to pass. He warns that the various offers of increased military assistance to Ukraine from a range of Western states suggest that NATO has changed its position and is now gradually expanding its military presence in Ukraine, with no ending date. He concludes by suggesting that this means that NATO's decision not to give membership to Ukraine is a temporary maneuver designed to lull Russia into a false sense of security, much like its previous promises not to expand made after the breakup of the Soviet Union.<sup>5</sup>

In response to discussions about increases in Western military assistance to Ukraine, Russian media are focusing on the danger that such assistance poses to Russia. In particular, an article in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* quotes military expert Aleksey Leonkov, who describes the current situation around Ukraine as a "war of nerves" whose goal is to test how far Russian leaders are willing to go to defend its client unrecognized republics. Leonkov believes that the United States is considering several scenarios, including the possibility of a military confrontation with Donetsk and Luhansk that might entangle Russia. In this scenario, Ukraine might mount a rapid attack against DNR/LNR using the armaments that NATO is supplying to its military. According to Leonkov, "The role of American military advisers in Ukraine... is to coordinate the actions of Ukrainians on the ground, using, among other things, satellite reconnaissance data that will be provided by NATO countries." He also argues that the acquisition of arms from NATO member states provides an opportunity for Ukrainian leaders to highlight to their domestic electorate that they have Western support. Meanwhile, the United States is seeking a zone of high tension in order to make Ukraine weaker and more dependent and to distract its own population from domestic problems by focusing on Russia as an external aggressor.<sup>6</sup>

## Western claims that Russia is preparing an invasion of Ukraine

Russian media have also engaged in extensive discussion of Western claims that Russia is preparing an invasion of Ukraine, with the primary argument focusing on the desire of the United States and its allies to raise tensions in the region. A short article in *Novye Izvestiya* quotes presidential spokesperson Dmitry Peskov stating that claims that Russia might start a war with Ukraine are simply attempts to pressure Russia, which does not actually present a threat to anyone. Peskov then goes on to claim that Western countries might organize a provocation on the border in order to justify these claims.<sup>7</sup>

An article in *Gazeta.ru* discusses in detail the publication in the German newspaper *Bild* of what are ostensibly Russian war plans for the invasion of Ukraine.<sup>8</sup> It then moves on to discuss the reaction in Moscow, quoting Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova, who argues that the publication is a "US special operation aimed at shifting responsibility to Moscow." She goes on to say that the Western press should be concerned about US aggression, not Russian aggression, since the presence of "Russian



armed forces on Russian territory is the legal right of a sovereign state.” The article also quotes Aleksey Pushkov, a member of the Russian Federation Council:

American and German journalists have had their hands itching for a long time—they really want to fight with Russia. Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria are not enough for them. At the same time, they reflect the sentiments in the highest offices of a number of NATO countries: “We must put the Russians in their place!” So they are preparing the necessary atmosphere for this, as they prepared before the wars against Iraq or Libya, obsessively exploiting the theme of the allegedly impending “Russian aggression against Ukraine.”<sup>9</sup>

In an interview in *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, Security Council secretary Nikolay Patrushev argues that Russia has never had any aggressive intentions towards Ukraine and that “there have been no unjustified movements of Russian troops or unscheduled exercises near the border with Ukraine.” He further argues that Ukrainian officials themselves earlier suggested that there was no Russian troop buildup near the border, up until the point when they received new instructions that would allow them to increase their defense budget by increasing the number of provocations along the border with DNR and LNR. Patrushev argues, “By escalating the situation around the alleged Russian threat, the United States and its allies are creating an informational background favorable to them for building up their military grouping and strengthening intelligence activities.... It is not yet clear why all this misinformation is spreading, although it may have been necessary in order to justify the introduction of additional sanctions against Russia.”<sup>10</sup>

