

## Russian Disinfo Patterns: NATO Is to Blame For Kaliningrad's Militarization

One of the most popular D's of the Russian 4 D's of Disinformation is Distract - if you are accused of something, accuse someone else of the same thing. This is exactly the narrative that has followed the recent armament of Kaliningrad with top-notch aerial denial weaponry.

In March 2019, Russian Armed Forces [reportedly](#) stationed another unit of S-400 missile systems in Kaliningrad. These systems are considered to be the top-notch anti-aircraft weapons in Russia's possession. The continuous armament of the Kaliningrad exclave has the goal of [challenging](#) NATO's and especially U.S. air superiority in the region, rendering it inaccessible for both NATO and Russia. Yet, as the tiny Russian exclave in Europe continues to be militarized, Kremlin juxtaposes criticism of the Western countries by their own narrative. Russian media sees the never ending militarization of Kaliningrad as a result of alleged NATO's aggression.

This case study show how significant Russian military developments are being covered with informational campaigns. These narratives are spread on purpose to justify their actions in the eyes of foreigners and to rally support in the local population.

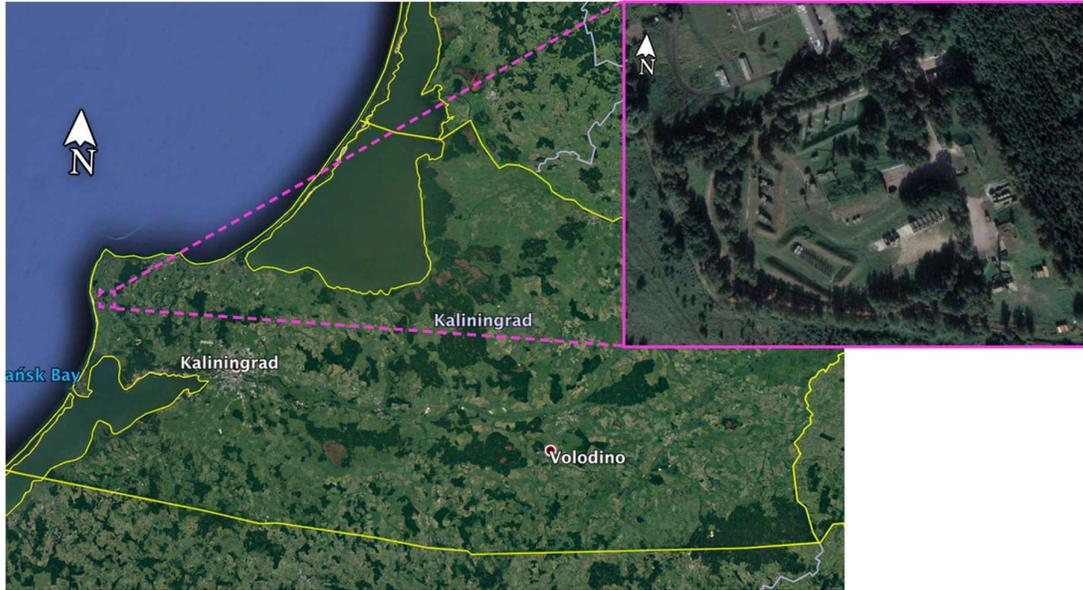
### The Premise of the Story

On March 5, 2019, a variety of articles surfaced on Russian media websites claiming that Russia is about to send a regiment of S-400, advanced air and missile defense systems intended to engage targets at ranges of up to 400 km, to the Kaliningrad enclave. This already highly militarized enclave was announced to receive additional military units soon after Poland [announced](#) the purchase of mobile rocket launchers [HIMARS](#) on February. On March 13, 2019, articles on Russian media already claimed that the new S-400 systems are already deployed to Kaliningrad region. On March 15 the first photos of allegedly deployed S-400 started surfacing on Russian media. Poland on March 28 announced and [Patriot missile](#) defense systems, which served as an argument in favor of the S-400 deployment amongst VK users.

### Possible Geolocation

As both the written and visual information coming from the Russian media outlets ought to be checked, the surfaced [photos](#) and [videos](#) were analyzed using the geolocation method. The lack of details in the video did not allow to conclude with confidence that the shown systems are really S-400. The visual recognition between the older S-300 and the newer S-400 systems is complicated and can be reliably done only by [analyzing](#) the radar equipment supporting the systems. Nonetheless, the geolocation details in the background proved to be sufficient to determine a likely position of these systems.

The geolocation method used in this research revealed that the likely location of the systems shown in the video was in the town of Yantarny, Kaliningrad region.



Likely geolocation of the new S-400 unit in Kaliningrad (Source: [GoogleMaps](#))

An underground bunker seen in one of the photos published by the New Kaliningrad media outlet coincided with the bunker seen in the military base near Yantarny.



Likely geolocation of the new S-400 unit in Kaliningrad (Source: [GoogleMaps](#), left; [New Kaliningrad](#), right)

The number of platforms used for the systems also coincided with the locations on the west of the base. The [40B6M mobile tower for antenna checkpoint of 92h6E](#) is also visible on the satellite imagery.



Likely geolocation of the new S-400 unit in Kaliningrad (Source: [GoogleMaps](#), left; [yar.kp.ru](#), right)

Due to the limited visual information available, the geolocation cannot be confirmed with full certainty, yet the full analysis of long range surface-to-air missile systems suggested that the location is likely to be in Yantarny. Furthermore, both videos and photos were checked using the reverse image search method in order to check that they were not posted before and therefore are likely genuine.

### **The Narrative**

One of the most spread articles that appeared on March 4, was written in the form of interview with the military expert, retired Russian Colonel Viktor Litovkin. He commented on the strengthening of the Kaliningrad region with a new regiment of missile systems S-400, saying it is a logical decision of the head of the Russian Defense Ministry Sergei Shoygu. The leadership of the Baltic Fleet reported earlier in the year that a regiment of new S-400 air defense systems was delivered to the Kaliningrad Region because of the MoD order. According to the interview, Shoygu is currently actively working on the defense of the Baltic outpost of the Russian Federation in the West. According to Litovkin, this is a necessary measure to ensure the protection of a strategically important territory. Placing the regiment of the newest air defense systems is important because the region is surrounded on all sides by the NATO countries - Poland, Lithuania and behind these states are the second echelons of NATO countries: Latvia, Estonia, Norway and Germany.

Litovkin in his interview quoted that Russia must be prepared that the forces of NATO may at any time try to cut off Kaliningrad from the mainland Russian Federation, blocking the movement of airplanes and ships.

### **The Justification**

According to the Colonel, it is important to focus on the recent Poland's purchase of RZSO missiles systems, against which, the new S-400 regiment near Kaliningrad was sent as a response. Litovkin said that the Russian MoD acts logically: The Kaliningrad region will be protected, which means that the outpost of Russia in the Baltic is as reliable as possible.

These arguments were used to justify the continuous militarization of the Kaliningrad region, the Russian military enclave on NATO's doorstep. The region was under heavy militarization for years, with the latest instances observed on [February 2018](#) and observed on [October 2018](#). These instances clearly show that the process of militarization has very little to do with the new military purchases of Poland that were made in 2019.

Social media listening tools did not reveal significant spread of these messages in the form of new media outlets neither in Russian or English, yet the search on VK using the keywords "С-400" and "Калининград" revealed that these messages were very prominent in the middle of March. Furthermore, these messages caused significant commenting of VK users who were praising this development and expressed negative emotions towards NATO. This finding suggested that likely these messages were intentionally spread in Russian and on social media, likely to rally local population support for the continuous armament of Kaliningrad enclave.

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