



Russia's Baltic Fleet Forces Conduct Extensive Exercise in Kaliningrad

OE Watch Commentary: NATO's 'Cold Response' military exercise in Norway was cancelled midway due to the COVID-19 outbreak (see: "Russia's Hot Response to NATO's 'Cold Response' Exercise," *OE Watch*, April 2020). Defender 2020, NATO's military exercise facing Kaliningrad, was also cancelled/postponed for the same reason. Russia, however, conducted her counter exercise in Kaliningrad and pulled out all the stops, as discussed in the accompanying passage from *Izvestia*. Like all countries, Russia is suffering from the coronavirus outbreak and even cancelled the huge 9 May Victory Day parade in Moscow because of the virus. Their rationale may be that wars are fought alongside epidemics, so major training for war should also continue despite disease outbreaks. The American War for Independence was fought during the course of a major smallpox epidemic that nearly cost Washington his army (see: *Pox Americana: The Great American Smallpox Epidemic of 1775-82* by Elizabeth Fenn). **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

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Source: Dmitriy Boltentkov and Roman Kretsul, "The Baltic Fortress: the maneuvers in Kaliningrad Oblast demonstrate how the Armed Forces repel aggression," *Izvestia*, 3 May 2020. <https://iz.ru/1006630/dmitrii-boltenkov-roman-kretcul/baltiiskaia-krepost-cto-pokazali-manevry-v-kaliningradskoi-oblasti>

The Baltic Fortress: the maneuvers in Kaliningrad Oblast demonstrate how the Armed Forces repel aggression

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In the Sky

The Baltic Exclave is the country's most vulnerable region since it has no land ties either with Russia or with allied Belarus. Contemporary military conflicts show that much is decided in the initial period of combat - the first two to three days. This combat also determines the further course of operations.

The primary mission of the Baltic Fleet is to prevent the enemy from conducting massive missile-aircraft strikes against its facilities and the infrastructure of Kaliningrad Oblast. It also needs to lay minefields to counter an enemy amphibious landing and to conduct a land defense. All of these actions were rehearsed during the course of the exercises that were conducted during the last 10 days of April.

The A-50U Early Radar Warning Aircraft "Sergey Atayants" flew in to command and control the air forces and air defense forces in Kaliningrad Oblast. Those unique aircraft are rare guests in the sky over the Baltic.

Under the command and control of the A-50U, Su-30SM and Su-24M strike aircraft conducted a series of sorties, during the course of which they refined the conduct of strikes against airborne and coastal targets. Combat helicopters, among which were Ka-29s, which recently arrived in the Fleet, also accomplished a broad range of combat missions. And two Tu-160 strategic missile aircraft became involved in the maneuvers over the Baltic Sea on 29 April. In general, this major exercise was the first for the recently created Kaliningrad 132nd Composite Aviation Division.

The large-scale aerial maneuvers attracted the attention of the NATO countries. In particular, Belgian fighter aircraft "intercepted" the A-50U. They escorted the Tu-160s and some other of our aircraft on various sectors of the routes. The Russian pilots gave as good as they got - Su-27s "intercepted" a Swedish reconnaissance aircraft and also unduly aggressive Belgian F-16s.

On the whole, Kaliningrad Oblast is adequately protected with air defense systems, beginning with S-400 long-range complexes and ending with on-board ship systems. Due to the proximity of Baltiysk Naval Base to the NATO countries' borders, the PVO crews will not have time to build up in the event of the initiation of combat operations. This is precisely why the ship air defense systems have been included in the region's defense loop.

At Sea

In the last several years, the Baltic Fleet has received four new small missile ships (MRKs), which are armed with "Kalibr" missile systems. The MRKs "Mytishchi", "Sovetsk", "Liven", and "Passat" have become part of the fleet. They conducted artillery firing and missile launches together with the Missile Boats "Morshansk" and R-257. Unfortunately, the Baltic Sea's maritime commerce conditions do not permit the conduct of full-fledged missile firings. Consequently, the launches were electronic.

The Baltic Fleet Corvettes "Soobrazitelnyy", "Stereushchiy", and "Stoykiy" also rehearsed missile and artillery firings at airborne, naval surface, and coastal targets.

The Large Landing Ships (BDK) "Korolev" and "Kaliningrad", the Small Hovercraft Landing Ship "Yevgeniy Kocheshkov", and small landing craft conducted an amphibious landing of naval infantrymen on the coast during ... the exercises. The BDKs also laid naval mines. This obstacle would help defend the coast of Kaliningrad Oblast from an enemy amphibious assault force and from the operations of the North Atlantic Alliance countries' submarines.

Antisubmarine warfare ships conducted a search and rehearsed the "destruction" of submarines.... Minesweepers, including the latest Project 12700 Ship "Aleksandr Obukhov", were involved with the mine-clearing of the water area. All Baltic Fleet ships essentially put to sea during the exercises.

On Land

The Baltic Fleet ground force was recently reinforced with new equipment - "Msta" and "Pion" artillery systems and "Smerch" multiple rocket launcher systems. A tank regiment has also joined the 11th Army Corps. In the future, one of the motorized rifle brigades will upgrade into a full-fledged division. All of the new ground force equipment, was involved for the first time during these exercises.

The Baltic Fleet forces conducted these major exercises, despite the coronavirus pandemic that is raging in the world and in Russia. The exercises were a serious inspection of the entire oblast's defense system. Judging by the careful attention NATO paid to them, maneuvers were successful.