

# RUSSIA MONITOR

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**W** WARSAW  
INSTITUTE

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## BLACK CLOUDS OVER BASTRYKIN

**In the last days of December, officers of the Investigative Directorate of the FSB detained another important person in the case against Zakhar Kalashov aka Shakro Molodoy. As a result, a former colonel of the Investigative Committee was charged with corruption. His detention occurred one and a half years after other high-ranking officers had been arrested. Such a state of affairs may mean the beginning of massive personal purges within the Investigative Committee and further weakening of the position, and perhaps even resignation, of the influential head of the service, Alexander Bastrykin.**

**U**ntil July 2016, Colonel Alexey Kramarenko had been the Head of the Main Investigation Directorate of the Investigative Committee (ICR) of Russia in Central district of the capital. He was detained on December 27, 2017 on suspicion of corrupt relationships with one of the leaders of the criminal underworld Zakhary Kalashov (aka Shakro Molodoy). Alexey Kramarenko was put in custody until February 15, 2018. This is the fourth high-ranking investigator detained in this case. Three of his colleagues were arrested in the summer of 2016 and it seems that the case, which started again after such a long period, may bring about serious consequences for the entire Investigative

Committee. In addition, the investigation on bribes from Shakro Molodoy was initiated by the FSB and not by the Investigative Committee. The aim was to hit people who had any connections with FSB General Oleg Feoktistov, referred as “Sechin’s personal trust” in Lubyanka Square, who also had to hand in his resignation in the summer of 2016. At the same time, the case was troublesome for the head of the Investigative Committee, Alexander Bastrykin.

According to the investigators, thief in law Zakhary Kalashov was supposed to give bribe on especially large scale to high-ranking officers of the Investigative Committee

in exchange for promising to ensure the release of his crony, Andrei Kochuykov (aka Italianets) from jail. The latter has remained in custody in connection with the shooting in one of the Moscow restaurants in December 2015. It is said that the ex-Deputy Head of the Bureau of Internal Affairs Alexander Lamonov was given a half million euro bribe and then a part of this amount could have been transferred to his superior, the Head of the Main Department of Interdepartmental Interaction and Own Security of the ICR, Colonel Mikhail Maksimenko. His task was to convince the former Deputy Head of the Investigative Committee Main Department in Moscow General Denis Nikandrov to change Kochuykov's charges. This issue has already been tackled by Nikandrov's subordinates responsible for the case, including Kramarenko. Thus, the gangster could be released; however, he was immediately detained by the FSB officers even before he was liberated. On July 13, 2016, the court issued a sanction for the arrest of Shakro Molodoy while Nikandrov, Maksimenko, and Lamonov were detained on the night of July 18 to July 19. Kramarenko submitted his resignation and then he started to work in the Rosneft's legal department, which corroborates his close relationship with Feoktistov. Just as Nikandrov who was in charge of the most important investigations launched by the 6th the 6th FSB USB Service supervised by Feoktistov. During the investigation, it was Nikandrov who supposedly ratted Kramarenko out. In any

case, all three men detained in the summer of 2016 agreed to cooperate with the FSB, which may have serious repercussions both for Feoktistov and Bastrykin.

Also Colonel Maksimenko seems to be a particularly important figure in the case. Former spetsnaz soldier, he is an old friend of the head of the Investigative Committee and his former bodyguard; then, he became an influential chief of the ICR Main Department of Interdepartmental Interaction and Internal Security in Moscow. He was even considered to be Bastrykin's right-hand man. The latter was not able to protect his protégé (however, the FSB did not even warn him about the fact that his subordinates had been arrested). Then Bastrykin tried to save himself thanks to the cooperation with the FSB in the case of several important investigations. However, he seems to be in troubles. One can expect further detentions within the structures of the Investigative Committee, which would affect not only its personnel. Among endangered officers, there are also two investigators who handed their resignation in the summer of 2016: Kramarenko's deputy Alexander Khurtsilava and priority cases investigator Andrey Bychkov. Further detainments in the upcoming months may lead to Bastrykin's resignation or, at least, to a serious weakening of the institution. Some claim that there will be some reforms in the Committee, as both the FSB and the allied Federal Protective Service (FSO) seem to be most interested in weakening the service.



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## PURGES IN LUHANSK

**Once Igor Plotnitsky was removed from power after the November coup, many important people have been sacked in the purges. Those who had any connections with the overthrown leader are now being removed from their posts. They are replaced by the protégés of the new “chief of state” Leonid Pasechnik. However, nobody has been arrested yet and the position of the “justice minister” is held by a consensual candidate agreed on by the patrons of both sides of the conflict, namely Vladislav Surkov and the FSB. It needs to be noticed that most of the new nominees are only acting ministers or chiefs of services. It may indicate that both Surkov and the GRU are trying to keep in Luhansk as many influences as possible, even despite the November defeat.**

People who were responsible for the operation against “interior minister” Igor Kornet were the first to lose their positions. The head of the State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company of the “LPR” Anastasia Shurkaeva was accused of cooperation with the Ukrainian services. The chief of Plotnitsky’s administration, Irina Teitsman and the head of the “government security service” of the “Interior Ministry” of the “LPR” Yevgeny Seliverstov were charged with involvement in an alleged attempt to seize power in September 2016 and the murder of the LPR’s “Prime Minister” Gennadiy Tsytkalov. However, all of them, including Plotnitsky, managed to flee to Russia.

