



Russia looks South

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July 2016

Executive Summary

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* The NATO summit in Warsaw on 8-9 July confirmed the Kremlin's apprehension about the mounting threat from the south. NATO commitment to the southern front ultimately amounts to endorsing the audacious and reckless initiatives of Turkey and Ukraine with tacit US support that are aimed to provoke Russia and spark mayhem. Little wonder, therefore, that the Kremlin is focusing on being able to deter, contain and forestall such escalation.

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Analysis

Starting early-July 2016, the Kremlin has quietly embarked on a profound reorientation and reorganization of the Russian Armed Forces in southern Russia, the Caucasus and the Middle East. For obvious reasons Syria is a special focus of attention – but the new command has built-in potential for spreading to Israel, Egypt and Libya. This reorientation comes in response to, and in anticipation of, the US-led escalation of the face-off incidents in the Black Sea, Syria and the region as a whole, that the Kremlin considers to be the manifestation of a new US/NATO doctrine. For several months, the Kremlin has been studying the evolution of NATO's doctrine both during and since the Cold War – and that led to the growing sensitivity to the Greater Black Sea Basin (GBSB) and the Eastern Mediterranean basin. This analysis led the Kremlin to decide on an expanded and unified southern theater covering these crisis zones.

Kremlin strategists have been paying close attention to the Greater Black Sea Basin (GBSB) and the Eastern Mediterranean basin during and since the Cold War. Since the early-1980s, the Kremlin was convinced that NATO air-power plans called for relying on the southern approach in order to penetrate Soviet airspace from the south and bomb the energy and industrial hubs in the European parts of the Soviet Union. This analysis made sense to the Kremlin since it was a reverse of the Soviet long-standing plans to use the Middle East in order to envelop NATO and strike Europe from the Mediterranean. Hence, the Soviets up-graded the Syrian air defense in the aftermath of the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon (where the Israeli Air Force destroyed virtually all the Syrian Soviet-made air defense batteries and shot down the bulk of the Syrian Air Force's Soviet-made fighters within a few hours and without a single loss) and integrated it with the Soviet Air Defense Command.

In the 1990s, the Kremlin followed closely the formulation by the EU of the Belt/Rim strategy for the Mediterranean basin. The EU considered the strip stretching from the Caucasus and along the eastern and southern littoral of the Mediterranean all the way to the Straits of Gibraltar as the primary security threat for Europe. This was a sharp deviation from the US analysis, as imposed on and via NATO, that Russia still constituted the main security threat to Europe. In the early-2000s, in the aftermath of Kosovo, as the EU was formulating its own defense posture independent from the US/NATO one – Germany focused on the eastern Mediterranean and the Caucasus, while France focused on the shores of North Africa. Washington strenuously objected to this threat analysis because it downplayed the importance of Iraq, Iran and the Persian Gulf, and because France demanded command over the NATO forces in the Mediterranean. Fearing overlap of interests between Europe and Russia – Washington embarked on a relentless campaign to undermine Russian presence and interests in the Greater Black Sea Basin. The Kremlin took notice.

Meanwhile, the Kremlin is cognizant of the radicalization and destabilization of Muslim lands bordering Russia. The aggregate experience since the outbreak of the Second Chechen War in Summer 1999 has made Putin's Kremlin very sensitive to the Islamist-Jihadist threat and particularly attempts at Chechenization¹ of local populations (as is now being implemented by the Islamic State/Caliphate against the Arab tribes along the Euphrates Valley). The Kremlin is apprehensive of Turkey and the US capitalizing on the Islamist-Jihadist awak-

¹ For detailed analysis of the evolution and ramifications of Chechenization see Yossef Bodansky, *Chechen Jihad: Al Qaeda's Training Ground and the Next Wave of Terror* (New York, Harper, 2007). The definition of Chechenization in the book is: "Chechenization refers to the profound transformation of a predominantly Muslim society from its traditional, largely pre-Islamic structure to one dominated by Islamist-Jihadist elements that historically have been alien to that society. Chechenization involves not only the Arabization of that society's value system, social structure, and way of life, but a near-complete abandonment of a society's own cultural heritage in favor of subservience to pan-Islamic Jihadist causes, even if those causes are detrimental to the self-interest of that society." (Pages 2-3)



ening originating from the Middle East and exploiting it against Russia from the south. Captured Jihadists from the North Caucasus – all of them combat veterans from Syria trained by Turkish Intelligence – provided precise data about the extent of Ankara’s sponsorship, including concrete plans to sabotage the Sochi Games in 2014 tacitly approved by US Intelligence. The US-led NATO relations with Ukraine, directly and via Turkey, that include the sponsorship of Crimean Tatar Jihadism against Russia, confirm that the Jihad remains an instrument of choice. The anticipated radicalization and Islamicization of post-coup Turkey and the unprecedented empowerment of Turkish Intelligence will only add to the anxieties of the Kremlin.

