

A 'DICKS OUT': ON THE REPORTED U.S. INTELLIGENCE ASSIST TO UKRAINE

[NB: check the byline, thanks. /~Rayne]

By now you've probably read Marcy's post, Bragging on U.S. Intelligence. I agree with her take in part, but I suspect the situation isn't just dick-wagging.

It's a 'dicks out' situation, an attempt using the media to make a statement.

Not in the sense there's any competition here between dick-swinging leaders – dick-wagging – but in the sense there's a display. It looks like a show of power and it is, reminding Putin and Russia's military leadership within view of the Russian public and the globe that the world's largest army can aid an eastern European democracy and make it look like it's a trifling amusement.

Russia media already acknowledges the aid provided by the U.S. and other NATO countries is tough competition.

Senior military expert on Russian state TV argued that mobilization wouldn't accomplish a whole lot, since outdated weaponry can't easily compete with NATO-supplied weapons and equipment in Ukraine's hands and replenishing Russia's military arsenal will be neither fast nor easy.
pic.twitter.com/jzkU7RiZFz

– Julia Davis (@JuliaDavisNews) May 7, 2022

The report about U.S. intelligence in The New York Times wasn't a surprise to Russia, though.

There had been numerous reports in social media about a U.S. military surveillance aircraft flying over the Black Sea shortly before the Moskva was reported to have taken a hit from Ukraine's Neptune missiles – or caught fire, if one paid attention only to pro-Russian accounts. The flight was not unexpected as the U.S. had been flying surveillance over the Black Sea for years before the invasion began.

US Navy P8 Poseidon AE681B.
pic.twitter.com/Y8PTAsAaaP

– Manu Gómez (@GDarkconrad) April 14, 2022

#BalckSea

-US Navy RQ-4B Global Hawk FORTE10
-US Navy P8 Poseidon AE67FF
pic.twitter.com/pC7B72MCsS

– Manu Gómez (@GDarkconrad) April 14, 2022

Note there was more than just a lone P-8 flying surveillance the day the Moskva was hit, though these reports shared here are likely well after the attack.

What's not clear is the timing of the attack on the Moskva – late on April 13, or very early on April 14. Lithuania's Defense Minister posted early morning ET about the attack:

Ukraine reports missile strike on Major Russian warship "Moscow" in the Black Sea. This is the same warship that was sent to one direction (everyone knows which direction) by the Ukrainian soldier's on the Snake island.

– Arvydas Anušauskas (@a_anusauskas)
April 14, 2022

By evening GMT the vessel had sunk which Russia

confirmed.

Russian state media TASS confirms that the Moskva, the FLAGSHIP of the Russian Black Sea Fleet has sunk and is now on the bottom of the Black Sea.

Let's start celebrating.

☐☐ pic.twitter.com/io12YKd9AU

– Visegrád 24 (@visegrad24) April 14, 2022

Russia and the U.S. have had run-ins over the Black Sea even during the Trump administration.

New video shows Russian fighter comes within five feet of U.S. surveillance plane over Black Sea.

<https://t.co/Ekpjl2sUUM>
pic.twitter.com/hKYQwGrv9b

– U.S. Naval Institute (@NavalInstitute)
January 31, 2018

The U.S. military made a point then that its duties continued in spite of the change in leadership. This may even have been an issue during the Helsinki summit in July 2018 but we may not know for certain since Trump squelched interpreter's notes.

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The British newspaper The Times reported at 12:01 a.m. BST on April 20 about the same surveillance aircraft which had been sighted over the Black Sea before the Moskva was in distress.

A U.S. aircraft was patrolling the Black Sea in the hours before the Moskva was hit by Ukrainian missiles, The Times can reveal.

A Boeing P8 Poseidon was within 100 miles of the Moskva on the day the

Russian cruiser sustained catastrophic damage. ...

“The Times can reveal” suggests either The Times were waiting validation from local sources, or the outlet had received authorization to report this news from either British or U.S. military. The just-past-midnight time stamp suggests the latter.

But this wasn't just a show of power for the benefit of NATO; EU member states who are NATO members are too deeply committed now whether the U.S. gets involved or not providing assistance to Ukraine. The chances of Russia nailing a EU member accidentally or on purpose is real, while the risk to the U.S. is slim to none; we don't have any real skin in the game. NATO members likely knew already the U.S. was providing intelligence because of the emergency session between NATO and G-7 allies on March 24 in Brussels where commitments of effort from sanctions and aid were discussed.

Who else benefited from the published confirmation the U.S. had provided intelligence to Ukraine? Cui bono?

1. **Ukraine** – not just because they have access to the intelligence apparatus of the largest military in the world, but their own intelligence sources and methods are no longer in the spotlight drawing the attention of Putin and his remaining intelligence system from FSB to ad hoc hacking teams.

2. **U.S.** – because one of the audiences who needs to know U.S. intelligence is both capable and effective is the U.S. itself, in Congress, the intelligence community, and the public; the reports assure the general public in the U.S. and abroad that the U.S. has an active role if not as a combatant. We're providing intelligence as well as materiel but not the personnel who ultimately act on intelligence available.

3. **U.S. corporations** – in particular, Apple and John Deere, because there have been stories of apps built into their products which may have allowed their hardware to be used for intelligence collection directly and indirectly, placing the companies at risk of attack by Russia.

4. **Iran and other parties to the JCPOA P5+1 agreement** – because elements in Iran are still demanding revenge for the assassination of Lt. General Qasem Soleimani; it's a reminder the U.S. is watching though Iran's intelligence apparatus surely knows this; factions desiring a return to the agreement know retribution works against them.

