

Provocative U.S. Air and Sea Maneuvers at Russia's Borders: Shift from Reconnaissance to Mock Cruise Missile Attacks

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This past weekend, Russian state television on two major channels devoted substantial news segments of their week in review programs to the ongoing game of chicken that the U.S. is carrying on in the air and on the seas at Russia's borders: on the Black Sea, the Baltic Sea, the Barents and Okhotsk seas in the Far East. From the North, from the South, from the East and West U.S. war planes are simultaneously being directed against Russian defenses to probe their effectiveness and score political points.

In the words of Russian Defense Minister Shoigu, quoted on one of these channels, *Vesti*, aside from intelligence gathering, one clear intent of these maneuvers is to demonstrate U.S. raw power, to impress on the Russians that there is one boss of the world who calls all the shots, to reinforce the notion of a unipolar world. Says Shoigu, Washington does not at all like the emergence of bipolar strategic balance being pursued by Russia thanks to its new strategic weapons systems and is responding with these provocations which, as explained by chief of operations of the Russian high command Sergei Rudskoi on Friday, also shown on the program, have moved from purely reconnaissance aircraft and ships, to battle ready aircraft and cutters. B-52s and ships equipped with precision munitions and cruise missiles activate their missiles as they approach Russian frontiers to as close as 15 km to simulate attacks on the Southern Military District and the Russian installations in Crimea.

The Russian Defense Minister emphasizes that the bomber flights up to Russian borders may be American led but on the way over include fighter jets from Sweden, Germany, Ukraine and even Italy. The point of this involvement of the allies is to impress the Old Continent with American capabilities and to persuade the countries of NATO to host American rockets. And to those in Europe who may express concern about Russian attack should they agree to serve as launchers for the Americans, Washington responds that it has a monopoly of actionable military intelligence.

The programs on Russian television gave a different version of the relative effectiveness of reconnaissance there and in the West, stressing that Moscow is tracking all the B52s from the America's North Dakota air arm that are now based in the U.K. from the moment they go aloft, following them across Europe, where they are accompanied by various European fighter planes and do so without the Americans' being aware they are in the crosshairs at any point until Russian jet fighters scramble to intercept them on their approach to Russian borders.

The host of the News of the Week program on channel Vesti, Dmitry Kiselyov, warned that the Russians are considering using their electronic warfare devices to blind the incoming enemy aircraft. For the present they merely fly up to intercept them at top speed, approach closely and tend to unnerve the NATO pilots, leading to protests from Brussels. Should e-warfare be invoked, things could get quite rough.

According to the statistics released by General Rudskoi on Friday and shown on the Sunday news wrap-ups, the U.S. is now staging some 33 to 40 flight approaches to the Russian borders a week that are met by Russian fighters and sent on their way. On September 4th, there were 5 reconnaissance aircraft approaching the Crimea at the same time. Major incidents of mock attacks came on 28 August and 14 September.

The Russian Armed Forces television station Zvezda ('the Star') noted meanwhile with satisfaction that although none of the NATO countries recognizes the Russian annexation of Crimea, they have all been very careful to stay clear of the Russian borders on the peninsula. Said Shoigu, we have never allowed any of them to cross our border and we will never allow it.

It is regrettable that none of these activities, none of these possibilities for tragic accidents and recriminations between US-led NATO forces and Russia are being reported in Western media. If and when there is some clash, some downed plane, it will be reported like a thunder clap in blue skies.

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