



## Strengthening Russian Influence in Crimea

**OE Watch Commentary:** Over the past six years, the Russian military has continued to strengthen the overall infrastructure and its combat capabilities within the annexed Crimean Peninsula. For instance, alongside auto and truck transport, rail service along the new Kerch Strait Bridge began last December. Militarily, as the first excerpt from the official news agency TASS points out, Russia continues to fortify its “aviation and air defense in Crimea.” The article describes a recent military exercise which combined “Black Sea Fleet naval aviation and air defense, aviation and air defense of the Southern Military District, S-400 missile air defense crews” to thwart “a massive missile strike of the mock enemy.”



Photo of Kerch Strait Bridge, December 2019.

Source: Rosavtodor.ru, <https://bit.ly/2xcxbey>, CCA 4.0 Intl

While there is no question that Russia has greatly improved its access to Crimea and ability to defend this peninsula, it has also transplanted some less favorable characteristics. The second excerpt from the pro-business daily, *Kommersant*, describes a recent military court case in Crimea where contract soldiers paid bribes, from 3-15 thousand rubles (\$40-\$200) to “receive positive marks for passing the standards for physical fitness.” Contract soldiers receive an additional bonus based on their physical fitness test results. The article goes on to point out that “the Crimean Military Garrison Court has recently reviewed at least 13 criminal cases against contract soldiers who paid bribes for positive assessments of physical training.” Perhaps in an attempt not to tarnish the Russian military’s “polite soldier” image, the article asserts that “several of... [the contract soldiers] served in Ukrainian Navy units until 2014.”

While acts of minor bribery within the Russian military are nothing new, it is curious that this incident was not covered by any of the media organs within the Ministry of Defense (e.g. *Krasnaya Zvezda*, *Zvezda TV*, etc...). From the Kremlin’s perspective, Russia now “owns” Crimea and they have continued to integrate this peninsula into all aspects, both good and ill, of their political, legal, economic, information and military infrastructure. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

***“In total, the Crimean Military Garrison Court has recently reviewed at least 13 criminal cases against contract soldiers who paid bribes for positive assessments of physical training.”***

**Source:** “Авиация, ПВО С-400 проводят учения по масштабному отражению ракетной атаки в Крыму (Aviation, S-400 air defense conduct drills on massive missile attack deflection in Crimea),” TASS, 3 April 2020. <https://tass.com/defense/1139669>

*Planes and S-400 air defense systems deflected a massive missile strike of the mock enemy during the bilateral military exercise of the Russian Black Sea Fleet and Southern Military District aviation and air defense in Crimea, Fleet press service announced Friday.*

*“According to the drill scenario, aviation and missile defenses, deployed in Crimea, provide the peninsula’s air defense, while the Southern Military District aviation, based on the mainland, conducts the air offensive,” the Fleet disclosed.*

*The attacking party seeks to secure the air supremacy by destroying targets at the Opuk proving ground. At the same time, the defense planes cover the S-400 crews and deflect the enemy’s massive missile strike....*

*The drills involve the Black Sea Fleet naval aviation and air defense, aviation and air defense of the Southern Military District, S-400 missile air defense crews, located on the Crimean Peninsula, and more than 20 military planes.*

**Source:** Vadim Nikiforov “У матросов есть заносы (Sailors have drifts),” *Kommersant*, 1 April 2020. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4310112>

*As Kommersant learned, the Crimean Garrison Military Court examined more than ten criminal cases of petty bribery. The defendants in the case are military men serving on contracts in the coastal defense forces of the Black Sea Fleet. All of them paid 3-15 thousand rubles to an unknown official through an intermediary. In return, they received positive marks for passing the standards for physical fitness....*

*...For a fictitious assessment of physical certification on October 14, he gave a bribe through an intermediary of 15 thousand rubles. And Nikolai Pavlov, who serves in the army under contract since October 2018, according to court documents paid a bribe of 10 thousand rubles for the mark “excellent” on passing the standards for physical training.*

*In total, the Crimean Military Garrison Court has recently reviewed at least 13 criminal cases against contract soldiers who paid bribes for positive assessments of physical training.*