Since the beginning of the active military intervention in Syria in September 2015, the Kremlin also began to pay close attention to their military capabilities in southern Russia – that is, the Southern Military District. The first phase of major reforms that built on the lessons of the war with Georgia in August 2008 and the continued anti-terrorist operations in the North Caucasus was completed in Winter 2015/16. On 8 February, President Vladimir Putin ordered a “snap inspection” of the Southern Military District in the form of a huge exercise aimed to assess units and test the extent of their combat readiness. A week later, on 15 February, the Defense Ministry announced the surprise military exercise that brought the entire District and associated units to full combat readiness. “From that moment, we began our surprise check of the military preparedness in the southwest strategic direction,” Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu announced.

The exercise directly involved 8,500 troops, 900 combat vehicles, 200 fixed wing aircraft and helicopters, and 50 ships. The theme of the main test was defending the Crimean Peninsula from a “massive air attack.” Exercised operations included Air Force and Air Defense operations, coastal defense operations, as well as long-range Seaborne and Airborne Desant/assault strikes to destroy and capture enemy bases from where the attacks on Crimea were being launched. Several transport aviation and Airborne units from other parts of Russia – all of them part of Russia’s intervention force- also participated. The Southern Military District controlled and managed operations from a system of headquarters co-located in Rostov, Sevastopol and Simferopol. In addition, 29 sub-exercises were conducted at various levels in order to test specific units and skills such as handling terrorist attacks and quick response to hostage crises in government and military facilities. Shoigu and the entire High Command personally supervised the exercise and declared great success. However, the steady pace of modernization would soon turn into a rush because of the overall political anxieties concerning the region.

A major element of the Kremlin’s anxieties is their inability to have meaningful communications and understandings with Obama’s Washington. Starting with the negotiations over the intervention in Libya back in 2011, the veracity and validity of US guarantees and explanations have been virtually non-existent. In early June, a Russian senior official described the Kremlin’s exasperation with the American negotiators including Secretary of State Kerry. “One day we agree on something; the second day they do the opposite. When we ask them, they blame it on others. There’s difficulty in building confidence with them. Even when they commit themselves to an agreement, it takes them months to implement it.” A couple of weeks later, the Chief of the General Staff, Army-General Valery Gerasimov, publicly acknowledged that “Russian patience is running thin” with the American double standards in Syria and Kerry’s own ever-changing negotiating positions. The Kremlin has concluded there no longer exists viable venues for discussing and clarifying points of contentions and perceived threats. Russia has no alternative but to take unilateral action as required.

If the Kremlin needed an incentive to expedite – there came on 7 June the entry of the destroyer USS Porter to the Black Sea. This was not the first time a US Navy combatant entered the Black Sea to show the flag, reassure



allies and intentionally irritate the Russians. The US 6th Fleet explained that the deployment of the USS Porter aimed “to enhance maritime security and stability, readiness, and naval capability with our allies and partners.” However, in Washington, the Pentagon explained that the USS Porter “will conduct port visits and bilateral exercises with partner navies.” While the destroyer visited a few ports, starting with Varna, Bulgaria, it trained with one Navy – Ukraine’s. For the Kremlin, this meant Ukraine was now a formal “partner”, and the reaction was harsh. “From time to time, US vessels enter the Black Sea. Obviously, we do not appreciate it and, undoubtedly, this will lead to retaliatory measures,” a senior official explained. “As regards [to] the overall situation, of course there is a definite increase and stoking of tensions in our relations.”

To make sure the Middle East part was ready, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu visited Syria on 18 June. He first met with President Bashar al-Assad and raised the forthcoming expansion of, and change in, the overall missions of the Russian deployments. According to Russian senior defense officials, Shoigu focused on “current questions of military and technical cooperation ... as well as certain aspects of the cooperation in the fight against terrorist groups operating in Syria.” Shoigu then traveled to the Hemeimeem Air Base where he held long discussions with the Russian High Command in Syria and particularly the top Russian military commander in Syria Colonel-General Alexander Dvornikov. In addition to the meetings with Russian air crews and technical staff, Shoigu inspected the S-400 air defense missile systems and the SS-26 Iskander ballistic missiles – two strategic weapon systems not involved in the fighting against the Jihadist forces.

