

Russia holds strategic air drills over Arctic

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Russia's strategic aviation started Wednesday an active phase of military exercises to fly over the North Pole and conduct test launches of cruise missiles, an Air Force spokesman said.

During the active phase, four Tu-160 Blackjack, 12 Tu-95 Bear-H strategic bombers, and 14 Tu-22 Backfire-C theater bombers will conduct simulated bombing raids, and more than ten cruise missile launches at the Pemboi range near Vorkuta [in Russia's Arctic], and fly over the North Pole, the Pacific, and Atlantic Oceans.

"On Wednesday, Tu-160 and Tu-95 bombers conducted eight successful [test] launches of cruise missiles at designated targets in northern Russia," Colonel Alexander Drobyshevsky said, adding that the planes made over 40 sorties throughout the day.

The Russian aircraft were closely monitored by NATO fighters during the missions.

The spokesman said six long-range aviation regiments were involved in the exercise to practice interaction with fighter aircraft, air refueling, and overcoming enemy air defenses.

Units of the 37th Air Army of the Strategic Command will conduct a total of six tactical exercises in August as part of an annual training program, the Defense Ministry earlier said in a statement.

According to various sources, the Russian Air Force currently deploys 141 Tu-22M3 bombers, 40 Tu-95MS bombers, and 14 Tu-160 planes.

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