Several articles note the reaction of Belarusian president Lukashenka to the heightened tension in Ukraine, suggesting that he promised that Belarus would support Russia in any conflict in the region. For example, an article in *Gazeta.ru* highlights his suggestion that the West is using migrants to contain the Belarusian military in the event of a conflict between Ukraine and Russia because its leaders realize that in the event of such a conflict, Belarus would not remain on the sidelines.<sup>11</sup>

Russian commentators have generally rejected the possibility that Moscow might start a war. Pro-government analysts generally follow the official position that the increase in tensions is the fault of the United States, sometimes highlighting that an invasion would not serve Russian interests.<sup>12</sup>

The opposition commentator Yuliya Latynina takes a different approach. She suggests that Russia will not start a war, because it would lose. Instead, she believes that the movement of troops to the border is part of an effort to force the United States to engage in talks. She argues that the Kremlin has so far never conducted a real war—it has only conducted hybrid wars that were aimed not at victory but at painting a picture through lies. Furthermore, all previous Russian wars were built on the possibility that Russia could deny its involvement in order to deflect responsibility. Finally, the Kremlin has always allowed the West the possibility of taking a neutral position and avoiding any irreversible decisions, i.e., saving face while doing nothing. Meanwhile, Russia has always avoided the risks that come with a real war, because it understands that the real correlation of forces between Russia and the West is not favorable. A major invasion of Ukraine could not be conducted as a hybrid war and would have a catastrophic effect on Russian public opinion and on Russia’s standing in the world—



besides which there is a real risk of losing such a war. In other words, Latynina argues, the entire operation is a bluff, just like the buildup of forces last spring. It is a response to sanctions, to efforts to cut off Russian gas and oil exports, and to closer relations between the US and Ukraine. The US and Europe can react by expressing fear and starting a dialog or by calling the bluff and letting Moscow know that if it starts a war, the West will provide Ukraine with enough military assistance to make Russian victory impossible.<sup>13</sup>

## 2. US-Russia and NATO-Russia relations

At least seven Russian articles address relations with the US and NATO during this reporting period. Three articles discuss the December 1 NATO Foreign Ministerial in Riga, which US secretary of state Anthony Blinken attended during a four-day trip to Europe.<sup>14</sup> The Strategic Concept document, which sets the goals for the alliance until 2030 and is planned to be approved at the Madrid summit in June 2022, garners particular attention. At the ministerial, NATO secretary general Jens Stoltenberg announced that the Strategic Concept “will once again demonstrate NATO’s ability to change, to adapt” to what he called a “more assertive Russia.” Reflecting on recent trends in US/NATO-Russia relations, a longer article in *NVO* concludes the following:

One gets the impression that Washington is pursuing a policy designed, on one hand, to maintain a professional bilateral dialogue with Moscow on certain international security problems of mutual interest. On the other hand, the current US administration is striving to exacerbate relations between Brussels and Moscow as much as possible in order to rally the NATO member states, create a united front of Europeans manipulated from across the ocean against their eastern neighbor, and prevent the development of partnership between Russia and NATO, even at a minimal level.<sup>15</sup>

A lengthy *Voенно-Promyshlennyy Kurier* op-ed by Alexander Khramchikhin also discusses Russia-NATO relations, and specifically addresses the role that China’s rise has on the relationship. He argues that “Washington has begun to realize that it does not have the ability to oppose Russia and China at the same time. Obviously, the US intends to reduce tensions with Russia in order to prevent its further rapprochement with China. However, there are great doubts that Washington will be able to achieve success in this; the American ‘stick’ only embitters Moscow, while Washington has no ‘carrot’ for Moscow, since it is not ready to conduct a dialogue with it on an equal footing.”<sup>16</sup>

Several articles also discuss the video conference between presidents Joe Biden and Vladimir Putin that lasted around two hours on Tuesday, December 7. According to *RBC*, President Putin told Biden that “Russia is interested in reliable legal guarantees that exclude NATO expansion to the east, as well as the deployment of offensive strike weapons in neighboring states.”<sup>17</sup> According to an official Kremlin statement, while the conversation was largely dominated by the topic of Ukraine, the presidents also discussed the Iran nuclear agreement, discussed bilateral issues, and “expressed their readiness to continue practical cooperation in the criminal procedural and operational -technical areas of the fight against cybercrime.”<sup>18</sup>