Their places were taken over by people associated with the putschists. Olga Bass has been appointed new “head of administration of the LPR leader”; previously, she had worked in the “Ministry of State Security” supervised by Pasechnik. Also Sergei Kolesnikov, the new chief of the State Television, is a trusted man of Pasechnik. After the rebellion of 2014, he initially worked in the “state television” of the “LPR”; then, he started to work in the “Ministry of Interior” where he was responsible for communication issues. He was in charge of the informational aspect of the operation against Plotnitsky. Some changes have also occurred in the “Ministry of the Internal Affairs”. As a result, Yuri Govtvin,



Mikhail Paraskeyev and Roman Vedmedenko have been appointed “deputy interior ministers”. The largest purge could be noticed within the structures of the “LPR government”. For example, Sergei Kozlyakov, former “justice minister”, was dismissed. He was in charge of the courts that tried to remove Kornet from the post at the request of Plotnitsky. Apart from the “Minister of Justice”, four other members of the “government” have been dismissed.

The “Ministry of Justice” was taken over by Zaur Ismailov who became an acting minister. Since 2014, he has been the head of the “prosecutor’s office” and he was considered to belong to a group of Plotnitsky’s faithful supporters. Interestingly, he unexpectedly submitted his resignation a month before the coup. It is possible that his current nomination constitutes a part of an agreement between Vladislav Surkov (the protector of Plotnitsky’s team) and the FSB General Sergei Beseda (Pasechnyk’s patron). Ismailov may guarantee that there will be no harsh repressions against

the old team. A series of resignations in the “government” have been announced by Pasechnik himself in an interview with the Russian news channel Russia-24. The fact that he had such a possibility confirms his strong position since Plotnitsky had never been honoured in this way. The interview with a state-owned Russian television constitutes a direct manifestation of the Kremlin’s support given to the new leader of the LPR. Its aim was to resolve doubts about the new balance of power in the “LPR”. Meanwhile, things are getting pretty tense in Donetsk. The election of the “president” of the so-called Donetsk People’s Republic is scheduled for autumn. Emboldened by recent events in Luhansk, Alexander Khodakovsky has been exerting public pressure on his old rival Alexander Zakharchenko. It seems that Surkov wants the current leader of the “DPR” to save his position at all cost. The situation may change after the presidential election in Russia. It is not known whether the political course towards the occupied Donbass will be changed.

## 4 January 2018

# NEW YEAR, SAME WAR

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**The attack on the Russian air base in Syria in Khmeimim confirms the forecasts of the Warsaw Institute, according to which the accomplishment of Russia’s military campaign in Syria, announced by Vladimir Putin on December 11, does not necessarily mean the end of the conflict for Russia. The Islamic rebels have seriously undermined Putin’s image when they attacked the heart of the Russian military contingent in Syria on New Year’s Eve.**

**A**s we wrote in our Russia Monitor on December 12, 2017, “contrary to the official declarations of Putin, Shoygu and generals, the Syrian war is not over yet for Russia. It is estimated that in Syria there are still between three and twenty thousand IS fighters. Having lost the areas that had to be defended, the jihadists had complete freedom to maneuver”. The war has entered its guerrilla phase, which basically means that Russian losses will not decrease but they may even increase.

On January 4, Russia’s Ministry of Defense confirmed media reports on a mortar attack carried out by Syrian militants against the Khmeimim Air Base on December 31. According to official information, two Russia military personnel were killed. At the same time, the ministry denies that seven Russian aircrafts were destroyed in the attack. Interestingly enough, the military base seems to be perfectly secured since it is located far from larger rebel groups in the rear of the government army, in the area inhabited by



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Assad supporters. Such a state of affairs shows the possibilities of the enemies of government in Damascus and in Russia. The attack on the Russian base in Khmeimim seems to be first and foremost symbolic since it is the place where Vladimir Putin has recently announced a troop withdrawal due to the victorious end of the conflict.

The war, which is not over yet, constitutes an excellent training ground for the Russian army. During an extended meeting of the Russian Defence Ministry Board, Russia's Defence Minister Sergey Shoigu informed that over 48,000 soldiers and officers had gained "invaluable combat experience" in Syria. Thus, he has only confirmed that the actual scope of Russia's military presence in Syria had been much larger than it had been officially declared. It is known that in Syria there were also soldiers from numerous military units that, according to official information, were not a part of the Russian contingent protecting Syrian Air Forces and did not belong to the military personnel of Russia's military bases in the country. Among them, there are mostly marines, signallers, Spetsnaz officers and artillery officers. A majority of them had previously participated in military activities both in Crimea and the Donbass.

In addition, personnel changes within the

structures of high-rank Russian command constitute another important result of the Syrian operation. Officially, the end of the conflict opened the way for the promotion of a significant group of high-ranking officers who are currently gaining some combat experience in Syria. Russia has new commanders of the Aerospace Forces, the Central Military District and the Eastern Military District. The first position is now occupied by Colonel General Sergey Surovikin, former commander of the Group of Forces in Syria. Previously, he had commanded the Eastern Military District and he had been in charge of setting up the Russian Military Police. Interestingly, he is not an aviator but an army officer; that is why the fact he was promoted as a commander of aviation, air defence and aerospace forces may be quite astonishing. Lieutenant General Alexander Lapin was appointed Russia's Central Military District Commander. Until recently, he had been the chief of staff of Russia's contingent in Syria. He is a tank crew member and he graduated from the famous military school in Kazan, Russia. There is also another tank crew member (however he graduated from the military school in Chelyabinsk), Colonel General Alexander Zhuravlyov, who has become the new commander in the Eastern Military District. He was the commander of the Russian Group of Forces in Syria. The same position had been previously held by Colonel General Andrei



Kartapolov, the commander of the Western Military District, a service which seems to be

Russia's key service in the event of a war with NATO.



