

4 NATO Jets Trail 2 Russian Bombers Over Arctic, Atlantic

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MOSCOW — Two Russian Tu-160 Blackjack strategic bombers that carried out a routine patrol mission over the Arctic and Atlantic Oceans were shadowed by four NATO fighters, the Defense Ministry said on Friday.

Spokesman Lt. Col. Vladimir Drik said the bombers spent about 11 hours in the air on Thursday and were “accompanied” by two NATO F-16 Fighting Falcons of the Norwegian Air Force and two RAF Tornados.

This is thought to be the first time Russian strategic bombers have been followed by such a large number of NATO jets.

A similar patrol mission on September 29, 2009, was shadowed by an F-22 Raptor, reportedly the first time the world’s only fifth-generation fighter aircraft, which uses stealth technology, was sent out to keep an eye on Russian planes.

Russian strategic bombers resumed patrol flights over the Pacific, Atlantic, and Arctic oceans in August 2007, following an order from then-President Vladimir Putin, and are usually shadowed by less sophisticated NATO aircraft.

All flights by Russian aircraft are performed in strict compliance with international law on the use of airspace over neutral waters, without intruding in the airspace of other states, the ministry said.

Russia has yet to develop a [fifth-generation fighter](#) and has just started testing a prototype, known as the T-50, which is not expected to enter service until 2015. A second U.S. fifth-generation fighter, the F-35 Lightning II, is due to enter service with the U.S. Marine Corps in 2012.

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