On 1 July, the Kremlin announced the profound change to the Southern Military District that would now be also responsible for regional affairs and the establishment of a dedicated department in the Defense Ministry’s central staff to supervise and formulate strategy for military activities in the Greater Black Sea Basin and the Eastern Mediterranean basin. Colonel-General Alexander Dvornikov was appointed the new commander of the forces of the Southern Military District of Russia. “Alexander Dvornikov has the experience of commanding not only troops in Syria, but also Russian army units in the Chechen campaigns,” wrote Dmitry Safonov, the military correspondent of *Izvestiya*. “He distinguished himself in military circles as a specialist in combating terrorism.” Dvornikov’s predecessor, Colonel-General Alexander Galkin, was nominated the first head of the new department of the Defense Ministry’s central staff. The Kremlin stressed that two highly experienced senior officers with up-to-date knowledge of the region were taking over the new expanded commands. Meanwhile, Dvornikov’s deputy, Lieutenant-General Alexander Zhuravlyev, continues as the on-site commander of the Russian forces involved in the fighting in Syria while serving under Dvornikov’s new expanded Southern command.

The revamped Southern Military District is a major force grouping with immense geo-strategic responsibilities. The primary missions of the District are ensuring security in the Black Sea and Caspian Sea regions; preventing the infiltration of Jihadist groups back into the North Caucasus; fighting jointly with other security forces Islamism-Jihadism in the North Caucasus and southern Russia; supporting and shielding Russia’s allies in the Caucasus; supporting, sustaining and participating in the Russian Air Force operations in Syria; and providing forward shield for the Motherland against potential high-quality threats such as the US and NATO. As such, the District is facing some of the most diverse and immediate challenges and threats to Russia and its vital interests.

To accomplish these missions, the Southern Military District controls huge and diverse military formations including the military group in the Caucasus (that includes several dozen formations of ground forces, Airborne Troops, Naval Infantry and coastal defense units), the Black Sea Fleet and the Caspian Sea Flotilla, the Fourth



Air Force and Air Defense Army, as well as Russia's military bases in Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Armenia, Syria and Iraq. Moreover, Dvornikov will have to accomplish these missions while simultaneously overseeing large-scale rearmament and modernization programs, the quick integration of the latest models of weapons and military equipment, and the construction of new bases and facilities. Back in January 2016, Shoigu disclosed that one of the three new divisions Russia was planning on establishing by the end of 2016 will be deployed in the Rostov region. The resurrected 8th Taman Guards Motor Rifle Division will be a heavy combined-arms division with over 10,000 troops.

In March 2016, the Southern Military District deployed a battery/battalion of the new SS-26 Iskander ballistic missiles to Hemeimeem, Syria. The SS-26 is considered the most advanced missile of its kind and the deployment was meant to send a strategic signal about Russia's commitment and resolve. The Southern Military District also deployed two batteries of the K-300P Bastion-P mobile coastal defense supersonic missile system as a clear challenge to US-led Western naval intervention.

The intervention force for Syria and other regional conflicts established back in June 2012 remains under the direct responsibility of the Defense Ministry's central staff – specifically via Galkin's new department. Colonel-General Vladimir Shamanov, normally the Commander-in-Chief of the Airborne Troops, remains the commander of the intervention force. The Kremlin will decide and directly control any foreign intervention. However, once a decision was reached about the use of force – operational coordination and sustenance of remote operations will be conducted through Dvornikov and the Southern Military District. This seemingly complex command structure has so far worked very well for both the frequent use in Syria of bombers and fighter-bombers flying directly from air bases in southern Russia, as well as the launching of cruise missiles by combatants of the Black Sea Fleet and the Caspian Sea Flotilla. Under the new command structure, Russia's long-range strike capabilities are more flexible and speedy.