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4 January 2018

## PUTIN'S TRICK IN DONBASS

**There is no doubt that the prisoner exchange between Ukraine and the so-called “people’s republics” can be considered as a humanitarian success. However, politically speaking, it is perceived as Kiev’s defeat. The entire process was initiated by Moscow and carried out under its conditions. In this way, Vladimir Putin has been implementing his Donbass “peace” scenario. This is the scenario aimed at achieving a strategic goal: to regain Kiev’s formal authority over currently occupied territories and, at the same time, to maintain Russia’s actual control in the aforementioned zones.**

**T**he exchange of prisoners on December 27 was the first one in fourteen months and, from the very beginning, it had been planned by the Kremlin. Such an operation has provided Putin with numerous benefits as it was profitable for him, Russian-backed rebels and the most important pro-Russian politician in Ukraine. In this way, Putin showed that he was a “peacemaker” and that he “had complied with the Ukrainian

request”. In fact, it was Viktor Medvedchuk who asked the Russian President to call the leaders of the “people’s republics” in order to “persuade” them to take part in the talks on the prisoner exchange. The President of Russia has announced the possibility of the prisoner swap in the presence of Medvedchuk, Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev and Patriarch Kirill of Moscow. In addition, the case has been publicised by the Russian media. Thanks



to the presence of the primate of the Russian Orthodox Church, Russia aimed to show its humanitarian face. The Orthodox Church was used to legitimize the “people’s republics” and administration of the occupied territories that were allegedly presented as “independent” entities (by the way, some biting remarks have been made about the “competitive” Ukrainian Orthodox Church). Therefore, instead of being a party to the conflict, Putin appeared to be an effective intermediary. Moscow did not intentionally send any representative who would participate in the talks on the prisoner swap so Medvedchuk had to discuss the issue with the leaders of the “people’s republics”. This situation, similarly as repeating in the Russian media that Ukrainian citizens were exchanged for other Ukrainian citizens, strengthens one of the main themes of the Russian narrative about Donbass, according to which the country is in civil war.

Viktor Medvedchuk has played an interesting role there. Putin’s friend and chief of staff to Ukrainian president Leonid Kuchma, he was perceived as an effective intriguer. In addition, he has been representing Kiev in the prisoner swap between Ukraine and Russian-backed separatists. From the political point of view, it seems to be risky for the Ukrainian authorities since Medvedchuk is considered to be the leader of the Russian faction in Ukraine. One can wonder whether his participation in the prisoner swap may be the proof of his powerful influence. His request has launched the process (which was expected by Putin himself), and, at the same, it has set aside other politicians in Kiev. Medvedchuk can now claim that, since he has led to the release of prisoners, he has the chance to free over one hundred illegally detained Ukrainians. In this way, Medvedchuk has become part of the Russian “de-escalation” scenario, according to which Moscow is carefully building its “peace party” in Kiev; it is composed of people who advocate improving relations with Russia under Russian conditions. Their long-term

goal is to regain at least some of the influence that the Russians had had in Ukraine before 2014.

The implementation of the Minsk agreements will be the most important mean to achieve this goal. It is not a coincidence that when the so-called Minsk contact group agreed on the prisoner exchange, Russia’s representative Boris Gryzlov announced that for 2018 Moscow has set such goals as a full amnesty and providing the occupied territories with a special status. Now, the Kremlin may officially declare that it has begun to fulfill the Minsk Protocol. The prisoner swap is included in one of its points. According to the Russians, Ukraine needs to make the next step. However, both sides are arguing about the order in which obligations should be implemented. Moscow demands elections and Donbass’ special status as first decisions to be introduced. Such a situation is extremely unfavorable for Kiev, though. It may even consolidate the Russian influence in Donbass; if the region is officially controlled by Kiev, such a state of matters will in fact lead to the federalization of Ukraine. One can now expect that the issue of introducing a UN peacekeeping mission in Donbass will be discussed again. However, it will be a trap if an effective control over the boundary of occupied territories is not simultaneously restored. Both Donetsk and Luhansk will be still governed by Moscow’s trusted people; nevertheless, the Kremlin will demand from Kiev to fulfill some decisions of the Minsk Protocol, saying that since there are some UN forces in Donbass, there are no more contradictions that would prevent the country from implementing the obligations. However, if it is the case, it will be impossible to restore the control over the border. First of all, the Russian influence in Donbass (and thus on the entire Ukrainian territory) will be consolidated. Secondly, the situation will be taken up by the West which seeks to de-escalate conflict, also by mitigating sanctions.



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## HOW RUSSIA AVOIDS SANCTIONS. EPISODE 2

**The growing list of Russian companies subject to U.S. sanctions is becoming a serious problem for Moscow. The restrictions may also strike at business partners of some enterprises, including financial institutions, and, more importantly, banks. So it is not surprising that the above-mentioned entities are now being cut off from defense companies facing possible sanctions.**

**A**lfa Bank is the largest private bank in Russia. On January 3, First Deputy Chairman of the Board of Directors Oleg Sysuev announced that his company would phase out business contacts with internal defense enterprises that had been increasingly becoming subject to Western sanctions. According to the bank, its aim was not to completely cease the cooperation but to minimise risks resulting from American sanctions. In recent years, Alfa Bank has extensively worked with Russian defence industry companies, including subsidiaries of some of the 33 enterprises sanctioned by the USA in September 2017 (such as Kalashnikov, MiG and Sukhoi). In December, the U.S. Commerce Department added several Russian defence industry companies to the list of

sanctioned entities. In February, the list is likely to be extended.

On January 4, Alfa Bank's decision was criticised by Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin, who oversees Russia's defense industry. However, it seems that the bank's owners would not stop servicing important state-owned enterprises without consulting the authorities. It is due to the fact that such a situation does not have much financial importance for defence companies since they are mainly based on loans granted by state-owned banks. It needs to be noted that avoiding the sanctions is not typical only for private Russian enterprises. Until now, many state-owned banks and corporations have avoided any involvement in Crimea, as they



have been afraid of sanctions. Among such entities, one can distinguish such popular companies as Sberbank and VTB Bank (former Vneshtorgbank).