### 3. Ret. Gen. Kartapolov discusses Russia's relations with US and NATO

In an interview with Fyodor Lukyanov for *Russia in Global Affairs* and the TV show *International Review*, Andrey Kartapolov, former deputy minister of defense and now chair of the Defense Committee of the Russian Duma, discusses the current security situation and Russia's relations with the West.<sup>19</sup>

In answer to a question about "Russia's force demonstration in Ukraine," Kartapolov notes that one of "the genetic and historical features of our partners [US and NATO] is the fact that they are very reluctant to react to other arguments, but there is always a clear reaction to a demonstration of strength. They receive these signals, so we have no choice but to show that we are ready for any development of the situation, including unfavorable—for them in the first place." He blames the US for the "deconstruction" of bilateral and regional arms control architecture, but also argues that it is impossible to talk with the OSCE and EU and that instead it is important to "make deals with those who have real power" such as the United States because then "its vassals will stand at attention." He notes the importance of "guarantees" for Russia. At the same time, he rebuffs Lukyanov's suggestion that Russia needs something "analogous to the Cuban Missile Crisis" to make others appreciate the dangers, stating that the current situation differs from the 1960s because "we know what the Cuban Missile Crisis is and what it could lead to [...] and it's not necessary to once again lead the world to the line that precedes the abyss." He points out, "This is the responsibility of politicians."

The interview then transitions to a discussion of NATO expansion. Lukyanov posits that it seems that NATO has become politically weaker as it has admitted new members. Kartapolov responds that NATO expansion has not dramatically increased the alliance's military potential but instead has added challenges for NATO because of the need to upgrade the new members' armed forces. He notes that it is not the number of members that concerns Russia. Instead, the danger is in the NATO "infrastructure approaching our borders, airfields appear at our borders that can receive tactical aviation, but, in fact, these are advanced airfields. Warehouse complexes appear at our borders, where is the equipment, capabilities, ammunition. Battalion tactical groups appear at our borders." He then notes the ability of the Romanian and Polish missile defense systems' Mk-41 launcher to launch Tomahawk cruise missiles.

Lukyanov then asks Kartapolov whether he believes that the United States is willing to fight for Slovakia or Latvia. Kartapolov's answer is no. (Note that even the desire to entertain this question is surprising because Russian political-military leaders do not publicly discuss the nature or credibility of US security guarantees to NATO allies.) He states:

They are not going to do this, they have enough historical experience, they got their "clocks cleaned" in Vietnam and they have now been kicked out of Afghanistan in disgrace, they understand this. This is why this hysteria has now begun in Ukraine: Americans are very fond of fighting with someone else's hands, on someone else's





territory. For them, the last war on their territory was between the South and the North [Civil War]. They do not know war. Until September 11, their houses did not fall, airplanes did not explode—but this is an isolated fact, although definitely tragic. And we—we know: our entire European part of the country was, in fact, destroyed, we had a continuous front line from the Barents to the Black Sea, and all men, from small to large, with weapons in hand, they defended our country, and women and children stood in industrial plants. America has not experienced this and will not survive, in any case—it is not going to do it. Therefore, they will not fight for notional Slovaks or Latvians, they will not risk their soldiers. They can send a ship, send a drone, planes, but I don't see any of their desire to die for Tallinn.

## 4. NATO nuclear weapons and US-Russian arms control

Numerous articles, including in *Krasnaya Zvezda*, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, and *Voенно-Promyshlennyi Kur'er*, discuss NATO secretary general Jens Stoltenberg's November 19 statement about the possibility of NATO placement of nuclear weapons "east of Germany" if the new German government decides to withdraw them. Separately, Aleksandr Yakovenko argues in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* that prospects for US-Russian arms control are slim.