In Summer 2016, the composition of the intervention force remains largely the same as in Summer 2012. Moreover, several elements of the intervention force have seen deployment to Syria since September 2015 and participated in combat operations – usually at the subunit levels (companies and battalions) in support and bolstering of Syrian forces. The key units assigned to the intervention force include the 76th Air Assault Division in Pskov, the 15th Combined Arms Brigade in Samara, the 810th Naval Infantry Brigade of the Black Sea Fleet, the 336th Naval Infantry Brigade of the Baltic Sea Fleet, and an assortment of GRU, VDV and MP SPETSNAZ units, including the GRU's SPETSNAZ units comprised of Chechen veterans of the "West" and "East" battalions. The most important recent addition is the 120th Artillery Brigade that controls a myriad of the latest heavy artillery, rocket launchers and target identification and designation systems. The main ground forces units in Syria come from the 810th Naval Infantry Brigade of the Black Sea Fleet, the 7th Guards Airborne Division in Novorossiysk (that belongs to the Southern Military District but is not part of the intervention force), and a host of SPETSNAZ detachments. The forward command in Syria also absorbed other units for limited periods in order to meet specific needs in the field. For example, a large number of personnel from the 1st Tank Army of the Western Military District deployed to Syria without any equipment in order to train and prepare Syrian units to use the new T-90 tanks and other combat vehicles they received from Russia.

The novel element introduced by the Southern Military District in Summer 2016 is a strategic deployment of anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) bubbles. Together, they aim to deter and/or prevent NATO intervention throughout most of the Black Sea and increasingly the eastern Mediterranean. The main network of bubbles is land-based and can be augmented by the forward deployment of the Fleet's missile cruisers. The bubbles are



based on air defense and command centers covering forward bases for strike-fighters and interceptors, as well as coastal defense deployments comprised of long-range anti-ship missiles, ballistic and cruise missiles. The controlling headquarters of this network of A2/AD bubbles is in Novorossiysk. The primary facilities are in Sevastopol in Crimea, Novorossiysk, the Gyumri-Yerevan area in Armenia, the Hemeimeem-Lattakia area in Syria, Black Sea Fleet elements built around such missile-cruisers as the flag ship Moskva or the Admiral Kuznetsov (that is soon to deploy to the eastern Mediterranean) that carry 8X8 (64) launchers of naval S-300/S-400 SAMs, and in the future Cyrenaica, Libya (to complete the coverage of the eastern Mediterranean from land bases).

The main anti-aircraft assets are the new S-400 SAMs with 250 or 400 km kill zones (depending on the missile model). In Russia and Armenia, they are augmenting local-area deployments of S-300 SAMs with a 200 km kill zone. All these missile batteries/battalions are self-sustained and their radar and command-and-control centers are equipped with data-links and coordination and homing ability for nearby shorter range SAMs to be used against low-flying aircraft, cruise-missiles and drones. The first S-400 units of the Southern Military District are two battalions of the 1537th Anti-Aircraft Rocket Regiment deployed in the Novorossiysk area. They are in the process of being up-graded to a full S-400 regiment. In Crimea, the 12th Anti-aircraft Missile Regiment of the 31st Air Defense Division deployed in Sevastopol is already fully operational. The 18th Anti-aircraft Missile Regiment of the 31st Air Defense Division deployed in Feodosia is completing qualifying exercises and is expected to become fully operational in early August. The new deployment to Crimea also includes batteries of the new SS-26 Iskander-M tactical ballistic missile system in joint deployment like in Hemeimeem, Syria.

The center for the coastal defense – that is, anti-shipping and cruise missiles – is presently at the Novorossiysk Navy Base. In Summer 2016, the Russians are near completion of a new command center near Sevastopol Bay on the Crimean Peninsula. The new facility is based on the Soviet missile-attack warning system station that was given to Ukraine in 1991 and was abandoned a decade later. Left to be completed is a centimeter-range radar system. The Sevastopol command center will also receive feed from the Armavir Radar Station. This is an ultra-high frequency early warning radar station at the Baronovsky Airfield near Armavir, Krasnodar Krai. The Armavir Radar Station is comprised of two radars – one faces south west and one south east – that jointly provide radar coverage of the entire Middle East. Once completed, the Sevastopol complex will be capable of tracking all aerial activities, including cruise missile launches, at huge distances.

The primary weapon system controlled by the Novorossiysk command center, and soon the Sevastopol center, is the K-300P or Bastion-P mobile coastal defense supersonic missile system.

These anti-ship cruise missiles have a range of 300 km with hi-low flight trajectory and 120 km with low-low flight trajectory. The primary mission of the Bastion-P is destroying surface ships – from carrier battle groups to small boats. It can also be used against surface targets near coastlines. In Summer 2016, the Black Sea Fleet operated three batteries under the 11th Coastal Defense Missile Brigade deployed near Anapa, Krasnodar Krai, and an independent battery on the Crimean Peninsula. The Russians plan to deploy additional Bastion systems shortly in order to establish another Coastal Defense Missile Brigade in Crimea.