The more and more severe consequences of sanctions mean that Russia's finance and defence ministries, along with the Central Bank of Russia, are now wondering whether a specific bank should be selected in order

to service defence industry. Such a state of affairs would constitute another step towards the actual distribution of financial services in Russia; there may be separate institutions that would deal exclusively with domestic market and companies subject to sanctions as well as with those that would operate outside the country. In our previous articles, we have written more about how Russia tries to avoid negative consequences of sanctions.



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15 January 2018

## ROSGVARDIYA'S IRON FIST

The new year has brought some new decisions aiming to strengthen the National Guard of the Russian Federation, which seems to confirm that the Kremlin wishes to provide it with a key role in the regime's security apparatus. There are some signals that seem to announce the beginning of a harsh competition within the Russian security apparatus, including the construction of anti-drone groups, the probable increase in the size of the formation as well as the consolidation of spetsnaz units. All of them constitute a response to the FSB's, so Rosgvardiya's main rival, December offensive.

In our latest report, we wrote that one of the biggest challenges the Federal Security

Service would face was further strengthening of the position of the National Guard

(Rosgvardiya). Recent events only seem to confirm such a state of affairs, especially when it comes to changes regarding the Rosgvardiya spetsnaz units, which should seriously be troublesome for the FSB as the service could consider its monopoly on anti-terrorism activities as one of its greatest advantages over the National Guard. It may change after the reform of Rosgvardiya spetsnaz, though.

In 2016, the subunits of police spetsnaz as well as Internal Forces of the Interior Affairs were incorporated into the Federal National Guard Service (FSVNG, Rosgvardiya, National Guard); however, the first organizations differ in the level of training, the type of performed tasks and legal status of officers/soldiers. Today, Rosgvardiya spetsnaz is divided into two major units, namely police and military ones. The former is primarily used as riot police (OMON) as well as it combats against organised crime (SOBR) whereas the latter (represented by Independent Special Designation Brigade, referred as OBrON, and Special Purpose Forces, also known as OSpN) is designed to fight illegal armed groups. Thus, Rosgvardiya has undertaken the necessary steps to unify spetsnaz units. All special military units will be subordinated to one command as well as they will be trained according to one system. The next step will be the unification of the legal basis for the work/service of spetsnaz officers since everyone should function in a military legal environment instead of the one related to the police.

As a result of the consolidation, Directorates of Rosgvardiya Special Forces (USpN) will be established. They will be organized according to a territorial criterion as well as they will be responsible for specific regions. Moreover, they will be commanded by the Main Directorate of Special Forces, established in the spring of 2017. The USpN will be composed of spetsnaz units as well as aviation; more precisely, special aviation division that has previously been transferred to Rosgvardiya from the Ministry of Interior. Such a concentration of Rosgvardiya spetsnaz aims to increase its mobility and efficiency. New units will be able to be rapidly transferred to various parts of the country in order to perform different duties such as suppressing mass riots or detaining criminals and terrorists. Within the FSVNG spetsnaz units, special anti-drone groups will be created. They will be deployed in the vicinity of important buildings.

The creation of unified and efficient spetsnaz will strengthen the role the body has been assigned to by the Kremlin, namely it will serve as the main anti revolutionary force of the regime. It seems that it will count many more troops. At the beginning of this year, Vladimir Putin, with his presidential decree, determined the new maximum number of staff of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, which would count 894,871 employees. Thus, the layoff affected 10 thousand people represented exclusively by traffic police employees. Vacant positions will probably be assumed by Rosgvardiya officers.





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15 January 2018

## NO CHANCES OF RUSSIAN MILITARY BASE IN SUDAN

**It has been long speculated that new Russian military bases would be established in such countries of the Eastern Mediterranean as Egypt, Libya and Cyprus. Now it is time for Sudan. However, the rise of Russia's political and military activity in the Red Sea region does not necessarily mean that the Russians will build their military base on the Sudanese coast. Such a plan will not be possible due to the interests of several countries interested in this strategic region. Also Sudan's intentions seem to arouse some doubts as inviting Bashir may constitute only a part of a game aiming to strengthen his position.**

**T**he Russian media have unofficially reported about the first unit of mercenaries from the "Wagner" private military company who had been allegedly sent to Sudan. The agency is known for its military involvement in Donbass and Syria. It is not known whether the information is true. But it is known that Moscow has become increasingly interested in Sudan as, in 2015, Russian engineers discovered large gold deposits, which made it possible for the country to sign the biggest investment deal in its history. In July 2017, Mr Bashir was invited to Russia at the invitation of President Vladimir Putin. For years, the Kremlin has

not been disturbed by the fact that Sudan's president was wanted by the International Criminal Court on charges of genocide. Putin sent a Russian plane to Khartoum in order to secure the Bashir's delivery to Russia. The meeting took place on November 23, 2017.

Bashir immediately asked Putin to protect his country from the United States and accused the USA of splitting oil-rich South Sudan in 2011. Instead, Bashir promised Putin that his geostrategically positioned state could function as Moscow's "key to Africa". He is allegedly interested in purchasing Su-30 and Su-35 fighter jets, missile boats, minesweeper

and missile systems, including S-300 systems. In 2016, it turned out that Russia had agreed to export 170 T-72 main battle tanks (MBT) to Sudan. Nevertheless, it is not known how poor and heavily indebted Sudan is going to pay for the next supplies of Russian weapons. President Bashir suggested a military base on the Red Sea in the region of Port Sudan. Also Russian MPs have already expressed great interest in constructing such a base. However, both Putin and defence minister Sergey Shoigu seem to be more cautious since building such a base from scratch would involve considerable financial outlays. And Russia needs money to expand its military bases in Syria. There is one more political question to be answered since the Russian project in Sudan would be controversial not only among Moscow's enemies.

