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SUBJ RUSSIA: TAKE 1 OF 2--Kursk May Have Been Attacked by Two Foreign Submarines, Says Moscow Paper

SERI CE#817#214 Moscow Moskovskiy Komsomolets in Russian 18 Aug #
 TEXT P 1

[Article by Yuriy Kochergin, Aleksandr Morozov, and Viktor Sokirko: "Last Battle in Barents Sea? Squadron Bends But Does Not Yield..."]

[FBI's Translated Text] As of today there are more than enough theories about the disaster to the multirole nuclear submarine Kursk: from a collision with a World War II mine to poor crew training. The former is put forward by official Russian representatives, the latter by Americans. People have even gone so far as to say that the submarine might have been attacked by...a UFO!

Moskovskiy Komsomolets is publishing another theory which, let us be frank, is equally fantastic. At least three sources agree on the sequence of events discussed below. Thus, in high-ranking circles it was hinted to us, under strict secrecy, that the possibility is not ruled out that the Kursk was attacked by...two foreign submarines and sunk by a powerful MS-48 torpedo.

This information, let us say at once, is absolutely without any documentary confirmation and could be interpreted as just the usual rumors. All the same, we felt we had no right to let it pass unnoticed.

...Spotting the emergence of a large squadron from the Severomorsk base was not so very difficult, and as a consequence two unidentified submarines were hanging around in the region of the large-scale Northern Fleet exercises from the very first day of the maneuvers. That is the established procedure: NATO submarines have been sitting right on the tail of Russian submarines on patrol duty ever since Cold War times. They also track all more or less significant naval exercises, admittedly from a safe distance. The Russian seamen knew very well that there were now two Los Angeles-class US submarines close by. They say that at first they did not get in the way of the progress of the exercises at all -- they kept their distance. After all, the Russian fleet was carrying out live missile launches at training targets.

Then, it is conjectured, the situation changed: The foreign submarines came practically right up to our squadron. In general, according to all the written and unwritten rules, during exercises of this kind any unidentified target that does not respond to signals and questioning is destroyed -- that is a security requirement.

The forces of the Northern Fleet, still according to conjecture, made several threatening maneuvers to drive the persistent submarines further away from the area of the exercises. At first they did not venture to take extreme measures. Not for the time being.

It is not ruled out that on the approach to Severomorsk the nuclear submarine Kursk was ordered to drive away the uninvited guests. The submarine went onto an attack course.

Let us turn to foreign sources. "Two US submarines and the surface reconnaissance ship the Loyal were observing the maneuvers involving the Kursk," a US intelligence spokesman announced in an official press statement. "Contact with the Kursk was lost soon after the US tracking ships intercepted a twice-repeated request from on board the Kursk to fire two torpedoes. After that there was a big explosion, recorded by US reconnaissance ships."

Could it be that the commanding officer of the Kursk, Captain First Rank Gemadly Lyachin, had one of the enemy boats in his sights (to all appearances, he did not detect the second)? Who knows? Maybe a request to fire torpedoes was submitted to the command. It seems that he received the command, only not to fire for effect, but as a warning -- a double shot across the bow and stern of the enemy submarine to show that they were not joking. Let us remind you that all this is only at the level of

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conjecture. According to this scenario, the enemy fixed the launch and fired a return salvo which the Kursk managed to dodge with an antitorpedo maneuver. Our submarine soared up from a depth of 80 meters to 30 and prepared to surface -- the raised antennas on the sail indicate this. And then the most unexpected thing may have happened: The Kursk was hit during the countermove by a torpedo from the second submarine (the one it had not noticed). This time the Russian submarine did not manage to dodge...

An interesting fact: A few days after this, as one of our sources informed us, a certain Western special service carried out satellite photography of the Kursk lying on the bottom of the Barents Sea. The conclusion of the foreign experts was this: The nature of the damage to the boat and its position on the sea bed are consistent with...a torpedo hit in close fighting by a ship at a distance of 20-25 cables (about 4,500 meters).

However, if you believe all of this and think that the foreign experts correctly analyzed the situation that led to the sinking of the Kursk, it remains unclear why our submarine did not report the underwater battle by radio.

...The other day Putin and Clinton had an unplanned 25-minute telephone conversation the details of which are being kept secret.

P.S. At the Navy Main Staff press service we were informed that among the official theories that exist at present, only the hypothesis of a collision between the Russian submarine and a foreign submarine is being considered. The theory about damage to the hull of the nuclear submarine Kursk by a live torpedo or

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