

Weekly Intelligence Brief

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The North Atlantic Treaty Organization Intercepts Russian Aircraft Over Estonia

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On 14 March 2023, Royal Air Force (RAF) and German Typhoon fighters intercepted and escorted a Russian IL-78 Midas flying too close to Estonian airspace. The mission was executed on behalf of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), as NATO is responsible for policing member states airspaces. Following the interception and escort of the IL-78 Midas, the NATO Typhoons were redirected to another Russian aircraft. A Russian An-148 transport aircraft was intercepted and escorted back into international airspace. Both Russian aircraft failed to communicate with Estonian aircraft as they were flying from St. Petersburg to Kaliningrad. This type of event is not unusual as NATO jets are involved in

approximately 400 interceptions a year with Russian aircraft.

Given recent Russian aerial maneuvers in the Black Sea, NATO member states are taking action to increase security measures. Recently, above the Black Sea, two Russian SU-27 fighter jets interacted with an American MQ-9 drone. The SU-27s dumped fuel on the MQ-9 drone and then proceeded to collide with the propeller of the drone. The MQ-9 was collecting intelligence over the Black Sea approximately 75 miles from Crimea at an altitude of 25,000 feet. The American MQ-9 drone crashed in an area of the Black Sea that is between 4,000 and 5,000 feet deep. Russian authorities are currently attempting to recover the wreckage of the drone. Though, intelligence collected from the drone has been wiped and stored in secure American data centers.

American reconnaissance missions have been a regular occurrence over the Black Sea for several years. However, Russia considers American drone flights near the Crimean coast as provocative in nature and they could lead to an escalation. In communication with the American defense attaché, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu stated, “(Russia) had no interest in such a development but will in future react in due proportion.” In response, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin stated, “The United States will fly and operate wherever international law allows.”

With recent events involving Russian aircraft, we can state with moderate confidence that NATO is likely to continue strengthening its aerial offensive and defensive power in Eastern Europe.

Honduras to Reduce Diplomatic Relations with Taiwan as Diplomatic Relations Increase with China

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On 14 March 2023, Honduran President Xiomara Castro announced that Honduras would begin to establish diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC) and begin reducing diplomatic relations with Taiwan.

In 2021, the PRC assisted the Honduran government by investing \$300 billion for a hydroelectric dam in Honduras. Currently, the PRC and the Honduran government are working together to build another dam in Honduras to increase the Honduran infrastructure sector. Honduras' decision to switch diplomatic relations from Taiwan to the PRC aligns closely with the PRC's previously successful strategy to use

investments and infrastructure to persuade countries to change diplomatic alliances.

The PRC's Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Wangm Wenbin, commented that Beijing is happy with Honduras' political decision. The PRC continues to espouse the success of the "one-China" policy and cites changing diplomatic relations as evidence of the policy's success. The Taiwanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, however, warned Honduras "not to fall into China's trap."

Since the PRC's Democratic People's Party President Tsai Ing-Wen was elected in 2016, Taiwan has lost a total of eight diplomatic partnerships to the PRC. Honduras would be the ninth country to switch their diplomatic relationship, leaving Taiwan with only 13 nations that recognize the island.

It can be stated with high confidence that it is highly likely that the PRC will continue to use investments and infrastructure to persuade countries to switch diplomatic ties from Taiwan to the PRC.



Russia's 24-Hour Special Military Operation

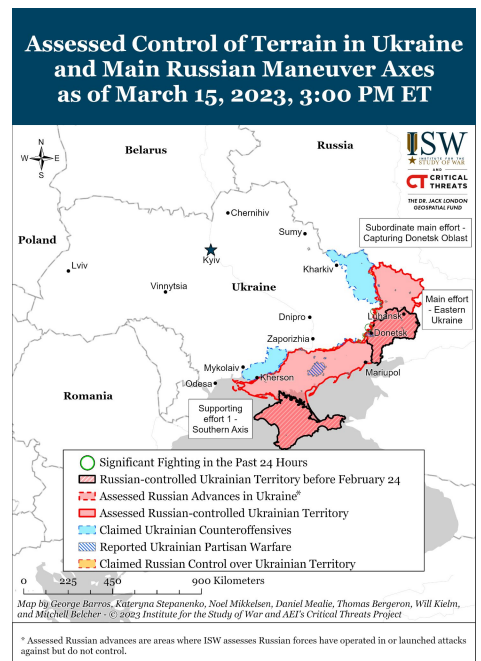
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Russia Desk

On 15 MAR 2023, it was reported that a Russian special military operation was conducted and targeted 101 Eastern Ukrainian artillery units in 197 different areas over a period of 24 hours. The operation destroyed three Ukrainian S-300 surface-to-air missile defense systems in the settlements of Ukrainka, Novodmitrovka, and Krasnoye in the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) after the radar systems were uncovered. Additionally, as many as 160 Ukrainian personnel, one tank, an infantry fighting vehicle, two armored combat vehicles, and four motor vehicles were destroyed because of active operations by units, aircraft, and artillery in the DPR.

Additional examples of the military

operation continued in the Krasny Liman area. Over 235 Ukrainian troops, two armoured combat vehicles, four pickup trucks, a D-20 howitzer, two Akatsiya and Gvozdika self-propelled artillery guns, and a US-made M777 artillery system were destroyed. Fighter aircraft of the Russian Aerospace Forces also shot down a Ukrainian Air Force Mi-8 helicopter near the community of Uspenovka in the Zaporozhye Region.

This 24-hour military operation has shown increasing aggression by the Russians in the Russo-Ukrainian War. It has been over a year since the war began and it is uncertain if the war will end soon. Operations to this degree are likely to continue as Russia moves West across the country. We can assess with high confidence that the Russian military front will continue to push forward in Eastern Ukraine.



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