A Russian base located only 300 kilometers from Jeddah would be considered by Saudi Arabia as a threat to its security as well as to the security of oil and gas supplies from the Persian Gulf to Europe. Another country that would not be satisfied with such a state of matters is China as it has been building its zone of influence in Africa for a long time. The Russian base could also weaken the position of Ethiopia, considered as a military power in that part of Africa. According to Sudan, the Ethiopians may constitute a counterbalance to Egyptian-Eritrean alliance. Also Turkey takes part in this complicated game. The president of the country, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has recently visited Sudan. In addition, Bashir offered him a similar offer to the one he had made to Putin. The Sudanese are ready to lease Suakin Island, situated near Port Sudan, to Turkish investors. As a result, Ankara would

expand the tourist infrastructure and change the island into a transit point for pilgrims going to Mecca. Such an idea is strongly disapproved by Egypt, whose authorities consider it as an attempt to deploy Turkish troops in Sudan. Interestingly, the latter have already been sent to Somalia. So Cairo sent its army to its border with Eritrea. Such a situation only aggravated the Sudanese-Egyptian conflict; Cairo accuses the Sudanese of supporting the Muslim Brotherhood, while Khartoum blames the Egyptians for supporting South Sudan.

Russia seems to maneuver between Cairo and Khartoum: Sudanese perspectives are tempting, but, on the other hand, Moscow has recently improved its relations with Egypt. On December 11, Putin paid a visit to Cairo, during which new economic agreements were signed. Also military cooperation between Russia and Egypt seems to be getting closer and it involves for example joint military exercises or using partner's military bases. The situation is additionally complicated by the U.S. policy. In October, the Trump administration decided to permanently lift the sanctions that Washington imposed on Khartoum in 1997. The Americans seem to be satisfied with the steps undertaken by Bashir. It can be exemplified by the participation of Sudanese troops in the Saudi Arabian war against the Shia revolt in Yemen or supporting diplomatic boycott of Iran in 2016. It is possible that Bashir, who allures Russia or Turkey with military bases, seeks to gain an argument against the United States. The main purpose is to guarantee that the dictator will remain in power after the 2020 election.





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16 January 2018

## RUSSIA'S INVESTIGATIVE COMMITTEE FACES IMMINENT REVOLUTION

**The fact that one of the main suspects in the so-called Shakro Molodoy case has been exonerated seems to confirm that the FSB's goal is to eliminate the head of the Investigative Committee. Alexander Bastrykin defends himself as he can, as evidenced by the press interview for the 10th anniversary of the Committee, but he is living on borrowed time. However, it is not known whether his resignation will take place before or immediately after the presidential election.**

The FSB has closed the investigation against former deputy head of the Investigative Committee's Internal Security Directorate of the Russian Federation (ICR), Colonel Alexander Lamonov. The investigators dropped the charges of accepting a bribe from one of the leaders of the Russian criminal underworld, thief in law Zakhar Kalashov. Thus, Lamonov will be able to apply for executive exoneration. High-ranking investigators: Alexander Lamonov, Denis Nikandrov and Mikhail Maksimeko were detained in July 2016. They intended to agree on mitigating the article of accusation against Shakro's henchman Andrei Kochuykov (Italianets). The ICR officers were believed

to accept a 500,000 euro bribe, and then they were later to get another five million dollars. At the beginning of December 2017, it was reported that Lamonov and Nikandrov had reached an agreement with the investigators; as a result, their case would be reconsidered separately. They started to inform the investigators as evidenced by the arrest of Alexey Kramarenko, another suspect in the case, that took place a dozen days later.

The new stage of the investigation has given rise to speculations about the imminent reform and even the dissolution of the Investigative Committee. Eventually, many ICR officers, including the head of the service,

may be sacked in the purges. Bastrykin is desperately trying to save his position; however, these efforts seem to be more and more hysterical, as exemplified by the above-mentioned interview with the Rossiiskaya Gazeta government daily. Recently, on the occasion of the Cheka centenary, the FSB Director Alexander Bortnikov argued about the superiority of his service in the same state-run newspaper. Now, due to the 10th anniversary of the Investigative Committee, Bastrykin seemed to follow his example. In his bidding for loyalty to the regime and the radicalism of measures directed against Putin's enemies, Bastrykin proposed the extrajudicial (administrative) order of closing down of "extremist" websites. Such a blockade could be challenged in court by an author or a website owner. As an example, Bastrykin cited China.

The head of the ICR also praised the results of his institution as in 2017 it managed to resolve 98% of rape cases, 93% of murder cases and 96% of cases of deliberate acts with a fatal outcome. The problem is that Russian investigators have adopted safe tactics and now they tend to initiate proceedings against only those cases that could be positively resolved. For example, according to data for 2015 provided by the Interior Ministry, investigations were launched in less than half of the rape reports. That is why the statistics look quite impressive. It should also be remembered that preliminary proceedings that precede the beginning of a formal investigation might take months or even years without any guarantee that the case will be formally opened.

16 January 2018

## RUSSIANS BOTHER U.S. ALLIES

**The activity of the Russian navy and aviation has recently increased near the borders of Western countries. Some incidents have occurred especially in the vicinity of Great Britain, the North Atlantic basin as well as the North Sea. However, the Russian aviation has also put Australia on alert; in this way, Moscow aims to demonstrate its global capabilities. The Russian presence near Great Britain results from activities of the former in the Mediterranean and in the Middle East; it needs to be added that the shorter routes from the bases of the Baltic Fleet and the Northern Fleet run right through the North Sea and the English Channel.**

**O**n January 15, the RAF deployed two Typhoon aircrafts from the Lossiemouth base in Scotland. Both jets intercepted two Tupolev TU-160 Blackjack bombers above the North Sea, as they were approaching a UK "area of interest". According to Moscow's official version, a pair of strategic bombers carried out a 13-hour training mission (which also included aerial refuelling) on the Barents, Norwegian and North seas. Moreover, two Belgian F-16 jets were sent to intercept the Russian planes. It is another example of the increased presence of Russian aviation in this part of Europe. In addition, according to unofficial information published by Germany's

Bild newspaper, Western intelligence services stated that during the Zapad 2017 military drills the Russian had been exercising bombings of Western European targets, approaching the German and Dutch coast from the North Sea (bombers would fly from the Barents Sea, along the Norwegian coasts).

