

Russian Bombers Trained Off U.S. Coast Associated Press | October 02, 2007

ANCHORAGE, Alaska - Russian warplanes staged at least seven exercises outside U.S. airspace near Alaska this summer, and each time U.S. or Canadian fighter jets were dispatched to escort them, U.S. military officials said Monday.

The latest exercise came Sept. 19 and involved two planes flying somewhere off the coast of Canada, said Maj. Allen Herritage, a spokesman for the Alaska region of the North American Aerospace Defense Command.

They were met by Canadian planes from NORAD, which is jointly operated by the U.S. and Canadian militaries.

At least five exercises by the Russian Tu-95 Bear heavy bombers have taken place off Alaska's Aleutian Islands and other historic Cold War outposts, such as Cape Lisburne and St. Lawrence Island, according to NORAD records.



All occurred beyond the 12-mile boundary that constitutes U.S. airspace and have involved two to six aircraft. Each time, Russia alerted the U.S. through reports in Russian news agencies, Herritage said.

The bombers have been met by fighter jets, usually F-15s.

"They used to have them from time to time, but not nearly in this frequency," Herritage said. "These exercises used to be more common during the Cold War."

The exercises come amid troubled relations between Russia and the West and are seen by some as intimidating moves by an increasingly assertive Russia, but Heritage said the exercises are not a cause for alarm.

"The recent exercises appear to be routine training activities," he told The Associated Press. "They are nowhere near U.S. airspace."

President Vladimir Putin announced in August that Russia was resuming long-range bomber flights over the Pacific, Atlantic and Arctic oceans for the first time since the breakup of the Soviet Union.

Russian Air Force officials in Moscow could not be reached for comment after hours. They have repeatedly said that the planes were not violating any nation's airspace or any international agreements.

But in mid-September, British and Norwegian jets intercepted Russian military aircraft after they breached NATO airspace close to the U.K. and Finland. And on a handful of occasions this year, NATO nations including Britain and Norway have sent fighters to escort Russian bombers nearing their territory.

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