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NATO RUSHES TO DEFEND UKRAINE'S AIRSPACE

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization is stepping up its efforts to provide additional air defense systems to Ukraine, according to the Alliance's Secretary General. Jens Stoltenberg has disclosed that the bloc is concentrating on deploying Patriot systems to protect Ukraine's urban centers and vital infrastructure from ongoing Russian missile attacks, and is engaging member states to reallocate their air defense capabilities to defend Ukraine. Dialogue is underway currently with several member states regarding the possibility of sending additional Patriot batteries to augment Kyiv's defenses, Stoltenberg has confirmed. He also mentioned the possible provision of other defensive systems, such as the NASALS surface-to-air missile system. (Reuters, April 18, 2024)

MOSCOW'S PLAN TO DESTABILIZE AMERICA

The Kremlin has drawn up a detailed strategy to weaken its Western adversaries, chief among them the United States, via information warfare and an array of political, military and economic measures. The *Washington Post* reports that a classified annex to the Russian government's official "Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation," which was released publicly last year, includes plans for hybrid warfare against the U.S. and other Western states using an array of tactics spanning "the military-political, economic and trade and informational psychological spheres."

Such tactics, Russian experts say, include an "offensive information campaign" and aiding "the coming to power of isolationist right-wing forces in America," as well as driving a wedge between the U.S. and the EU "by supporting parties dissatisfied with economic pressure from the U.S." Notably, in this effort, Russia's government sees its ongoing conflict with Ukraine as decisive. The fight against Kyiv will "to a great degree determine the outlines of the future world order," the annex lays out. (*Washington Post*, April 17, 2024)

GERMANY ROLLS UP RUSSIAN SPY AND SABOTAGE NETWORK

The German government has arrested two German-Russian nationals on suspicion of spying for Russia and planning sabotage attacks on German military aid bound for Ukraine. The men are accused of multiple offenses, including communicating with Russian intelligence, surveying potential targets such as U.S. military facilities, and discussing sabotage operations to undermine Germany's support for Ukraine. The arrests highlight Europe's ongoing struggle against Russian sabotage and spy networks active on the continent. Last year, Poland carried out a string of arrests to break up a Russian spy network similarly plotting to disrupt military aid shipments to Ukraine. (*BBC*, April 18, 2024)

DEMONIZING THE OPPOSITION

Over the past two years, the Russian government has dramatically stepped up persecution of its opponents, harnessing the country's judicial system to expand punishments for critics of its war of choice against Ukraine. It is also working overtime to cast its political opponents as agents of foreign powers who are seeking to weaken and even to overthrow the Kremlin. Take, for example, a so-called "investigative film" entitled "Foreign Agents" recently aired on state channel *Rossiya-24*. The movie, produced by Russian propagandist Arkady Mamontov, spotlights a broad array of activists – from exiled oil tycoon Mikhail Khodorkovsky to environmental activist Yevgeniya Chirikova – who it describes as "craving" the collapse of the Putin regime, and of being controlled by "Western handlers." (*Meduza*, April 18, 2024)

A RUSSIAN MARITIME THREAT TO THE BALTIC SEA

According to European officials, Russia is using a "shadow fleet" of aging tankers to transport its sanctioned oil through the Baltic Sea, sidestepping Western sanctions and price regulations in order to continue selling its oil abroad. The fleet is said to contain 400 to 650 vessels, most of them sailing under the Gabonese flag. Many of the vessels are uninsured and not seaworthy – a state of affairs that poses an additional danger of environmental catastrophe. Sweden's foreign minister, Tobias Billström, has called for new enforcement mechanisms to ensure that Russia's covert shipments don't end up causing damage in regional waters. "The fact that they are transporting oil, which fuels Russian aggression against Ukraine is bad enough," Billström recently told London's *Guardian* newspaper. "But even worse is the fact that Russia doesn't care one bit, apparently, about the fact that these ships could cause major environmental havoc in seas, which if you take the Baltic Sea is sensitive as it is." (*Express*, April 18, 2024)

RUSSIAN SCIENTIST JAILED FOR TREASON

Alexander Kuranov, a leading figure in Russian hypersonic technology research, has been sentenced to seven years in prison on charges of high treason against the state. Kuranov, aged 76, led a state-sponsored research institute in St. Petersburg and was involved in the *Ayaks* hypersonic aircraft program for years before his arrest in 2021. Investigators have accused him of sharing scientific secrets with foreign nationals. St. Petersburg's City Court found Kuranov guilty and imposed a sentence of a seven-year term in a high-security facility, along with a fine of 100,000 rubles. (*Wall Street Journal*, April 19, 2024)