Russian military experts explain that “the Bastion rocket system allows one to destroy the ships of any enemy in most parts of the Black Sea within 10-15 minutes.” Reaction time to identified threats does not exceed 5 minutes. Russian senior officials discussed the potential power of the Bastion system in the context of the deployment to the Black Sea of the destroyer USS Porter. Alexander Glushko, the Russian official representative to NATO, harshly criticized the provocative character of the deployment of the USS Porter in the context of



NATO's attempt to dominate the Black Sea. "NATO is well aware of the fact that the Black Sea will never become a 'NATO lake', and we will take all necessary measures to neutralize possible threats and attempts to put pressure on Russia from the south," he stated. A senior officer of the Russian Navy was blunt. The US warships that "enter the Black Sea to show support for Ukraine and put pressure on Russia" do not constitute a viable threat no matter what they do and where they sail. "Those ships that currently stay in the Black Sea would never be able to cause considerable damage to either the Black Sea Fleet of the territory of Russia, even if they wanted to. They would only have 5-10 minutes to live, if they showed aggression against Russia," the senior officer explained.

Meanwhile, the greatest challenge was the timely completion of the integration of Armenia into the regional system of the A2/AD bubbles. On 30 June, the Armenian Parliament ratified the "Agreement between Armenia and Russia on creation of joint regional air-defense system in the Caucasus region" by an overwhelming majority. The agreement effectively permits Russia to augment the S-300 batteries in the 102nd base in Gyumri with S-400 batteries and fully integrate the air defense system into the regional system run by the Southern Military District. Although the air defense assets, as well as other weapon systems deployed to Armenia, remain under Russian control – the agreement stipulates their possible use under Armenian command against local enemies, that is, Azerbaijan.

Even though the agreement formally excludes Nagorno-Karabakh – it provides Armenia with enough leverage in case Azerbaijani forces advance close to the Armenian borders. "This joint System will further enhance the level of Armenia's air-defense. In case of any threat to Armenia, we can guarantee our security by using additional resources," Deputy Defense Minister Ara Nazaryan explained in Parliament. "With this agreement we will be able to use the technical capabilities and resources of Russia's air defense, including weapons, aircraft, and the ability to use fighter aircraft." Nazaryan hinted about secret understandings between Moscow and Yerevan that evolved during the lengthy negotiations and particularly the aftermath of the brief war with Azerbaijan in the first days of April 2016.

The roots of the negotiations are in the Russian hasty deployment of aircraft and troops to Armenia in November 2015 as part of the reaction to the Turkish unprovoked shooting down of a Russian Su-24 over Syrian territory in the Turkish-Syrian border area. The Russians sought to expand Central Asia oriented agreements of joint air defense conducted in the framework of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) to include Armenia. By then, the Russians already had military presence in Armenia in the Yerebuni/Yerevan Air Base and the 102nd Military Base in Gyumri – including S-300 batteries and over 18 MiG-29 fighters. On December 8, the Russians deployed to Yerebuni/Yerevan six Mi-24P gunships and six Mi-8MT assault helicopters from Krasnodar. The size of the Russian contingent reached between 4,000 and 5,000 troops. The formal Russian-Armenian military agreement concerning closer cooperation was signed on 23 December 2015.

In early-2016, Yerevan was increasingly apprehensive about the rapid military build-up and growing bellicosity of Azerbaijan. Yerevan pleaded with the Kremlin for major military assistance packages. The Russians committed to providing Armenia with a \$200 million-worth package of weapons at Russia's expense provided Yerevan accelerated the ratification of the agreement. On 19 February, Moscow and Yerevan signed the weapons supply agreement based on a ten-year state export loan to Armenia the payment conditions of which would not be discussed until early 2018. According to the agreement, the Russians will quickly deliver Smerch multiple rocket launchers and ammunition, Igla-S portable air defense missile systems, Avtobaza-M ground-based radar jamming and deception systems, TOS-1A heavy flame-throwing systems with tank-based transporter-loader



vehicles, 9M113M Konkurs anti-tank guided missiles, RPG-26 grenade launchers, Dragunov sniper rifles, Tiger armored vehicles, combat engineering equipment and military communication gear.

Armenia kept procrastinating particularly in lieu of Obama's sudden promises for help in a clash with Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh. The Obama White House was desperate to reverse the Russian threat to Turkey and determined that they could get Armenian cooperation in return for helping Armenia with a military escalation in Nagorno-Karabakh. However, the Armenian forces suffered major setbacks and losses, as well as a few important terrain features, despite initial success in the early-April mini-war in Nagorno-Karabakh. Meanwhile, the Russians continued with the initial deliveries despite the Nagorno Karabakh crisis. At the same time, Yerevan was furious over Moscow's even-handedness during the early-April mini-war in Nagorno-Karabakh and Moscow's effort to sustain the cease-fire and restart negotiations.