With regard to Stoltenberg's statement, Vladimir Kozin writes in the MOD official publication *Krasnaya Zvezda* that NATO has "completely lost connection to reality and is willing to cross 'red lines' in relations with Russia." He notes past statements by Polish politicians and by the former US ambassador to Poland Georgette Mosbacher about the possibility of placing nuclear weapons in Poland. The article then discusses the nature of US nuclear sharing arrangements in Europe and NATO nuclear exercises. Kozin writes, "It should be noted that if such exercises [SNOWCAT and Steadfast Noon] in NATO with imitation of the use of nuclear potential and exercises with the use of conventional weapons were previously conducted separately, then from now on exercises with the involvement of conventional weapons, as a rule, are completed with the conditional use of tactical nuclear warheads. And this significantly lowers the threshold for the use of American tactical nuclear weapons, which endangers Europe and the world as a whole." He then discusses the opposition of NATO allies to any changes in US declaratory policy such as "no first use" or "sole purpose" and argues that NATO nuclear sharing is in contravention to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). Kozin concludes by citing statements by Deputy Foreign Minister Aleksandr Grushko that any potential placement of nuclear weapons "east of Germany" would be counter to the NATO-Russia Founding Act.<sup>20</sup>

In *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Vladimir Mukhin interprets Stoltenberg's statement and conclusion of US-Ukrainian agreements as the possibility of deployment of US/NATO nuclear weapons in Ukraine or against Russia in a conflict with Ukraine.<sup>21</sup>

In *Voенно-Promyshlennyi Kur'er*, Konstantin Sivkov, seemingly confused about what he argues is new participation of German aircraft in the NATO nuclear sharing mission, writes that this is a new threat of "hybrid nuclear weapons." Hinting at the possibility that a NATO member hosting the weapons could decide to use nuclear weapons on its own, he posits that nuclear sharing suggests the violation and the



abrogation by the US and NATO nations of the NPT. “If we consider the situation in relation to the grant to Germany of the right to use American B-61-12 nuclear bombs against Russia, this means that the United States wants to lead the nuclear war with the transformation of all German and part of the Russian territories into the theater of nuclear war, themselves staying on the sidelines.” He argues for a symmetric response to “hybrid nuclear weapons” that would also put the United States at risk, including potentially with Kh-101/102 long-range cruise missiles and the potential deployment of Russian “hybrid [nonstrategic] nuclear weapons” in Iran and North Korea because Cuba and Venezuela are too “far away.” He argues that while something like this would never come to pass, it is important for the West to revise its policy toward Russia.<sup>22</sup>

On a different note, Aleksandr Yakovenko argues in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* that prospects for US-Russian arms control are slim. The article begins with the author discussing the “destruction” by the US of the US-Russian arms control architecture, beginning with the ABM Treaty in 2002. He argues that Russia had no other option but to counter US missile defense developments with various capabilities, and now the US stake in missile defense does not seem to have been as beneficial. He notes that while Russia is ready to continue bilateral talks with the US, “much, if not everything, depends on the political will of the American side.” Yakovenko posits that because of the situation in Ukraine and the US expectation to negotiate on arms control with China as well, he is not positive about the prospects of arms control.<sup>23</sup>

## 5. Threats to Russia from US missile defense and space policies

Several articles in trade publications discuss US policies on missile defense and in space as a potential threat to Russia. For example, a set of two articles by Vadim Koziulin in *NVO* profiles US global missile defense efforts, arguing that the architecture as it is evolving is acquiring offensive capabilities and thus presents a growing threat to Russia.

