

Cold War Shivers: Two Russian strategic bombers fly along Alaska, Canada coasts

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Two Russian Tu-95MS strategic bombers, within the scope of a long-range aviation drill, flew along the coasts of Alaska and Canada and returned to their home airfield via the North Pole on Thursday, Air Force spokesman Col Alexander Drobyshevsky told Itar-Tass.

“A pair of Tu-95MS planes flew along a large range along the coasts of Alaska and Canada and, returned home via the North Pole. The bombers were refueled in mid air by an Il-78 tanker aircraft. The average flight duration made up some 17 hours. The aircraft flew more than 13,000 kilometers,” Drobyshevsky said.

“During refueling, each Tu-95MS took on board 30 tonnes of fuel, a record high amount since the Soviet era,” the spokesman said.

“Another pair of Tu-95MS flew around Greenland into the air space over eastern Atlantic Ocean. The average duration of flight was some 12 hours,” Drobyshevsky said.

“Tu-95MS flights were made in accordance with air patrol plans. During the mission, the bombers were accompanied by NATO planes,” according to the spokesman.

“The crews of Tu-22M3 planes, along with the scheduled flights, flew patrol missions over the Black Sea, with the average flight time of 5 hours. Another two pairs of Tu-22M3 planes practiced bombing at the Nagotai range in the Irkutsk region. Tu-95 MS, Tu-22M3 and Il-78 made more than 15 flights today,” he noted.

“The flights by long-range aviation were made according to international rules of the use of air space, over neutral waters, without violating the borders of other states,” Drobyshevsky said.

The long-range aviation exercise began on September 18 and will run through September 21.

Russia resumed patrolling by long-range aviation in remote areas after a 17-year pause, per decision by the supreme commander-in-chief, President Vladimir Putin.

Russian long-range aircraft have flown to the air space of remote areas several times in the past two months.

In mid-July, four Tu-95MS bombers flew through the air space near Great Britain.

Their flight provoked numerous comments in British media outlets, because it coincided with the diplomatic row over the expulsion of four British diplomats.

In early August, two Russian strategic bombers flew to the U.S. base Guam in the Pacific Ocean.

As a rule, the flights by Russian long-range aviation are accompanied by NATO fighter jets which are watching the Russian bombers.

Earlier on Thursday, Drobyshevsky said more than 90 planes and helicopters were involved in a tactical exercise of the far eastern Air Force and Air Defense formation.

“The far eastern Air Force and Air Defense formation has detailed more than 90 Su-24, Su-25, Su-27, and Mi-8 helicopters to the drill. Pilots will be flying in the area of airfields and along routes, drill missions to deliver strikes at ground targets and the tactics of providing air cover for troops,” Drobyshevsky said.

The exercise is led by commander of the far eastern Air Force and Air Defense formation Lt-Gen Valery Ivanov.

The strategic supersonic bomber Tu-160 /Blackjack by NATO’s classification/ is intended for destroying enemy targets in remote areas. Its range is up to 13,000 kilometers. Armaments: 12 nuclear-tipped cruise missiles.

Tu-160, with a crew of four, can carry up to 40 tonnes of bombs, and has a take-off mass of 275 tonnes and a flight altitude of 16 kilometers.

Tu-95 MS /Bear by NATO classification/ is a strategic all-weather bomber, armed with bombs and high-precision air-to-ground cruise missiles with a range of more than 3,000 kilometers, which can carry nuclear warheads.

The mainline long-range missile-carrying bomber Tu-22M3 /Backfire by NATO classification/ with variable geometry wing has a range of up to 7,000 kilometers. It can carry three X-22 air-to-ground cruise missiles against seaborne or ground targets.

The Il-78 tanker is a modification of the Il-76 plane. It can carry 35 tonnes of fuel with mid-air refueling rate at 2,000 liters per minute.

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