Russian naval activity seems to be even more considerable. The Royal Navy has informed that it had noted an "upsurge" in Russian vessels on British waters. A few days before the bombers were intercepted, the British frigate HMS Westminster had been ordered to interrupt two Russian corvettes





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and two support vessels that had appeared near UK territorial waters as they had been sailing to their base in the Baltic Sea. The frigate HMS St Albans departed on 23 December to track the new Russian warship Admiral Gorshkov as it moved through the North Sea. Another frigate, HMS Tyne, was called to escort a Russian intelligence-gathering ship through the North Sea and the English Channel on December 24. It was probably the Admiral Vladimirsky oceanographic research ship that left the port of Kronstadt in northwestern Russia as it was going towards the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. At the same time, Royal Navy helicopters were sent to monitor two other Russian vessels.

Moreover, the Russians remain active in other, more exotic, parts of the world. At the beginning of December, Australian media revealed that RAAF Base Darwin had been placed on a “short period” of heightened alert. The official reason was Russian military drills at the Biak Airbase in Indonesia’s eastern Papua province. Initially, two Russian Ilyushin-76 transporters carrying a hundred personnel arrived on the island and were joined shortly after by a pair of Tu-95 bombers. According to the Australian authorities, the Russians used the flight and exercises to collect intelligence data, also about American aviation whose officers use military bases located in the cities of Darwin and Tindal in the Northern Territory.



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22 January 2018

## FSB “CLEANS UP” AFTER THE FAILED OPERATION

**Detainment of four people associated with the private security sector, including the former chief of Boris Berezovsky’s security service, is officially connected with the investigation concerning cooperation between the siloviki and gangsters in Samara Oblast. But it is not a coincidence that the key figure in the case is accused by Ukraine of participation in a severe provocation allegedly prepared by FSB. Lubyanka uses the excuse – or found it on its own – to isolate participants of the operation denounced previously by the Ukrainian counterintelligence.**

**O**n January 16, four people has been detained by FSB. Sergey Sokolov is a former chief of Boris Berezovsky’s security service, recently an expert in private co-partnership Federal Information Centre “Analyses and security”. Ruslan Milchenko is the head of this company. Oleg Antoshin, a former chief of TogliattiAzot’s security service and his former deputy Alexey Alexeev. All four of them are suspected of illegal possession of arms. The investigation also inspects whether they are involved in conducting terrorist attacks. Officially,

these detentions are linked to the FSB’s investigation concerning cooperation between the siloviki from Samara Oblast and a local organised criminal group. Interestingly, this case has recently been interceded with the attorney general by the State Duma Deputy, Andrey Lugovoy, who is suspected by Britons of participation in the Alexander Litvinenko’s murder. Litvinenko got to know Sokolov very well during their work for Berezovsky.

All four people mentioned has been temporarily arrested until March 16. Court



has made the decision behind closed doors – FSB cares for the privacy of this case. But according to leaks, Sokolov was supposed to state in court that the case against him was induced by the Security Service of Ukraine.

It is a fact, that according to SBU Sokolov played the role of “a subcontractor” in the operation performed by the Russian secret service. In August 2017 SBU announced that they successfully annihilated Moscow’s provocation. Russian services were to lure the Ukrainian ATO veterans onto the Russian territory in order to subsequently accuse them of conducting terrorist attacks. SBU detained a Ukrainian citizen, Darya Mastikasheva on this matter. In 2014 she moved to Russia and became Sokolov’s cohabitant. As she now testifies, her partner accepted an offer of collaboration in the operation aiming at Ukraine from FSB. He used the fact that his cohabitant used to visit her family in Dnipropetrovsk Oblast. There, Mastikasheva made a proposal to three former participants in the Donbass fighting, which entailed

moving to Moscow – for a short period of time – to perform well-paid construction works. They were supposed to be the scapegoats for diversions and assassinations prepared by Russian services.

It is possible, that exposure of Russian services’ intentions caused the reaction of FSB and isolation of the denounced agents, with Sokolov ahead, under the pretext of Samara case. His future is unknown, but it is obvious that he is dangerous. Just after Berezovsky’s escape from Russia, Sokolov remained untouched, despite the fact that he was one of the key figures in oligarch’s surrounding performing illegal activities (eavesdropping on politicians, contacts with Chechen rebels, etc.). He claimed, that he knew so much that he would not let himself become imprisoned. In recent years he was seen as an expert in such issues as e.g. shooting down a Malaysian Boeing over Donbass or murder of the former Deputy of the State Duma in Kiev. He always presented anti-Ukrainian views and put forward conspiratorial theories.