Koziulin explores in detail elements of and partner countries participating in the US global missile defense system in Europe and in the Middle East. With regard to Europe, Koziulin argues that US/NATO missile defense assets are present at sea, on the ground, in the air, and in space, and the number of countries participating in US and NATO programs, as well as the number of systems in the region, has been on the increase. The article profiles European countries engaged in missile defense efforts or in possession of US-origin missile defense-related systems, pointing out in particular the creation in 2020 of a NATO space center in Ramstein specifically to counter Russia and China.<sup>24</sup>

Koziulin argues that “Washington has taken a course towards the gradual neutralization of Russia's strategic nuclear forces by deploying a network of anti-missile weapons of the Pentagon and the US allied states along the perimeter of our country.” He further notes the concern with the possibility of US intercept of Russian ICBMs “in the active phase of the flight” and states that “the ongoing [US] research on the destruction of missiles not only in flight, but even before their launch can be regarded as evidence of the preparation of the United States to deliver a preemptive strike against [Russian]



strategic nuclear forces.” Koziulin further posits that the US has demonstrated the ability to conduct counterspace operations and is working on the possibility of using Mk-41 launchers for hypersonic systems. He notes that the SM-3 launcher allows the US to launch Tomahawk cruise missiles. He concludes, “The build-up of missile defense assets along the perimeter of the Russian Federation, improvement of missile detection and interception, and especially the work of the Pentagon on the formation of the missile defense space segment with the participation of strike systems provokes a new round of military confrontation, which can become catastrophic for the entire system of strategic stability.”<sup>25</sup>

In an article in *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er*, Vladimir Kozin argues that US criticisms of the recent Russian ASAT test are disingenuous because the US and others have also tested similar capabilities and the US remains a leader in military space. He argues that the US has opposed negotiations on ASAT systems since the 1977-1978 talks with the Soviet Union, that it “hasn’t conducted and isn’t intending to conduct negotiations” with anyone on the issue, and that the US and NATO partners have “successfully blocked” numerous Russian initiatives on space weapons. The rest of the article discusses US space policy documents and the X-37B space plane as feeding Moscow’s perception that “Washington is taking practical steps for a stable growth of its military strike potential in space.” He argues that the X-37B is intended for the “development of technologies for a future orbital interceptor, allowing to inspect others’ space objects and, if necessary, disable them with various anti-satellite systems.”<sup>26</sup>

## 6. Reaction to US/NATO military exercises

At least six Russian articles draw attention to recent NATO and US military exercises during this reporting period. Two articles discussed the Steadfast Noon NATO exercises, which took place across southern Europe on October 18-28 and included aircraft and personnel from 14 NATO countries.<sup>27</sup> A *Voенно-Promyshlennyi Kurier* article states, “The alliance refers to the allegedly routine nature of the annual maneuvers, but these exercises are clearly provocative in relation to Russia and Belarus, since they were used to develop a nuclear war scenario.”<sup>28</sup> The article also references the Castle Forge exercises, which took place in Romania and Bulgaria around the same time.

US Strategic Command held its annual Global Thunder exercises on November 2-10, specifically focusing on nuclear readiness, featuring “bomber flights, missileer training, and SSBN readiness, verifying reliability and resilience of the nuclear triad.”<sup>29</sup> According to Russian minister of defense Shoigu, “10 strategic bombers practiced the option of using nuclear weapons against Russia almost simultaneously from the western and eastern directions,” coming within 20 km of the Russian border.<sup>30</sup> A Topwar.ru article analyzes the exercises, stating:

Such a demonstration of the ability to repel aggression is far from peaceful. The presence of bombers near Russian borders or SSBNs in the Pacific Ocean in patrol and launch areas appears to be a full-fledged threat....To achieve the goal of maintaining combat effectiveness and demonstrating capabilities, but without direct threats and



provocations, the Pentagon should more reasonably and soberly draw up plans for future exercises....Otherwise, [these plans] will resemble real provocations and further worsen the already difficult international situation.<sup>31</sup>

