COLD WAR 2.0
By David Cenciotti

All the most significant close encounters between NATO and Russian warplanes since 2013
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Introduction

In the last couple of years we have observed and reported about the increasing number of Russian flights across the world.

Suspended in 1992, Russian Air Force bombers long-range missions resumed after President Vladimir Putin, in 2007, announced that Russia would resume strategic-scale flights.

On Aug. 17, 2007 RAF Typhoon Block 5 jets belonging to the Xi Sqn at Coningsby, launched their first scramble since assuming Quick Reaction Alert (QRA) duties on Jun. 29, 2007, to intercept a Russian Bear bomber flying over the North Atlantic Ocean.

Since then, the frequency of close encounters between NATO and Russian aircraft has increased, with a "spike" recorded in northern Europe in the months that followed Russia's annexation of Crimea and the subsequent crisis with NATO over Ukraine.

Through a collection of posts published by The Aviationist between 2013 and 2015, you can read how routine interceptions have become recurrent, tenser and more dangerous; the proof that we live in a new Cold War, or a "Cold War 2.0", as we dubbed it.

David Cenciotti
Founder & Editor
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CHAPTER 1

BOMBER INCIDENT: TWO NUCLEAR-ARMED RUSSIAN TU-95S REPORTEDLY SKIRT U.S. MILITARY BASE AT GUAM

According to the Washington Free Beacon website two Russian Tu-95 Bear-H strategic bombers circled Guam island, in the Pacific Ocean, on Feb. 12.

“Defense officials said the bombers tracked over Guam were likely equipped with six Kh-55 or Kh-55SM cruise missiles that can hit targets up to 1,800 miles away with either a high-explosive warhead or a 200-kiloton nuclear warhead,” reports Bill Gertz in his piece.

The episode happened shortly before President Obama delivered his State of the Union address and prompted U.S. to scramble some Kadena F-15s temporary deployed to Andersen Air Force Base.

The Eagles shadowed the two Russian bombers until they left the area in a northbound direction. Andersen AFB, on Guam, is strategically located 1,800 miles (about 2,900 km) to the east of China.

It has hosted a deployed strategic bomber force since 2004; recently, the Air Force has announced it will base two B-2 Spirit bombers in the Pacific atoll.

Although this kind of incident is not frequent, this is not the first time Russian strategic bombers conduct a long range training sorties into the south Pacific. And circumnavigate Guam.

In 2007, President Vladimir Putin said Russia had resumed the long-range flights of its strategic bombers that had been suspended in 1992. According to Putin, those tours of duty would be conducted regularly and on strategic scale.

On Aug. 8, 2007 two Tu-95 undertook a 13-hour round trip from Blagoveshchensk base to “visit” Guam for the first time since the end of the Cold War.
Guam is among the key strategic U.S. military installations in the Pacific theater; a base that is pivotal to the Air Sea Battle Concept strategy designed to counter China’s military power in a region characterized by territorial disputes.

*Image of a past interception. Credit: U.S. Air Force*
RUSSIAN TU-22M BACKFIRE BOMBERs ESCORTED BY SU-27 FLANKERS SIMULATE NIGHT ATTACK ON SWEDEN.

Erik Arnberg, a reader of The Aviationist, brought to my attention an episode that occurred on the night of Mar. 29, 2013, when Russian military aircraft simulated a large scale bomb run on Sweden. The episode got much media attention among the Swedish media outlets on Apr. 22, when more details about the simulated attack surfaced.

According to the Svenska Dagbladet, after midnight on Mar. 29 (Good Friday), the Swedish radars detected six fast planes coming from the east, originating from the St. Petersburg area and overflying the Gulf of Finland.

The route the aircraft were flying was far from being suspect: Russian bombers periodically fly across the Baltic Sea to reach the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad, located between Lithuania and Poland. However, on Mar. 29, the two Tu-22M3 Backfire heavy bombers, capable to carry cruise missiles and nuclear weapons, and their four Su-27 Flanker fighter jets escort got dangerously close to the Swedish airspace and, at 2 AM local time, they skirted Gotland island, some 30-40 kilometers off the Swedish territorial waters.

After they carried out their mock attacks (on targets in the Stockholm area and Southern Sweden, according to Swedish military sources who talked to Svenska Dagbladet) they turned back and returned towards Russia.

The episode is similar to those Soviet Union’s exercises typical of the Cold War, when bombers carrying the typical Red Star flew quite close to the Swedish airspace boundaries and got intercepted by Swedish interceptors. Such “visits” ended in 1992 but returned in 2011 when Putin resumed the long-range flights of its strategic bombers.

Although some Tu-22M3 Backfire bombers flew over the Baltic Sea in the last year, what’s unusual in Mar. 29 incident is that the Russian activity took place at night and, above all, it found the Swedish...
Air Force totally unprepared.

Even if at least two JAS-39 Gripen should always be in QRA (Quick Reaction Alert) and ready for take off in case of alarm, quite surprisingly there were no interceptors ready on Good Friday night.

