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Russia heightened its aggressive posture toward NATO as the U.S. prepared new deterrence measures in Europe. The U.S. Defense of Department requested funding to deploy an additional 3,000-5,000 troops to Europe in its FY 2017 budget request in a show of support to NATO allies threatened by possible Russian military aggression. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg called for the establishment of a “cooperative and constructive” relationship with Russia, which he said required bolstering NATO defenses in order to gain Russia’s respect. Russia escalated its confrontation with NATO in advance of U.S. deterrence efforts. A Russian warplane violated Turkish airspace for the first time since Turkey downed a Russian bomber in November 2015, marking a new escalation in Moscow’s confrontation with Ankara. The Russian Ministry of Defense subsequently announced the deployment of advanced Su-35 air superiority fighters to the Russian airbase in Latakia Province, Syria, signaling Russia’s intent to continue provoking Turkey and projecting force along NATO’s southern flank. Russia also announced plans to deploy air superiority fighters to the occupied Crimean Peninsula on January 29, days after a Russian jet conducted a dangerous maneuver in proximity to a U.S. reconnaissance plane in international airspace over the Black Sea. The Kremlin continued to challenge NATO through political means, inviting a delegation from aspiring NATO member Montenegro’s pro-Russian opposition to meet with a member of Vladimir Putin’s inner circle. The Kremlin’s escalated confrontation with NATO coincides with mounting domestic economic challenges driven by low oil prices, which have forced Russia to consider cooperating with its geostrategic competitors in the Persian Gulf and selling major state-owned enterprises.

1 United States. 02 FEB: U.S. Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter revealed that the proposed FY 2017 defense budget included a 300 percent increase in expenditures in Europe, reportedly funding the forward deployment of an additional 3,000 to 5,000 U.S. troops. President Barack Obama said the new funds would enable the U.S. to reassure its NATO allies in Central and Eastern Europe facing the threat of Russian military aggression.

01-02 FEB: The U.S. Treasury added five Russian citizens to a 2012 sanctions blacklist targeting individuals suspected to have been involved in the imprisonment and death of Russian lawyer Sergey Magnitsky. The “Magnitsky List” has proven to be a major source of tension in bilateral relations. This round of expanded sanctions prompted Russia to blacklist five former U.S. officials.

2 NATO. 28 JAN: NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg called for the establishment of a “cooperative and constructive” relationship with an increasingly “assertive and unpredictable” Russia. Stoltenberg stressed that the alliance’s efforts to strengthen its defenses while re-engaging Russia did not present a “contradiction” and instead fostered “mutual respect.”

28 JAN: Moscow’s envoy to NATO accused the transatlantic alliance of attempting to create a new “iron curtain” by strengthening its defenses in Eastern Europe and promised Russian retaliation against efforts to upset the regional “military equilibrium.”

3 Germany. 01-02 FEB: During a visit to Berlin by Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, German Chancellor Angela Merkel called for EU sanctions against Russia to remain in place until the February 2015 “Minsk II” ceasefire agreement in eastern Ukraine is fully implemented. Merkel later called Putin to ask him to apply “influence” on the separatists in Ukraine to support the ceasefire.

4 Montenegro. 01 FEB: An anti-NATO opposition delegation from Montenegro met in Moscow with Sergey Naryshkin, the chairman of the Russian lower house of parliament. Naryshkin reiterated Russia’s stance in support of a popular referendum in Montenegro on the Balkan country’s prospective NATO accession.

5 Black Sea. 25 JAN: A Russian Su-27 air superiority fighter intercepted and reportedly “disturbed the controllability” of a U.S. RC-135 reconnaissance plane in international airspace “in an unsafe and unprofessional manner,” according to the Pentagon.

29 JAN: The commander of Russia’s Black Sea Fleet announced plans to deploy additional Su-30 fighter aircraft to occupied Crimea.

6 Russia. 01 FEB: President Vladimir Putin met with the heads of major state-run companies to discuss privatization proposals aimed at reducing the Russian government’s oil price-driven budget deficit.

7 Syria. 01 FEB: The Russian Ministry of Defense confirmed the deployment of advanced Su-35 air superiority fighters to the Russian airbase in Latakia Province, expanding Russia’s ability to threaten Turkish airspace. Russia has reportedly deployed four Su-35s to Syria, marking the supermaneuverable fighter’s first use in combat.

8 Turkey. 29 JAN-01 FEB: Turkey accused a Russian warplane of violating its airspace for the first time since a Turkish fighter jet downed a Russian Su-24 bomber in November 2015. Russia denied that its Su-34 fighter-bomber violated its airspace and called the accusation “unfounded propaganda.” Turkish President Recep Tayipp Erdogan warned that Russia would face “consequences” if it continued to violate Turkey’s borders while NATO also called on Russia to respect its members’ airspace.

9 Persian Gulf. 02 FEB: Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that Russia was willing to hold talks with other oil producing countries, including those from the Saudi-led OPEC cartel during a visit to the United Arab Emirates. Previous reports indicated Russia and OPEC may cooperate to raise the slumping price of oil.

10 Japan. 26 JAN: Two Russian Tu-95MS “Bear” strategic bombers circumnavigated Japanese territory, causing Japan to scramble jets to enforce its airspace.

26 JAN: Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stated that a possible World War II treaty with Japan would not include a settlement for the disputed Southern Kuril Islands, occupied by Russia since 1945.