By early-May, however, Yerevan realized the US was not delivering politically while Armenia needed massive military assistance in order to meet the Azerbaijani build-up and bellicosity. The Kremlin was desperate to calm down Yerevan and thus demonstrated flexibility. The Kremlin and Yerevan entered secret negotiations on the expansion of Russian military presence in Armenia in order to pressure Turkey and in return for a better Russian umbrella for Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh in case of a future conflict with Azerbaijan. Moscow is determined to escalate the face-off with Turkey because of Turkey's growing involvement not only in Syria but also in the GBSB on behalf of the US (mainly support for Ukraine and for Crimean Tatar Jihadists). A key to the Russian strategy is the ability to put greater military pressure that will force Turkey to deploy forces away from the Syrian border. As well, the Kremlin wants to increase the weapon supplies and insertion of trained fighters to the Kurdish rebels fighting in eastern Turkey from bases in Armenia. On 13 May, a Kurdish PKK fighter shot down a Turkish AH-1W Cobra gunship in Hakkari province with a Russian-made 9K310-1 Igla-1M MANPAD that had just been supplied via Armenia.

By mid-May, the Kremlin launched the secret negotiations with Yerevan. The Kremlin's offer had two key components: (1) Deploying more Russian Air Force and Air Defense assets that will both pressure Turkey and provide a better umbrella for Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh in case of a future conflict with Azerbaijan; and (2) Supplying Armenia with new weapons to help in a future clash with Azerbaijan – especially T-90 tanks to replace/reinforce the T-72s destroyed by the Azerbaijani military, as well heavy artillery and long-range rocket launchers the shortage of which was noticeable in the clashes with Azerbaijan.

Russian senior officials delivered the latest offer to Yerevan around 7-10 June. Yerevan was very interested in the proposed deal but wanted larger military supplies and additional financial support. The Russians were forthcoming because the Kremlin needed to complete the integration of Armenia into the A2/AD bubbles. Moscow has given up on meaningful understanding with the US and Turkey. Senior officials at the Kremlin called the 12 June Turkish rapprochement initiative "too little, too late," and reiterated the Kremlin's resolve to increase the Russian military pressure on Turkey. The agreement with Armenia as ratified on 30 June is therefore a major step forward in implementing the Kremlin's regional strategy.

Meanwhile, the Russians embarked on a major modernization and expansion of the Black Sea Fleet and the Caspian Sea Flotilla. The main objectives were to vastly increase the size of the Fleet and to improve the long-range strike capabilities. In the Caspian Sea Flotilla, the Russians gradually up-grade the cruise missiles on their main missile ships. First to be up-graded are the five ships that on 7 October 2015 fired Kalibr precision cruise missiles against targets in Syria – the Dagestan, Grad Sviyazhsk, Velikiy Ustyug, and Uglich. They are to be equipped with the next generation Kalibr that can reach 2,500 km and strike with greater accuracy.



On 9 June, the Black Sea Fleet received in Sevastopol the Admiral Grigorovich guided missile frigate. This is the first frigate of the Admiral Grigorovich-class frigates (Project 11356P/M). The Admiral Grigorovich was commissioned on 11 March in Kaliningrad and was put to operational testing in the Baltic Sea before sailing to the Black Sea. Navy senior officers in Sevastopol stressed that the arrival of the Admiral Grigorovich was “marking the first time the Black Sea Fleet has seen a new blue water warship since the end of the Cold War.” Symbolically, the second frigate of the class – the Admiral Essen – was commissioned in Kaliningrad on 7 June and is expected to join the Black Sea Fleet by Autumn 2016. A total of six Admiral Grigorovich-class frigates are being earmarked for the Black Sea Fleet.

Most important is the planned doubling of the fleet of Varshavyanka-class (Project 636.6) diesel-electric submarines from the current three to six as soon as a new base is completed near Novorossiysk. The new complex will include three underground submarine berths and additional tunnels in the Caucasus Mountains in order to shield the submarines and nullify the threat of destructive winds. In Summer 2016, the Black Sea Fleet had three Varshavyanka-class submarines – the Rostov-on-Don, Novorossiysk and Stary Oskol – based in Novorossiysk. They are equipped with torpedoes and the next-generation Kalibr cruise missiles with range of 2,500 km. The other three submarines will deploy the moment the underground berths are completed.