However, since 2004, NATO has a QRA detachment in Lithuania’s First Air Base in Zokniai/Šiauliai International Airport whose aim is to guard the airspace over the three Baltic states Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The task is shared by several NATO members; since Jan. 2013, the Baltic air policing task is assigned to the Royal Danish Air Force.

On Mar. 29, two RDAF F-16 fighter jet took off from Siuliai to shadow the Russian bombers and fighters from distance as the formation headed east towards Russia.

Analysts believe the massive restructuring process that downsized the Swedish Air Force from 20 squadrons and over 400 planes to four divisions and less than 150 planes is to blame for the lack of preparedness of the Swedish air defense.

For sure the Russian military activity didn’t come unannounced. As said, it was neither the first time nor will be the last to see Moscow’s bombers, fighter jets performing simulated attacks on strategic targets around the world.

On Feb. 26 and 27, after Russian Tu-95 had skirted Guam airbase, Tu-22M Backfires simulated strikes on a U.S. Aegis cruiser in the Pacific and ground-based radar station in Japan.

And, in the future, Russian could detach its advanced, stealth PAK-DA, destined to replace the current aging fleet of 63 Tu-95 Bearand 13 Tu-160 Blackjack strategic bombers.

Sweden, Japan and U.S. you’d better be prepared.

*Image credit: Sergey Krivchikov*
RUSSIAN INTELLIGENCE GATHERING PLANE FLIES NEAR SWEDEN. SWEDISH AIR FORCE ALLEGEDLY FAILS TO INTERCEPT IT.

On Mar. 29, two Russian Tu-22M Backfire bombers, escorted by four Su-27 Flankerfighter jets, conducted a simulated night attack on Sweden. The mock air strike did not cause any reaction by the Swedish air force.

On Apr. 25, Svenska Dagbladet reported about a Russian Air Force ELINT (Electronic Intelligence) plane that on the preceding day flew in an unusually aggressive fashion in a narrow line of international airspace in between two big strategically placed Swedish isles, Öland and Gotland. The Russian plane, reportedly an Il-20 Coot, arrived from the southern Baltic Sea on a northern course between the islands, then it turned south: a route that brought the spyplane close to violating the Swedish airspace.

One reason for the Russian reconnaissance plane to fly so close to Sweden may have been the large international “Combined Joint Staff Exercise” that began on Apr. 20. The annual exercise features intense signal connection between the staffs in Karlskrona, Enköping and Uppsala; signals that could be of interest for the Russian Il-20 whose presence between Ä–land and Gotland could also be aimed at testing the Swedish Air Force air defense readiness.

It is not clear yet whether any Swedish Gripen interceptor was scrambled to intercept the spyplane.

According to some Svenska Dagbladet’s sources, Sweden did not launch any Gripen; other sources
say the Gripens were launched, but a bit too late to intercept the intruder when flying between the Swedish islands.

Either case, the lack of proper/effective reaction by the Swedish Air Force to Russia’s aggressive posture in the Baltic is causing concern in Sweden.

In 2011, a Russian Il-20s was intercepted by JAS-39 Gripens of the Czech Air Force performing Baltic Air Policingt asks from Lithuania’s First Air Base in Zokniai/Šiauliai International Airport as the image in this article shows.

*H/T to Erik Arnberg for the heads-up*
Finland’s Ministry of Defence has recently revealed that two Russian military aircraft violated the airspace of the northern European country earlier this week. The official statement was published on the MoD official website on Tuesday.

A Finnish Air Force F-18 Hornet fighter jet was scrambled in order to intercept the intruders. The Russian response was that Tu-22M bombers escorted by Su-27 fighters (more or less the same kind of formation that staged the mock attack on Sweden some weeks ago) were flying close to the border but did not violate it.

Nevertheless it is the second incident involving Finland and Russian planes this month. On the earlier episode the Russian official statement was that the planes came close to the border due to the bad weather.

In one way or another one, this is just the last of a series of incidents involving Russian planes in the Scandinavian region.

*Image Credit: coldvalentine.blogspot.com*

*Written by Jacek Siminski, edited by David Cenciotti*
INCREDIBLE PHOTO SHOWS RUSSIAN TU-22 BOMBER, SU-27 AND OTHER FIGHTER PLANES INTERCEPTED OVER THE BALTIC

On Mar. 29, two Russian Tu-22M Backfire bombers, escorted by four Su-27 Flanker fighter jets, conducted a simulated night attack on Sweden. The mock air strike did not cause any reaction by the Swedish air force.

On Apr. 24, a Russian Air Force Il-20 Coot ELINT (Electronic Intelligence) plane flew close to the two big strategically placed Swedish isles of Öland and Gotland.

On Jun. 3, a flight of two French Air Force Mirage F1CRs tasked with the Baltic QRA intercepted and identified another Il-20 spyplane less than ten minutes after the scramble order was issued to the two fighter jets at Siauliai, Lithuania, by CRP(Control and Reporting Post), of Amari, Estonia.