5. **Japan** – with Russia's military demonstrating weakness, Japan has seen opportunity to not only recover some of its stature post- Abe but make demands related to the occupation of the Kuril Islands; its public may be reassured its partner is watching Russia closely as it does so.

6. **Taiwan** – China is watching closely how the U.S. responds to Russia's invasion of Ukraine as a model for its response should China attempt to realize its One China ideology and take Taiwan; it's already seen in Hong Kong a lack of U.S. intervention. While China's leadership surely knows about U.S. intelligence provided to Ukraine, Taiwan's public needs to know this is on the table for them as well.

7. **Aspiring NATO members Finland and Sweden** – while these two countries have been prepared for Russian hostilities since WWII, the invasion of Ukraine has heightened their sensitivity to national security. Both are now pursuing membership in NATO as Marcy mentioned; open acknowledgment of the benefits of membership may help their public feel more at ease with joining after holding out for so long.

Marcy's post noted the value of the publicized intelligence to several of these beneficiaries' voting constituencies.

Of all of who benefit, two most critical are Ukraine and U.S. corporations. As a 'dicks out' effort, the U.S. draws attention to itself and its intelligence capabilities which the media have gladly hyped up.

I have to wonder if this change in NYT hed was really because of an error, or an attempt to ensure the Russians were sitting up, paying attention to, and pissed off at the U.S.

Change in Headline
pic.twitter.com/duNojeTVV5

– Editing TheGrayLady (@nyt_diff) May 5, 2022

Especially since the NYT's article pointedly said there was no targeting information.

... The Pentagon press secretary, John F. Kirby, asked about a report in The Times of London that a Navy P-8 spy plane from Sigonella air base in Italy was tracking the Moskva before it was hit by Ukraine, spoke of air policing missions in the Black Sea as part of a carefully worded response: "There was no provision of targeting information by any United States Navy P-8 flying in these air policing missions," he said. ...

By drawing attention away from Ukraine and U.S. corporations, the use of non-traditional sources of intelligence based on non-government private resources becomes less obvious, potentially reducing their risk from retaliatory attack by Russia.

(An aside: Did you know that Apple iPhones were the second or third most popular cell phone in Russia? While Apple has now stopped selling its products in Russia, it's not clear iPhones and

MacBooks are no longer operative on Russian networks.)

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There were two other things worth noting related to the day the Moskva was hit and Russia's response afterward.

First, the U.S. Navy P-8 (and other surveillance craft) weren't the only unusual flights on April 14. A "Doomsday" plane took off from Moscow; the plane is equipped for use in the event of nuclear war.

Russian Air Force Tupolev Tu-214PU-SBUS RA-64530 "Doomsday plane" departed #Moscow Chkalovskiy.
pic.twitter.com/SzCMNzCIg5

– Manu Gómez (@GDarkconrad) April 14, 2022

But it wasn't just a Russian "Doomsday" plane in the air that same day.

Fascinating! The presidential Doomsday Plane is out practicing the comms method it would use to order submarines to launch nuclear missiles after a nuclear war started. (This is routine, don't worry, but rarely spotted.)
<https://t.co/BYqiIiXSkG>

– Garrett M. Graff (@vermontgmg) April 14, 2022

Most media didn't appear to have noticed the Russian plane. The Daily Express-UK published an article on April 14 at 13:16 hours London time, edited at 14:25 hours, about the Russian craft's kit, and wrote about a flight at 4:16 pm which lasted nearly four hours. It also mentioned the U.S. "Doomsday" plane taking a flight but in little detail. The Daily Express didn't tweet their article.

Second, Russia told the families of Moskva crew members who died on April 14 that they would not receive survivor compensation:

#Russian Federation authorities informed family members of dead crewman from the cruiser #Moskva that the state will offer them no survivor compensation, because the warship sank by accident not in military action, and their son's whereabouts are unknown
<https://t.co/r0t9BsB36t>
pic.twitter.com/C0Grrwr7Nk

– KyivPost (@KyivPost) May 6, 2022

This seems particularly callous especially since crew members families were told little to nothing immediately following the Moskva's "fire" and sinking, calling to mind the handling of the Kursk submarine disaster. Were the Moskva's crew and their surviving families punished financially for failing?

Another particularly odd detail was the immediate reaction of crew on board the Moskva after it was hit by Ukraine's Neptune missiles – the radar didn't respond as if it wasn't watching for another attack, and life boats didn't appear to be deployed and loaded once the ship appeared to be in extremis. A report by U.S. Naval Institute News said the ship was blind to the attack, its radar not detecting surveillance by drones or planes or the missiles once it was targeted.

One analysis of the attack in this following Twitter thread suggests the weather conditions the night of April 13/morning April 14 may have helped mask the missiles if the radar was working and its 180-degree range aimed in the correct direction.

Some thoughts on the apparent sinking of the Russian Black Sea flagship Moskva: if confirmed, it's likely to go down in history as one of the most audaciously

successful attacks in modern naval
history. /1 pic.twitter.com/hWLLdbNMxP

– Chris0 (@Chris0_wiki) April 14, 2022

There are a lot of ifs here even after reading an analysis of the attack (pdf) shared by USNI News.

Perhaps the publication of the news that the U.S. intelligence isn't merely a 'dicks out' statement to garner attention away from others, or make the point the U.S. is assisting with intelligence up to but not including targeting.

Perhaps the message was meant to tell Putin, "The U.S. intelligence community knows *exactly* what happened to the Moskva," implying another mishandling of information a la the Kursk could be used strategically against weakened Russian leadership.

The deployment of our own "Doomsday" plane the same day Putin moved his also says something, but that may be even more cryptic and intended for a very small audience compared to the 'dicks out' about the Moskva's sinking.