

Summer 2018

Maskirovka is an expansive operational Russian intelligence concept that encompasses masking, disguising, camouflage, deception, concealment, subterfuge and disinformation. These were integral components of the Russian operational plan that eventually separated South Ossetia and Abkhazia from sovereign Georgia in late summer 2008 as part of an exercise under the code name <Kavkaz-2008>. More recently, deception and subterfuge were essential elements of Russia's unlawful seizure and annexation of Crimea in 2014.

As part of the 2010 Russian military reforms, four military districts (MD) were created to replace the six previous military districts and in December 2014 the Northern Fleet Joint Strategic Command was established:

- *Western MD* incorporated the Moscow MD and Leningrad MD as well as the Baltic Fleet with headquarters in Saint Petersburg, Leningrad Oblast;
- *Southern MD* incorporated the Northern Caucasus MD with headquarters in Rostov-na-Donu, Rostov Oblast;
- *Central MD* incorporated the Volga-Ural MD and the western part of the Siberian MD, as well as the Black Sea Fleet and the Caspian Flotilla with headquarters in Yekaterinburg, Sverdlovsk Oblast;
- *Eastern MD* incorporated the Far East MD and the eastern part of the Siberian MD, as well as the Pacific Fleet with headquarters in Khabarovsk, Khabarovsk Kray; and
- *Northern Fleet Joint Strategic Command* separated from the Western MD with primary responsibility in Northern European Russia and the Arctic. It has equal status as a military district and is headquartered in Severomorsk, Murmansk Oblast.

<Vostok-2014> [East-2014] was preceded by a snap no-notice readiness inspection and conducted in the *Eastern Military District* as primarily a command and control staff exercise involving ground and airborne troops, naval assets and aircraft operating in a defensive posture.

<Tsentr-2015> [Center-2015] was preceded by a snap no-notice readiness inspection and conducted in the *Central Military District* jointly with members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization focusing on strategic mobility, improving command and control, and neutralizing armed conflict in Central Asia.

<Kavkaz-2016> [Caucasus-2016] was preceded by a snap no-notice readiness inspection and conducted as an integrated operation in the *Southern Military District* along with assets from the Central and Western Military Districts including elements of the Northern Fleet Joint Strategic Command. The operation was essentially a test of combat elements of the armed forces against NATO as a simulated adversary.

<Zapad-2017> [West-2017] was preceded by joint tactical and logistical exercises in Russia's neighboring country of Belarus. As one of the largest military exercises since the Cold War, <Zapad-2017> employed both naval and air assets of the Northern Fleet Joint Strategic Command, including a nuclear component, to repel a simulated attack by NATO forces.

The conclusion of <Zapad-2017> marked the complete rotation of more recent annual readiness exercises across the four military districts with the overall objective to measure progress in improvement of Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (C4ISR) in defense of *Rodina* (the homeland). The absence of an announced forthcoming exercise by the Ministry of Defense in 2018 on the scale of the previous four is noteworthy in itself and invites considerable interest and conjecture on the part of Western observers. Although the formidable Northern Fleet, which is the most powerful among the four fleets, played a substantial role in <Zapad-2017> as well as a contributing role in a number of the annual exercises in other military districts, *it is conspicuous in its absence* among the regional districts which have been tested individually.

Did the recently concluded annual Main Navy Parade held in Kronshadt/Saint Petersburg provide an important clue to future planning by the Russian General Staff? The composition of the parade, which included vessels from the earlier exercise, numbered both surface and submarine combatants as well as the overflight of fixed-wing and rotor aircraft. Assets from the Northern Fleet Joint Strategic Command, including its flagship *Severomorsk*, figure prominently among the parade participants. Notably, antisubmarine warfare (ASW) and surface combatant guided missile capabilities were displayed as well. Two highlights were the appearance of the *Oryol* Oscar II class nuclear-powered cruise missile submarine from the Northern Fleet Joint Strategic Command and the new Karakurt class guided missile corvette *Uragan* assigned to the Baltic Fleet at Baltysk, Kaliningrad Oblast.

Table 1 provides further details on the types, units and fleet assignments of the primary vessels which comprised the main parade:

Table 1.

Vessel	Hull No.	Type	Class	Unit	Base	Fleet
<i>Severomorsk</i>	619	ASW Destroyer	Udaloy-I	14 th ASW Brigade	Severomorsk	Flagship, Northern Fleet Joint Strategic Command HQ
<i>Oryol</i>	K-266	Nuclear-powered cruise missile submarine	Oscar-II	11 th Submarine Division	Murmansk-150/Zaozyorsk	Northern Fleet Joint Strategic Command
<i>Vladikavkaz</i>	B-459	Diesel-electric ASW hunter-killer submarine	Kilo	161 st Submarine Brigade	Polyarnyy	Northern Fleet Joint Strategic Command
<i>Marshal Ustinov</i>	055	Guided missile cruiser	Slava	43 rd Missile Ship Division	Severomorsk	Northern Fleet Joint Strategic Command HQ
<i>Admiral Gorshkov</i>	417	Guided missile frigate	Gorshkov	43 rd Missile Ship Division	Severomorsk	Northern Fleet Joint Strategic