A *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* article discusses the Winter Shield NATO exercises, hosted in Latvia from November 21 to December 4, in which more than 1,500 troops simulated the defense of an attack on Riga. The article states, “But it seems that this is not enough for the Latvian leadership. On the eve of the NATO summit in Riga, Defense Minister Artis Pabriks addressed the United States with a proposal for a ‘permanent US military presence to contain Russia.’ This is a provocative idea, since, according to the founding Russia-NATO document, the forces of the alliance should not be present in Eastern Europe on a permanent basis.”<sup>32</sup> The article also addresses the NATO Cyber Coalition exercises, which were held in Estonia on November 29-31 and included participation from all NATO countries as well as Finland, Ireland, Sweden, and Switzerland. It notes that while these cyber exercises, which have been carried out regularly for over 10 years, are typically defensive in nature, they have recently started to include offensive elements. For example, in the 2020 exercises, “participants trained to disable the enemy’s air defense system, as well as conduct cyber attacks on other physical military and industrial facilities.”

At least two articles address capability enhancements at NATO and US bases in Europe. A *Krasnaya Zvezda* article discusses enhancements to the US military presence in Germany, including the US Army’s recent announcement to reactivate the 56th Artillery Command, as well as anticipated improvements to fires capabilities deployed in the country.<sup>33</sup> A *Voenna-Promyshlennyi Kurier* article discusses nuclear aircraft and weapons modernizations expected to affect NATO bases and speculates that, though the quantity of US tactical nuclear weapons (type B-61-3/4) based in Europe has been decreasing to around 100, the total number will rise back to 180 as they are replaced with the more accurate B-61-12 version between 2022 and 2025.<sup>34</sup>

## 7. The growing importance of information warfare

The information space is the subject of two longer articles in Russian newspapers, both of which argue that the issue of cybersecurity and digital vulnerabilities is only going to grow in importance in the coming years, especially as it concerns great power politics. One article in *NVO* focuses on the growing importance of cybercrime for undermining the security of major powers, while another, in *Voenna-promyshlennyi kur'er*, sketches out a portrayal of the ongoing information war by the West against Russia.

An article in *NVO* by Nikolai Poroskov focuses on the role of cybercrime, such as distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks or malware strikes, as it applied to international relations. As military technology becomes more highly developed and reliant on complex computer systems, he argues that cybercrime is only going to grow in both absolute quantity as well as in the danger it poses to major powers, especially the United States. Poroskov overviews recent major attacks in Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) countries, including the Kobalos virus attack on research and university



networks—which also attacked institutions in Europe, the Americas, and Asia. He reports that “over the three quarters of 2021, the number of DDoS attacks...increased 2.5 times,” and that the “longest attack during this period lasted more than four days,” whereas the longest attack during the previous year had been only three days. Poroskov also notes recent efforts at the UN to coordinate on “rules of conduct” in the information space, although such efforts have had a mixed record of diplomatic success so far. In the meantime, he argues that a “cyberspace disarmament race” is still far away, because both new projects through Rostec’s Avtomatika Concern as well as NATO’s “cyberNATO” are more focused on raising technical capacity to fight cyber threats than on seeking to halt developments themselves.<sup>35</sup>

A second article in *Voенно-promyshlennyi kur'er* by Major General Sergei Korotkov focused on the information space as a primary domain for “hybrid warfare.” He argues that the tactics of warfare in this area—such as disinformation, spreading rumors, and military propaganda—are old, but with the revolution in information and communication technology (ITC), “the destructiveness of this means of struggle has reached a qualitatively new level, comparable to weapons of mass destruction.” Korotkov reviews the rise of information warfare as a part of a general assault on Russia by the United States and NATO, especially since the crisis in Ukraine in 2014. He argues, “The confrontation is being waged under the conditions of the global domination of corporate media, which have switched to the online format while maintaining traditional forms of information presentation, as well as the emergence of new platforms—social networks, video hosting sites, online publications, blog platforms controlled by large American businesses.”<sup>36</sup>

Among several vectors of attack, Korotkov highlights public-private partnerships in the United States, such as the Highlands Forum, an American “informal think tank” dealing in ICT issues, as well as the Mountain Forum, a “dialogue platform for IT companies, media representatives, and the leadership of military intelligence, where long-term corporate ties are established, [and] opportunities for fine-tuning the information war strategy in conditions of absolute secrecy are identified.” He also notes that a major part of the information war against Russia comes in the form of ideological subversion, including the use of religious cults and “anti-state propaganda.” The general also reiterates several times that part of the ongoing confrontation involves “false-flag” operations and other means by which Western interlocutors blame Russian hackers or agents for activities that they themselves have undertaken.