26 January 2018

## WHY MOSCOW LEFT KURDS. FIVE REASONS

**Turkish military operations against Kurdish enclave Afrin would not have begun without Russian permission. Moscow has made cold estimation of gains and losses on this matter. It turned out that it is profitable to risk good cooperation with Kurds in exchange for gains not only in Syria, but also in relations with Turkey and the West.**

**D**istrict of Afrin is located in the northern part of Aleppo, in northern Syria. It is 40 km long (east-west) and about 30 km wide (north-south). Since 2012, when governmental forces retreated from this area and Kurdish YPG forces took over the power, Afrin was the oasis of stability. Russia became one of its guarantors and sent several hundreds of soldiers there. Taking into consideration very good relationship between Moscow and the political wing of YPG, i.e. PYD, it is not surprising that Kurds in Afrin

felt safe, despite recurrent threats from Turkey. However, the Russian changed their stance and allowed Ankara to attack. On January 18 in Moscow, the chief of Turkish army and the chief of MIT’s military intelligence agreed on details of the operation with the Russian defence minister and generals. As a result, on January 20 the “Operation Olive branch” began – Turkish air forces, not disturbed by the Russian who controlled the airspace there, attacked targets in Afrin. Why did Moscow risk good relationship with Kurds and make



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an agreement (which was openly confirmed by president Erdoğan) with their enemy?

The **first** reason is the reinforcement of Assad's regime, whose functioning is a guarantee for Russian influence in Syria. According to Kurds, Moscow exposed them to Turkey because Moscow didn't receive what it demanded. Namely, it required that YPG should pass Afrin to Assad's regime. The meeting between YPG and representatives of the Syrian regime took place in the Russian Hmeimim Base on January 20, just before the Turkish attack. What Russia couldn't receive from Kurds, it will probably get from Turks. The aim of Ankara is not a permanent occupation of Afrin, but only reduction of Kurdish autonomy there. Then, they will give back the power over the enclave to Assad.

**Secondly**, the agreement on the Turkish attack on Afrin is a part of a tying agreement. In exchange, Ankara gave an allowance for action in the neighbouring Idlib province to regime forces supported by the Russian. Until then, it was a bastion of anti-Assad rebels supported by Turkey. The takeover of prominent Al-Duhur base by regime forces almost without resistance of rebels, just in the day of Turkish attack on Afrin is an important fact. There are many signs that Turkey not only ordered the rebels to retreat, but even targeted part of them at the battlefield with Kurds. **Thirdly**, Moscow obtained Turkish concessions behind Syria's back. Right after the beginning of the "Operation Olive branch" it turned out

that Ankara agreed on the second Turkish Stream's gas pipeline constructed by Gazprom. It means, that greater amount of gas will be carried under the Black Sea to Turkey and further to Europe. This is how Russia will bypass Ukraine in gas transport to EU. It is also important to remember about the closing purchase transaction for the supply of anti-aircraft weapon system S-400. Possession of this Russian weapon by Turkey doesn't contribute to the defensive integrity of NATO, which Turkey belongs to. Moreover, weakening the position of NATO by escalating the conflict between Turkey and America concerning Syrian Kurds is the **fourth** reason of Russian decision on allowing Turks to enter Afrin. Ankara for a long period of time has been faulting Americans for supporting Kurdish "terrorists" in Syria, despite the fact that the USA train and militarise YPG only to fight with the so called Islamic State (which gave good results such as the defeat of Raqqa). Almost all Russian declarations made after the beginning of Turkish operation blame the USA for provoking Ankara's actions. According to Moscow, the final "provocation" which led to the offensive was caused by Americans who trained military formation, consisting mainly of Kurds, which was supposed to reinforce north-eastern boundaries of Syria. Moscow clearly wants to blame their American ally in the eyes of Kurds for fights in Afrin. And this is the **fifth** reason of the Moscow's decision: desire to create a conflict between Kurds and the USA.

If the plan works out, it would be the end of American's presence in Syria. And this is the Russia's main strategic aim since the beginning of their intervention in Syria.

But the Russian leave themselves a margin of manoeuvre. If Turkey occupies Afrin fast enough, it will be a striking victory of Turkey and Russia and fiasco of the USA. But the

longer the operation will last, the biggest the political costs for Ankara will turn out, and at some point Russia may change its stance again. By having soldiers in the de-escalation zone Tell Rifaat (where they retreated from the area attacked by Turks) Moscow keeps the opportunity to become a peacemaker in the Afrin conflict at the appropriate moment.



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26 January 2018

## ANOTHER “LIBERAL” IS GOING TO JAIL

**One of most notorious politico-corruptive cases of last years is coming to an end. On January 31 a sentence of the trial against the former governor of Kirov, Nikita Belykh, will be pronounced. As with the recently finished court proceedings concerning the former minister Alexey Ulyukaev, the sentence is expected to be severe. Both cases are closely connected: from political regime calculations to the role of FSB.**

**O**n January 24 both parties provided their final arguments. The defence claims, that Belykh is innocent, but the prosecution demands 10 years in a high-security penal colony and a fine of 100 million roubles. The

last oral argument of the defendant is planned on January 26, whilst a sentence is to be announced on January 31.

Nikita Belykh was a governor of Kirov Oblast



since 2009. He passed as a quite liberal politician even though he was loyal to the Kremlin. He was detained in June 2016 in an exclusive restaurant in Moscow in the moment of taking – according to the prosecution – 150 thousand euros from a businessman. This was assumed to be a part of the bribe from Kirov entrepreneurs of the total amount of 400 thousand euros. Investigators claim, that in years 2012-2016 Belykh was supposed to take 600 thousand euros of bribes. The former governor does not plead guilty and the defence pointed to incoherence in the testimony of the principal prosecution witness, businessman Juri Sudheimer. He provided dates of his meetings with Belykh, on which the governor was alleged to demand bribes, which do not coincide with the dates and official schedule of the then governor. Weak points in the principal prosecution witness' testimony is only one aspect of affairs connecting Belykh and the former Minister of Economic Development Alexey Ulyukaev, who was recently sentenced to 8 years in

prison, also for corruption. In both cases, the retired general Oleg Feoktistov served as a witness. This once influential FSB officer unofficially supervised the operation against Ulyukaev. And completely officially – when he was in Lubyanka – controlled the detainment of Belykh's, who requested court to summon and question Feoktistov. But court rejected the request claiming that testimonies given during the investigation were sufficient. An argument for the severe conviction of Belykh is the fact that being a governor he cooperated with Alexei Navalny for some time. Moreover, his businesses in Kirov were the reason for valid sentence forbidding the leader of the Russian opposition participate in an election.

