TAL SHIAR DEFENSE INTELLIGENCE REPORT

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Russia to Continue Hybrid Campaign Against Europe To Erode Support For Ukraine

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We assess that Russia will continue to wage an intensified hybrid campaign across Europe in the near term. Moscow is employing increasingly brazen sabotage, drone incursions, cyberattacks, and disinformation. The goals is to raise the political and economic costs of continued support for Ukraine, test the thresholds of NATO Article 5, and fracture European unity. Russia seeks to remain below the level of open conventional conflict. Its conventional forces remain strained by high casualties and equipment losses in Ukraine. It is unlikely Russia will divert significant conventional military resources to wage this campaign, will continue to rely on a small number of operatives, and will not take public responsibility for the attacks/disruptions. Despite war rhetoric from European leaders, Russia is unlikely to conduct large-scale overt attacks that will trigger Article 5 and lead to a conventional conflict.

- Germany formally attributed the 4–5 August 2026 attempted attack using explosive-laden drones at Leipzig/Halle Airport to Russian state actors. The drones targeted Ukrainian cargo aircraft supporting NATO airlift operations. Interior Minister Alexander Dobrindt cited matching technical components, explosives, and intelligence linking the operators to Russian agencies. Foreign Minister Johann Wadephul stated the incident fit a broader pattern of Russian hybrid operations. Berlin responded by closing the Russian consulate in Bonn and terminating the Russian House agreement.



- The Kyiv-based Sahaidachnyi Security Center's Everywhere War Tracker recorded 182 hybrid incidents across Europe from 23 September 2025 to 23 September 2026. This total represents more than one-third of all incidents logged since February 2022. August 2026 was the most active month on record with 28 incidents, including a surge in sabotage. Activities encompassed airspace violations, arson against defense firms, and infrastructure disruptions.

- Denmark's Defense Intelligence Service assessed in a September 2026 report that Russia will increase threats to NATO nations with greater consequences than in the past. The assessment noted a low but growing risk of limited military attacks. French President Emmanuel Macron and Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk warned that "no one is safe," citing intelligence indicating possible planned attacks.



Europe Advances Collective Mechanisms Amid Persistent Deterrence Gaps

We assess that European governments and EU institutions are shifting toward more coordinated attribution, emergency protocols, and selective cost-imposition in response to Russia's hybrid escalation. Structural challenges remain. These include slower attribution processes, difficulties in achieving rapid unified action, and reluctance to cross escalation thresholds short of Article 5. These factors will constrain effective deterrence through at least early 2027.