## 8. Scandinavian geopolitics and integration with NATO

In recent weeks, Russian commentators have noted political and foreign policy developments in Scandinavia. Several articles note recent statements by Norwegian officials expressing disinterest in raising the military stakes with Russia. Meanwhile, analysis comparing the differing viewpoints of the Scandinavian countries with regard to assessing Russia’s threat level has also appeared. All in all, Russian writers argue that although all of the Scandinavian states are ultimately in the US-centric camp, their geopolitical views are more nuanced than those of other alliance members and regions in Europe.



An article in *Moskovskii Komsomolets* interviews Ruslan Pukhov, the director of the Moscow Center for the Analysis of Strategies and Technologies, who provides an assessment of the varying Scandinavian relations with NATO. Pukhov underlines that Norway's foreign minister Anniken Huitfeldt had recently spoken out against the need for NATO troops to defend the country's border with Russia and said that they should not "tease the 'Russian bear'" —a statement that the analyst feels was particularly illustrative of the Norwegian reluctance to go along with NATO's current adversarial trajectory vis-à-vis Russia. Pukhov argues that while Finland and Sweden "often behave even more like NATO members than even the Americans themselves," Norway has a stronger military position and a "quite sensible military strategy towards our country."<sup>37</sup>

Other news reports also highlight Foreign Minister Huitfeldt's comments. One article in *Lenta.ru* raises the question of whether Norway's interest in peaceful relations along the Northern Sea Route is a reason for the country's hesitance to join in escalating rhetoric regarding Russia.<sup>38</sup> A longer article, on *Topwar.ru* by Evgeny Fedorov, also analyzes the Scandinavian political-military situation and how it relates to NATO alliance politics. Fedorov raises the important role of the intraregional security collaborative bloc of the Nordic Defense Cooperation (Nordefco), which he argues is finding a role in coordinating materiel purchases such as the new Nordic Configuration Uniform and other applied research projects. Fedorov also notes that "one of the main threats to Russia within the existence of Nordefco is Sweden and Finland, which are actively being drawn into NATO."<sup>39</sup>

## 9. Black Sea threats and provocations

Interest in the greater Black Sea has continued to focus on new NATO and American deployments to the region. While some articles mostly just report increased tensions, including a recent reconnaissance flight that induced the Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova to comment, one article also provides a more detailed summary of escalation and threats to Russian security, showcasing a view of American activities in the region as highly aggressive.

The comments of Maria Zakharova regarding US Air Force activities over the Black Sea were reported widely in media. The incident in question occurred when a civilian flight from Tel Aviv to Moscow had to divert course because a reconnaissance plane had flown into its air route. One article in *Gazeta.ru*, for example, reports both the December 3<sup>rd</sup> incident and Zakharova's comments on her Telegram channel, but also notes that the event was an example of the US military's general "threat to civil aviation" in the region.<sup>40</sup>

At a far higher level of detail, Viktor Litovkin, writing in *NVO*, reviews the US Navy's increased activity in the Black Sea and what that poses as a threat to Russia. He argues that new multinational naval exercises are just the latest development in a string of military provocations by the US —made in the name of demonstrating support to regional allies such as Georgia, Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria, and Turkey—that are causing anxiety among Russian military and foreign policy planners. Litovkin notes that flying the flag—a stated US goal—is indeed a key reason for American activities in the region, especially in the wake of the Afghanistan debacle that has undermined confidence for many partners.<sup>41</sup>



