

# Russia's Kaliningrad Territory Is Armed to The Teeth. NATO Wants to Crush It in a War.



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The Pentagon has a plan for destroying the defenses of Russia's most heavily-armed European outpost, a top U.S. commander said in September 2019.

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From Kaliningrad, Russia can threaten NATO aircraft, ships and ground forces for

hundreds of miles in all directions.

But U.S. forces believe they know how to crack Kaliningrad, Gen Jeff Harrigan, commander of U.S. Air Forces in Europe, told reporters including Breaking Defense's Sydney Freedberg, Jr. "We train to that," Harrigan said. "We think through those plans all the time, and... if that would ever come to fruition, we'd be ready to execute."

"It would be a multi-domain, very timely and effective capability that we would bring to ensure we have the access we need in that environment," Harrigan added.

"Unsurprisingly, the general didn't give details on what that plan of attack would be," Freedberg wrote. "But the unique position of Kaliningrad, nestled between Poland and Lithuania, well away from the rest of Russia, makes it both an excellent advance base and a highly exposed target."

Moscow in recent years has been beefing up Kaliningrad's defenses. Ground troops in the exclave are scheduled to receive Iskander-M ballistic missiles in 2019, "completing" the "rearmament of the missile formations of the land forces," the Kremlin announced on Jan. 1, 2019.

Kaliningrad's missile brigade possesses more than 50 vehicles, including launchers, command and maintenance vehicles and other support vehicles, according to the defense ministry. The new Iskander-M rocket can carry a conventional or nuclear warhead as far as 300 miles away.

"Russia has invested considerable energy into developing [anti-access, area-denial] capabilities and carefully positioning them to maximize their strategic effect," the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C. explained on its website.

"Russia's A2AD deployments span as far north as the Arctic down to Syria, with particular concentrations in Kaliningrad and around Crimea—a sort of 'thicket of overlapping and redundant A2/AD systems,'" the center added, quoting one of its own reports.

"In the event of a crisis, such deployments would complicate NATO's ability to access key areas such as the Baltics or Poland. These relative weaknesses within

NATO could increase the attractiveness to Russia of a *fait-accomplis*."

As Harrigian stated, Kaliningrad and its garrison could be prime targets for what Pentagon planners call "multi-domain operations." That's a fancy way of saying forces simultaneously would attack from the air, land, sea, and cyberspace. "A single symphony of violence to break down advanced defenses," Freedberg wrote.

Hackers could disrupt communications networks while jamming planes confuse radars. Bombers, ships, and submarines could lob long-range cruise missiles. Ground forces could fire rockets. Stealth fighters and bombers could penetrate surviving defenses to drop GPS-guided bombers.

One possible part of the multi-domain plan for attacking Kaliningrad played out in the wide-open when the U.S. Air Force in early March 2019 practiced a cruise-missile strike on the exclave. The mock attack was part of the flying branch's deployment of five B-52 bombers from Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana to the United Kingdom.

At least two of the B-52s that deployed to the United Kingdom were nuclear-capable models, identifiable by a special fin that the Air Force added in order to comply with the New START treaty that limits the number of U.S. and Russian nuclear-delivery systems.

But it was one of the non-nuclear-capable B-52s, serial number 60-0024, that initially flew a mock cruise-missile attack on Kaliningrad on March 14, 2019, according to Steffan Watkins, an independent imagery analyst. Observers can track military flights via their transponders and radio traffic.

"USAF Boeing B-52H 60-0024 ... took off from Barksdale AFB [on] 2019-03-14 [at] 01:30 Zulu [time], flew over [Canada] and conducted a mock nuclear cruise missile strike on the Russian Federation, only turning around 60 nautical miles from Russian air space [at] 11:10 Zulu, landing at RAF Fairford [at] 13:32 Zulu," Watkins tweeted.

It's worth pointing out that a non-nuclear missile strike would match the profile of a nuclear one. It's highly unlikely that the Pentagon's first attempt to take down Kaliningrad's defenses would involve a nuke.

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Image: Reuters.

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