						Command HQ
<i>Ivan Gren</i>	135	Amphibious assault ship	Ivan Gren	121 st Amphibious Assault Ship Brigade	Polyarnnyy	Northern Fleet Joint Strategic Command
<i>Yunarmeyets Zapolyar'ya</i>	669	Countersabotage boat	Grachonok	269 th Special Forces (SPETSNAZ) Detachment ?	Gadzhiyevo	Northern Fleet Joint Strategic Command
<i>Dmitrov</i>	B-806	Diesel-electric ASW hunter-killer submarine	Kilo	123 rd Separate Submarine Brigade	Kronshtadt/Saint Petersburg	Baltic
<i>Soobrazitel'nyy</i>	531	Guided missile corvette	Steregushchiy	128 th Surface Ship Brigade	Baltysk	Baltic
<i>Boykiy</i>	532	Guided missile corvette	Steregushchiy	128 th Surface Ship Brigade	Baltysk	Baltic
<i>Geyzer</i>	555	Guided missile corvette	Nanuchka-III	106 th Small Missile Ship Division	Baltysk	Baltic
<i>Liven'</i>	551	Guided missile corvette	Nanuchka III	106 th Small Missile Ship Division	Baltysk	Baltic
<i>Uragan</i>	567	Guided missile corvette	Karakurt	106 th Small Missile Ship Division	Baltysk	Baltic
<i>Serpukhov</i>	563	Guided missile corvette	Buyan-M	36 th Missile Patrol Boat Brigade	Baltysk	Baltic
<i>Chuvashiya</i>	820	Guided missile patrol boat	Tarantul	36 th Missile Patrol Boat Brigade	Baltysk	Baltic
<i>Morshansk</i>	874	Guided missile patrol boat	Tarantul	36 th Missile Patrol Boat Brigade	Baltysk	Baltic
<i>Yunarmeyets Baltiki</i>	682	Patrol boat	Raptor	36 th Missile Patrol Boat Brigade	Baltysk	Baltic
<i>Minsk</i>	127	Amphibious landing ship	Ropucha	71 st Amphibious Assault Ship Brigade	Baltysk	Baltic
<i>Korolyov</i>	130	Amphibious landing ship	Ropucha	71 st Amphibious Assault Ship Brigade	Baltysk	Baltic
<i>Aleksandr Obukhov</i>	507	Mine countermeasures minesweeper	Aleksandrit	146 th ASW Tactical Group	Baltysk	Baltic
<i>Urengoy</i>	304	Coastal ASW corvette	Parchim	146 th ASW Tactical Group	Baltysk	Baltic
<i>Zelenodol'sk</i>	308	Coastal ASW corvette	Parchim	146 th ASW Tactical Group	Baltysk	Baltic
<i>Kazanets</i>	311	Coastal ASW corvette	Parchim	146 th ASW Tactical Group	Baltysk	Baltic
<i>Ivan Khurs</i>	788	Signals intelligence (SIGINT) ship	Yuriy Ivanov		Sevastopol'	Black Sea

<i>Admiral Makarov</i>	799	Guided missile frigate	Grigorovich	30 th Surface Ship Division	Sevastopol'	Black Sea
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Thus, one might surmise that the recent Russian naval training activities involving some eighteen combatants in the Gulf of Finland prior to and in preparation for the naval parade in Kronshtadt/Saint Petersburg serve as a preliminary shakedown for a future large-scale exercise in the maritime waters on the northern flank of NATO. In July, prior to the main naval parade, Navy Commander-in-Chief Vice Admiral Aleksandr Fedotenkov touted the exercise as essential to prepare commanders and crews for operating *in the open waters of the gulf as well as in the confines of these waterways*.

In conclusion, do the strategic and tactical successes and experience gained in each of the foregoing regional operational scenarios point towards a future <Sever-20??) [North-20??] exercise in the Scandinavian/Arctic area by combined operational elements of both the Northern Fleet Joint Strategic Command and the Western Military District? Judging by past Russian operational military behavior and the asymmetrical nature of modern warfare, command and control exercises can rapidly expand and serve as the launch platform for a flagrant violation and/or outright invasion of the territorial sovereignty of a neighboring state.

As an interesting footnote, a brief article on the Russian Ministry of Defense web page on July 10, 2018 cited an unusual clandestine-type operation by a Western Military District Special Forces (SPETSNAZ) intelligence team which parachuted from an altitude of 2,500 meters (approximately 8,200 feet) using satellite navigational equipment and Mi-8AMTSh helicopters to land on Russian-controlled Gogland Island in the Gulf of Finland and destroy selected training targets some 30 miles from the Finnish coastline. The Gulf of Finland shares a border with Russia, Finland (a non-member of NATO), and Estonia (a member of NATO). This unusual and ominous commando operation may have provided a preview of further covert operations of this type to test NATO resolve on its northern flank in responding to Russian intrusion, whether intentionally or inadvertently, in the land/air space of one of its Scandinavian neighbors.