The reinforcing of the Caspian Sea Flotilla and the Black Sea Fleet with additional combatants and up-graded long-range cruise missiles, along with the consolidation of long-range strike and bomber aircraft that are regularly used for bombing in Syria from bases in Russia, are aimed mainly to enable Russia to quickly intervene in and decide regional upheavals that harm Russian interests. They also provide Russia with the capability to swiftly destroy any US/NATO naval forces in the Black Sea, as well as neutralize the new implicitly anti-Russia US/NATO ballistic missile defense deployment.

Senior officers of the Black Sea Fleet are convinced that the completion of the flotilla of six Varshavyanka-class submarines will revolutionize the Russian strategic posture in the entire region. “The deployment of Varshavyanka-class (Project 636.6) submarines in Novorossiysk allows Russia to control potential threats in Europe and the Middle East,” they explained. These capabilities are also a direct result of the command center at Sevastopol Bay. “Together with the new [submarine] base in Novorossiysk, Russia can fully control the Bosphorus, the military infrastructure in Bulgaria, as well as neutralizing the threat of a US missile defense base in Romania.”

The NATO summit in Warsaw on 8-9 July confirmed the Kremlin’s apprehension about the mounting threat from the south. On the surface, the entire NATO was unified. There was heightened rhetoric and vocal commitment to politically-motivated symbolic trip-wires for Poland and the Baltic States.

However, on the eve of the NATO conference, Germany signaled having doubts about NATO’s overall strategy. On 18 June, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier warned that NATO’s forthcoming maneuvers in eastern Europe were needlessly creating tensions with Russia. “What we shouldn’t do now is to inflame the situation by loud saber-rattling and shrill war cries,” he told the *Bild*. “Whoever believes that symbolic tank parades on the alliance’s eastern border will bring more security is mistaken. ... We are well-advised not to create pretexts to renew an old confrontation.” Public opinion polls painted a darker picture. Only 9% of Germans supported NATO’s buildup in Eastern Europe, while 64% shared Steinmeier’s views. Official Berlin cannot ignore such strong opinions as an increasingly unpopular Chancellor Angela Merkel is heading for a desperate attempt at getting reelected in 2017. Moreover, Germany is not going to risk the Nord Stream 2 and its immense contribution to German economy.



France is also leery about the growing tensions with Russia and apprehensive about improper US influence. On 8 July, President François Hollande stated that “NATO has no role at all to be saying what Europe’s relations with Russia should be. For France, Russia is not an adversary, not a threat.” Hollande stressed that disagreements with Russia on specific issues must not determine the overall relationship of both Europe and France with Russia. “Russia is a partner which, it is true, may sometimes, and we have seen that in Ukraine, use force, which we have condemned when it annexed Crimea,” he explained. Ultimately, France can no longer tolerate the horrific impact of the sanctions on Russia on French economy and especially employment of youth.

Therefore, NATO is looking away from Poland and the Baltic States for the real confrontation with Russia and is focusing on sponsoring the escalation in Ukraine. Obama set the tone when he stated that “there will be no business with Russia as usual” until the Kremlin abides by the cease-fire accords in Ukraine as interpreted by the US. Ukraine’s President Petro Poroshenko called NATO’s support for Ukraine a “de facto alliance” against a common foe. “It is our common responsibility to change Russia’s aggressive behavior,” he said. “We are grateful that NATO stands by Ukraine.”

Still, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg acknowledged that there was “not a meeting of minds” on the Ukraine conflict. Consequently, NATO committed only to taking half-way measures regarding the Black Sea region. “We condemn Russia’s ongoing and wide-ranging military build-up in Crimea, and are concerned by Russia’s efforts and stated plans for further military build-up in the Black Sea region,” read the Summit communique. However, NATO avoided a commitment to concrete actions and stated only that NATO “will continue to support, as appropriate, regional efforts by the Black Sea littoral states aimed at ensuring security and stability.”

The real military activity in the GBSB is driven by US bilateral undertakings with regional states, the NATO Summit clarified. Thus, the training of Romanian forces to face the Russian threat will be in the context of bilateral exercises with US troops under a US-Romania agreement. Although ostensibly under NATO’s command, the BMD base in Deveselu, Romania, is the sole permanent operational presence of US forces in NATO’s south-eastern flank and thus constitutes the local trip-wire.