A second goal is the “development of a theater of military operations” in Russia’s southwestern strategic region that is “aiming at our strategic containment complexes” as far as away as the Kaluga, Tver, and Saratov regions. He also suggests that given the US withdrawal from the Open Skies Treaty, reconnaissance along Russia’s southwestern border is also necessary in order to

look for the locations of our air defense/missile defense systems, coastal defense complexes, counting the number of aircraft at our airfields, counting our ships at sea and at the berths, removing thermal, radar, infrared characteristics from operating weapons systems, eavesdropping on the conversations of our commanders on radio and telephones, they are trying to break the encryption codes of closed communication lines; they are conducting other intensive espionage and intelligence activities. Everything in order to inflict disarming and high-precision strikes on our military and industrial facilities at a critical moment.

In this way, Litovkin also argues that these activities should all help bolster the willingness of Ukrainian authorities to take decisive steps to retake the Donbas.

## 10. Arms deals and mixed signals in the Indo-Pacific

Russian commentators review the changing state of play in the Indo-Pacific region from multiple angles, with the common through-line of increased US-Chinese tensions and its ripple effects diplomatically as well as in the shifting correlation of forces. Several focus on the AUKUS security bloc and how it shifts the balance of power in the region, while others report on diplomatic relations between China and the United States.

Earlier in November, for example, an article in *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* discussed recent diplomatic overtures by the Biden administration to China with regard to its nuclear weapons program. The article, by Vladimir Skosyrev, reviews international reporting on the issue that emphasized both the new ICBM silo building and hypersonic missile programs by China, as well as the US self-interested concern with reinforcing strategic stability.<sup>42</sup> This is juxtaposed by other Russian reporting that focuses on military preparations regarding China. As one example, an article in *Krasnaya Zvezda* discusses a recent Hudson Institute report suggesting that American tanker aircraft need modernization and replacement, especially given the chance for a future conflict with China.<sup>43</sup>

At a far higher level of detail, two articles dig into the AUKUS arrangement, taking distinct views on the meaning and substance of the agreement. Vladimir Karnozov, a military analyst, writes in *NVO* that the United States decided to provide nuclear-powered submarines to Australia because of the considerable superiority of American submarine production. Karnozov notes recent history of submarine sales to Australia over the last two decades as well as the tensions around choosing “Anglo-Saxon” over French equipment, and goes into detail about the technical capabilities of modern American nuclear submarines. Karnozov is particularly interested in the production base of American submarine manufacturing, and even suggests that given the new orders—and the current demands by



the US Navy's own procurement plans—it is possible that a new submarine “mega-shipyard” might need to be built, perhaps even in Australia itself. <sup>44</sup>

A second article in *Voенно-promyshlenniy kur'er*, by Colonel-General Leontiy Shevtsov, an adviser to the director of the Russian National Guard, argues that the AUKUS deal was primarily about creating a tightly aligned coalition to counter China, as well as a far-sighted interest in collaborating on “the creation of military and quantum technologies, including those based on artificial intelligence and computing technology.” He argues that because American unipolar hegemony has faded, it has become more important for the US to resecure regional and subregional geopolitical blocs than before. Shevtsov also states that there are major financial incentives for the deal, especially with regard to perceived oligarchical control of the United States by a power group made up of the Democratic Party, multinational corporations, and media. He notes that the cause of this scramble for a new military arrangement is that “ultimately, the United States slept through the development of China, not having time to harm Beijing by imposing its values and has decided to correct this omission. But it is already difficult to do this even by force, so everything will be thrown at the strategic containment of the PRC in various hybrid directions.” <sup>45</sup>

According to Shevtsov, in this way, the US has *de facto* changed its geopolitical posture significantly, such that it is no longer the “global gendarme” and is rather hoarding its resources and orienting them more deliberately. In this way, he cautions that the United States is realizing the increasing role that states in East Asia will play in global affairs, and has chosen to make its bed with other Anglo-Saxon cultures in the new multipolar setup—something that Russia will have to deal with in time as it too further seeks to play a part in pan-Asian affairs.





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CNA Occasional Paper | 18



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