



The Cambridge Security Initiative

## RUSSIA ‘EMBARRASSED’ TWICE IN A WEEK BY CHINESE MEDIA

---

NOVEMBER 2019

**Dr. Victor Madeira**

In early November, Chinese media unusually embarrassed Russia – twice in a week. First, SINA [reported](#) that in July 2018, Syria seized an unexploded, cutting-edge Israeli-U.S. missile interceptor from the ‘David’s Sling’ system and gave it to Russia. Days later, [Eastday.com](#) quoted a leading Chinese strategist who claimed NATO could occupy Russia’s Baltic exclave of Kaliningrad (formerly Königsberg) in just two days, but Moscow would then widen the conflict by striking several European capitals. Russian media carried both reports, raising questions about their source, timing, and aims, though the second piece provoked a mix of angry and defiant reactions.

The first story attracted [media interest](#) mainly in Israel, but experts cannot be sure if it is true, pointing to errors in the SINA report. Its timing is interesting. On 30 October, after years of U.S. pressure, Israel finally created a security committee to review foreign investment. The reason: China, which sees Israel as a shortcut to U.S. military secrets, targeting especially Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI), Rafael, and Elbit. All have U.S. subsidiaries doing classified work – including with Raytheon on ‘David’s Sling’. Plus, the Israeli government remains deadlocked on the pros/cons of a planned IAI IPO, which could force IAI to reveal some of its sensitive intellectual property; a decisive meeting set for 31 October was called off at the last minute. But most curious of all, SINA’s 02 November story was a re-run: it originally appeared on 18 August 2018.

The Kaliningrad story appeared as [U.S. bombers deployed](#) to northern Europe, including the Baltic, for a second time in three months. But it appeared also with a milestone in the making: the arrival in Kaliningrad of the [first multi-modal](#) (i.e. rail, sea, air) China–EU connection on a single waybill, meaning fewer stops and lower costs thanks to standardised transit requirements. U.S. deployments were warnings to China and Russia over aggressive expansion into the High North to secure resources, as well as the Northern Sea Route for China’s Belt and Road Initiative. The Kaliningrad story may have been China’s way of nudging Russia to harden its regional defences further and protect mutual interests.

### OUTLOOK

Assuming no behind-the-scenes collusion, both stories suggest China may increasingly be willing to use disinformation to advance national interests, even at Moscow’s public expense. This would mark a departure for the long-term strategic rivals, which both want to undermine U.S. influence and split key alliances, e.g. with Israel. Notably, Russia has not commented officially on the missile story but has exploited the Kaliningrad article to divide NATO further, by amplifying the original Chinese narrative that Russia would respond against Europe, not North America. Other than at times of international crisis, expect Russian interests to become increasingly secondary in the context of the global U.S.–Chinese rivalry.