Hence the NATO commitment to the southern front ultimately amounts to endorsing the audacious and reckless initiatives of Turkey and Ukraine with tacit US support that are aimed to provoke Russia and spark mayhem. Little wonder, therefore, that the Kremlin is focusing on being able to deter, contain and forestall such escalation.

Remarks: Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author.



Appendix

The Main Units of the Southern Military District

District-Level Units

175th Luninets-Pinsk Order of Alexander Nevsky Twice Red Star Headquarters Brigade (Aksai)
176th Separate Communications Brigade (Territorial) (Rassvet)
11th Separate Guards Kingisepp Red Banner Order of Alexander Nevsky Engineering Brigade (Kamensk-Shakhtinsky)
28th Separate NBC Defence Brigade (Kamyshin)
1270th Separate Electronic Warfare Center (Kovalevka)
37th Separate Railway Brigade (Volgograd)
39th Separate Railway Brigade (Krasnodar)
333rd Separate Railway Pontoon Bridge Battalion (Volgograd)
Mountain Training Center of the Armed Forces (Baksan)
54th Training Center of Intelligence Units (Vladikavkaz)
27th Training Center Railway Troops (Volgograd)

58th Army in Vladikavkaz

4th Military Base [693rd Motor Rifle Brigade] (Dzhava-Tskhinval, South Ossetia)
17th Motor Rifle Brigade (Shali)
18th Motorized Brigade (Khankala)
19th Motorized Brigade (Sputnik Vladikavkaz)
136th Motor Rifle Brigade (Dagestan)
205th Independent Motor Rifle Brigade (Budennovsk)
67th Air Defense Brigade (Volgograd)
34th C3 Brigade (Vladikavkaz)

49th Army in Stavropol/Maikop

8th Motorized Brigade (Mountain) (Borzoi)
20th Motor Rifle Brigade (Volgograd)
33rd Motor Rifle Brigade (Mountain) (Novocherkassk)
34th Motorized Brigade (Mountain) (Storozhevaya-2)
66th C3 Brigade (Stavropol)
1st Guards Rocket Brigade (Krasnodar)
439th Guards Perekop Order of Kurozov Rocket Artillery Brigade (Znamensk)
291st Artillery Brigade (Troitskaya)
21st NBC Defense Brigade (Kamyshin)
175th C3 Brigade (Aksai)
176th Communications Brigade (Novocherkassk)
154th ECM Brigade OSN (Izobilny)
Separate Logistics Brigade (Stavropol)



102nd Military Base in Gyumri, Armenia

76th Motorized Brigade (Gyumri, Armenia)
73rd Motorized Brigade (Yerevan, Armenia)
988th Air Defense Regiment (Gyumri, Armenia)

Airborne Troops

56th Guards Air Assault Brigade (Kamyshin)
7th Guards Airborne Division (Novorossiysk)

SPETSNAZ/Reconnaissance

100th Separate Reconnaissance Brigade (Experimental) (Mozdok-7)
10th Spetsnaz Brigade (Krasnodar)
22nd Spetsnaz Brigade (Rostov)

4th Command of Air Force and Air Defense in Rostov

7th Aerospace Defense Brigade (Rostov-on-Don)
8th Aerospace Defense Brigade (Yekaterinburg)
6970th Aviation Base (Morozovsk, Rostov Oblast)
6971st Aviation Base (Budenovsk, Stavropol Krai)
6972nd Aviation Base (Krymsk, Krasnodar Krai)
6974th Aviation Base (Korenovsk, Krasnodar Krai)
999th Aviation Base (Kant Air Base, Kyrgyzstan)
229th Transport Aviation Base (Rostov-on-Don)
3624th Air Force Base (Yerebuni/Yerevan, Armenia)
393rd Army Air Force Base (Korenovsk)
546th Army Air Force Base (Rostov)
387th Army Air Force Base (Budenovsk)
27th Mixed Air Division (Crimea)

Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol

810th Naval Infantry Brigade
382nd Independent Naval Infantry Battalion
11th Independent Coastal Defense Missile-Artillery Brigade
126th Independent Coastal Defense Brigade
1096th Fleet Independent Rocket Artillery Regiment (Coastal Defense)
8th Independent Field Artillery Regiment (Coastal Defense)
68th Fleet Independent Naval Engineers Regiment

Caspian Sea Flotilla in Astrakhan

414th Independent Naval Infantry Battalion
727th Independent Naval Infantry Battalion
46th Independent Coastal Defense Missile Artillery Battalion



About the Author of this Issue

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