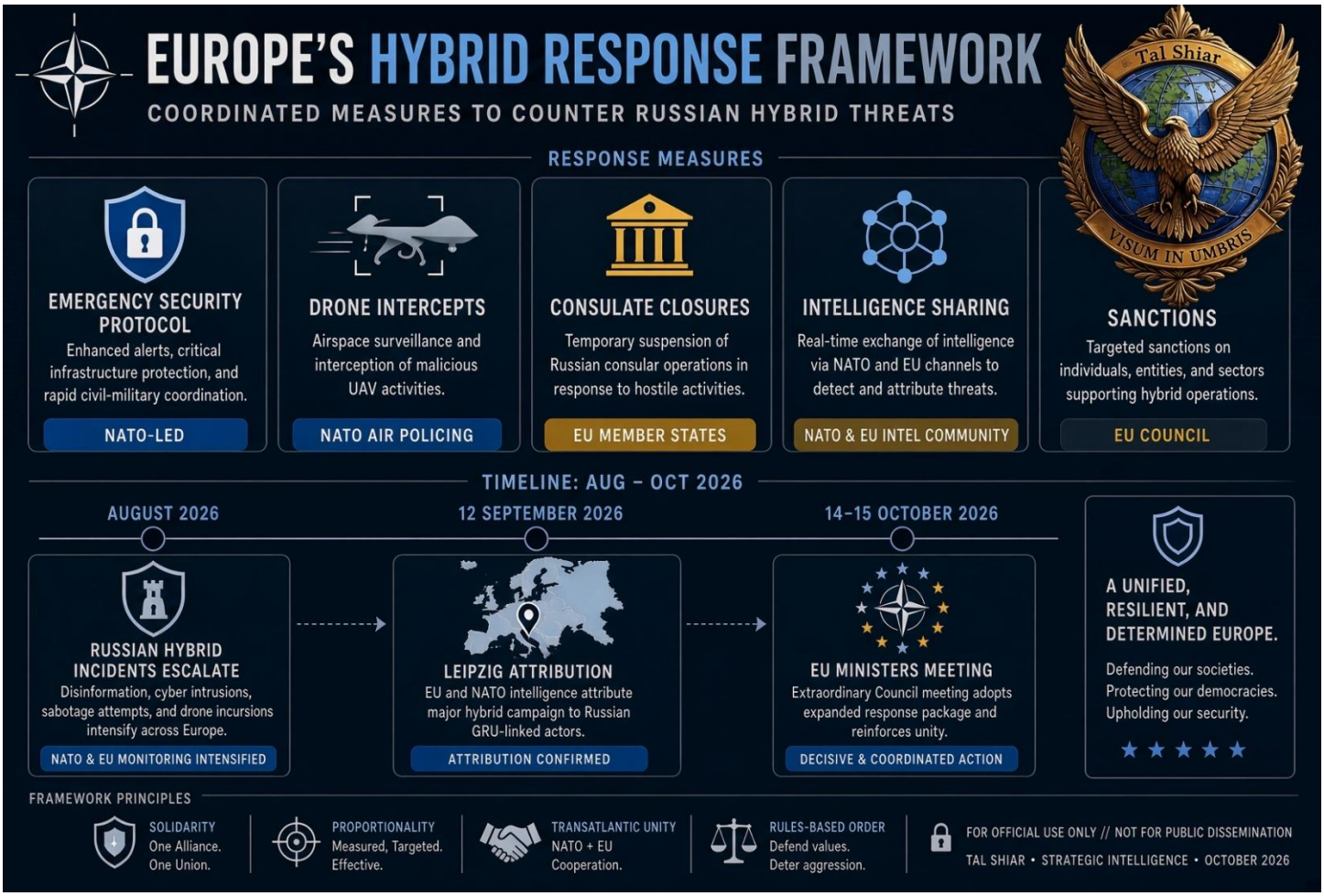
- In late September 2026, EU defense ministers discussed an Emergency Security Protocol proposed by Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. The mechanism is designed as an Article 4-style tool for hybrid incidents below the threshold of armed aggression. It would enable coordinated responses including sanctions and visa restrictions while cooperating with NATO.

- Germany's 1 September 2026 attribution of the Leipzig attack prompted diplomatic closures and an elevated national threat assessment. NATO reinforced eastern-flank air policing and advanced the Eastern Sentry initiative. Individual allies demonstrated greater willingness to intercept Russian drones.

- The European Parliament in mid-September 2026 called for increased intelligence sharing through the Single Intelligence Analysis Capacity, a new cross-cutting action plan against hybrid warfare, and closer EU-NATO cooperation. EU officials including Kaja Kallas and Defense Commissioner Andrius Kubilius stressed the need for “painful” consequences for Russian provocations.

Conclusion

Russia’s hybrid campaign has entered a more kinetic and less deniable phase. Its primary purpose is to erode European support for Ukraine without triggering a full NATO collective-defense response. European efforts to institutionalize collective hybrid defense—through attribution, protocols, and selective costs—represent measurable progress. However, these steps remain largely reactive. Sustained political unity, faster attribution, and calibrated cost-imposition will determine whether Moscow continues to test thresholds with limited restraint into 2027.





Tal Shiar was founded by Nadeem Iqbal, a national security expert who served over 16 years as an intelligence officer for the Department of Defense from 2006-2022. His career began as a counter-insurgency analyst on the Afghanistan-Pakistan Task Force (2006–2013), followed by 9 years as a military analyst in the Syria Branch (2013–2022). He deployed five times in support of combat operations (3× Afghanistan, 2× Iraq), including two rotations with Special Operations Forces focused on counter-terrorism missions in the CENTCOM theater. Additional roles included rotations to CIA Headquarters as the military analyst for the DNI Middle East Task Force and served as the Syria Country Director for Office of Secretary of Defense Policy (OSDP). He was recognized with Joint Civilian Commendation/Achievement Medals, the NATO Medal(x3), the Secretary of Defense GWOT Medal, DoD Expeditionary Award and the OSD Excellence Award.