Belykh and Ulyukaev's affairs are connected not only by the corruption, but also by the fact that operations were conducted by FSB. In both cases, politicians associated with the liberal part of authorities are the target. Severe convictions are supposed to discipline elites in power.

30 January 2018

## RUSSIA STRENGTHENS ITS FORCES ON THE BALTIC SEA

**Increase in the military capability of Kaliningrad Oblast and The Baltic Fleet is a part of strategy aiming at reinforcing the western flank of Russia. Enhancement of the missile weapons killing power located in Kaliningrad exclave, reconstruction of air forces in that region or strengthening the offensive possibilities on the sea through increasing the number of submarines are targeted at the main enemy: NATO. Kaliningrad Oblast is to become the same thing as Crimea on the Black Sea: a Russian “onshore aircraft carrier” packed with weapons.**

**A**fter the collapse of the Soviet Union, Kaliningrad Oblast has gained an incomparably more important strategic value than in the times of the Cold War. Not only is it the westernmost Russian territory, but it also drastically changes the strategic situation on the Baltic Sea as it is located at the back of three Baltic countries and can play an important role in cutting off the eastern

part of the Baltic in case of the conflict with NATO. Russian exclave borders on land with two members of the alliance: Lithuania and Poland.

It is also connected with the nearby Swedish Gotland and Belarus by sea and air routes. The exact number of soldiers stationed in the Kaliningrad Oblast is unknown, but it



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is estimated at 15-20 thousand. The Russian themselves call the exclave “Crimea-2”. But Kaliningrad Oblast is still much more militarised than the occupied peninsula. By means of Voronezh radar and missile systems S-300 and S-400 the Russian are able to paralyse not only the airspace of Lithuania, but also major parts of Latvia and Poland. A couple of years ago Gen. Ben Hodges warned, that thanks to powers placed in the Kaliningrad Oblast Russia could “enclose” the Baltic Sea, especially with the aid of missile power but also with air and naval forces.

Headquarters of the Finnish fleet anticipate the increase in the number of Russian submarines on the Baltic Sea. Currently, there are only two such units: Project 877 submarines stationed in Baltiysk (Kaliningrad Oblast). Submarines can play an important

role in case of military conflict by attacking sea lines of communication between Baltic countries and western NATO allies and Scandinavia. Air forces in the Kaliningrad Oblast may be used in the similar way. It is unofficially reported, that in the Kaliningrad Chkalovsk military base the 689th Guards Fighter Aviation Corps would be reconstructed. Firstly, the unit would be equipped with the modernised Su-27SM fighter aircraft, and then with the latest Su-35. Even though the main and official purpose of the unit is the defence of the Oblast and The Baltic Fleet, arming of the aircraft will allow for attacking the navy and land forces of NATO. It is important to mention, that deployment of the Kaliningrad regiment may imply the Russian withdrawal from the plans of constructing an airbase in Belarus.



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30 January 2018

## MOSCOW PLAYS THE OSSETIAN CARD

**Tbilisi announced that it obtained the first part of the American Javelin missile systems. Moscow replied the following day: ratifying the agreement entailing the incorporation of the South Ossetian separatist units into the Russian Armed Forces. Meanwhile, the leader of separatists was hosted in the Serbian part of Bosnia and Herzegovina, a Russian ally. Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs protested against this issue in Sarajevo, and the U.S. Department of State criticises the Russian-Ossetian treaty. Moscow keeps replying: it is only a defensive reaction on the growing hostile military capability of the neighbouring Georgia.**

**O**n January 23, Georgia announced that it had already received the American Javelin missile systems. It was declared by the Georgian Minister of Defence Levan Izoria after his meeting with the U.S. Ambassador in Tbilisi. This was the first of two stages of transaction. Georgia turned to the USA with a request of buying 410 Javelin missiles and 72 launchers. Such a reinforcement of the Georgian defensive capabilities evoked Russian protests from the very beginning. So when it turned out that the Georgian already have the weapon, The State Duma ratified the treaty on “Alliance and Integration” with the

separatist South Ossetia the following day (January 24).

After the war with Georgia in August 2008, Russia recognised the independence of two insurgent regions of Georgia: Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The Russian deployed additional forces and arms there. But except for Moscow, only Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Nauru recognise the independence of these two regions. The rest of the world considers them as the Georgian territories under Russian occupation. Over the last years, Moscow continues its “creeping annexation”



of regions. The incorporation of the armed separatist forces into the Russian army was a big step towards it. In fact, this issue was included in the treaty which Vladimir Putin and Leonid Tibilov (a former leader of separatists) signed up in Moscow on 18 March 2015. The agreement was concluded for the period of 25 years with the possibility of extension. Four months earlier, Moscow had made a similar agreement with Abkhazia. Now, Ossetian soldiers can serve on contract in the Russian army, and the rebellious region becomes an integral part of the Russian defence system.

It obviously met with the protest of Tbilisi, and U.S. Department of State made a declaration condemning Russian agreement with South

Ossetia. The American deem the agreement invalid in regard to international law and appeal to Russia for withdrawal of the army on their positions from before the outbreak of the war in 2008. Meanwhile, Moscow tries to reinforce the separatist authorities in Tskhinvali using other allies. At the end of January, the “president” of South Ossetia Anatoly Bibilov has visited Republika Srpska, a legal entity of Bosnia and Herzegovina, for three days. He met with, inter alia, the president Milorad Dodik. In response, Tbilisi sent a note of protest to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The problem is that Dodik pursues his own foreign policy, which differs from the policy of Bosnian-Croatian part of the federation and official government in Sarajevo.

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