The French planes escorted the Russian plane for some minutes until two Jas-39 Gripen Swedish took over (previously, Swedish Air Force was blamed for not dispatching Gripens to intercept the spyplanes flying close to Sweden’s airspace).

On Jun. 11, Finland’s Ministry of Defense claimed Russian bombers escorted by Su-27 Flankers violated the Finnish airspace for the second time in the last few weeks.

And later, the French Air Force released the following stunning images of the close encounters with the Russians over the Baltic Sea on Jun. 8 and 11...
Notice the presence of a Su-24 Fencer and A-50 Mainstay.
EXCLUSIVE: CLOSE ENCOUNTER WITH "IVAN", AS SEEN FROM INSIDE THE RUSSIAN SPYPLANE!
Close encounters between Russian strategic bombers, spyplanes and Western fighter jets scrambled to intercept them have been quite frequent since the Cold War.

Every month or so, a new image taken by one of those interceptors depicting a Tu-95 Bear, Tu-22 Backfire, Il-20 Coot ELINT/reconnaissance spyplane, during a long range patrol over the Baltic Sea, or close to Japan, emerges as a “proof” of the latest “provocation” or “near violation” of this or that nation’s sovereign airspace.

Whereas images taken by the interceptors are not so rare (nevertheless, they are extremely interesting!), there are not so many photos taken from inside the “zombies” (the targets of the fighter planes).

Here are some really interesting ones taken from inside a Russian spyplane in international waters sent by a reader.
A JASDF F-15J on the right hand wing of the intercepted plane near Japan.

Both Japanese F-15s shadowing the Russian spyplane.
Close up.

Mirage F1 over the Baltic Sea.
Say “Cheese”

Finnish Air Force F/A-18 Hornet.
According to the Eastonian newspaper Eesti Päevaleht eight Russian Air Force planes flew close (or at least closer than usual) to the Estonia’s airspace on Sept. 16, 2013. The aircraft had departed from St Petersburg region and were heading to Kaliningrad Oblast, the Russian exclave between Poland and Lithuania on the Baltic Sea.
Fighter planes from Sweden, Finland and NATO planes situated in Lithuania were scrambled to intercept the Russian fighter jets (reportedly some Su-27 Flankers along with a transport plane) most probably deploying to Kaliningrad to take part to the huge Zapad 2013 exercise.

Estonian media outlets published some images allegedly taken by fighter planes that intercepted the Russians on their way to the exclave area.

Still, some of those published by Eesti Päevaleht were taken during previous close encounters, so it is not clear whether they are all photo files or some of them were really taken on Sept. 16 (by the
way, top image was surely taken by a French Mirage F1 in June 2013). Anyway, this is not the first time Russian planes create some concern in the Baltic area, and regardless to when they were taken the air-to-air images of the combat planes with the Red Star remain extremely interesting.

Image credit: Eesti Päevaleht
The Japan Air Self-Defense Force is always quite busy intercepting planes skirting the Japanese airspace.

In the third quarter of year (in the period between July and September 2013), JASDF planes were scrambled 80 times in response to activity of Chinese warplanes (and drones) close to Tokyo’s airspace.

The number of alert scrambles is the third highest since 2005 (when the MoD started releasing such figures).

On Sept. 8, two H-6G maritime strike aircraft were intercepted by the Japan Air Self Defense Force F-15 scrambled from Naha while flying in international airspace between the Miyako and Okinawa islands. On Sept. 9 a Chinese BZK-005 UAV (unmanned aerial vehicle) was intercepted near the contested Senkaku islands.

The dispute about the islands in the East China Sea has surely played a role in the increase of People’s Liberation Army Air Force and Navy activity in the area.

However, not only Chinese fighters caused some concern to the JASDF: from July to September, the number of QRA (Quick Reaction Alert) departures in response to Russian planes, reached a peak of 105, up form only 31 of the previous quarter (April - June).

*Image credit: U.S. Air Force*
"RUNS ON SWEDEN, BALTIC STATES AND POLAND" SWEDISH ARMED FORCES SAY

Talking to a local media outlet, a Swedish Armed Forces officer said that Russian bombers practiced bombing runs to Sweden, Baltics states and Poland last week.

Nothing new then. Close encounters occur quite often and some of them have much media attention, as happened in March, April, and June.

The latest episode occurred in the morning of Oct. 28, when three escort planes and two Russian bombers flew in direction of the Swedish territory. The “package” was detected on the radar over the Gulf of Finland and for one hour they seemingly carried out attack runs against Poland, the Baltics - and the southern tip of Öland in Sweden.

“I think the purpose was to practice various types of attacks as well as highlight the Russian presence in the southern Baltic,” Anders Persson, acting flight tactical commander on the Swedish Armed Forces said in an interview with SVT.se.

“We are now seeing an increased activity of Russian strategic bombers in the area. Of course we have to follow developments and see what they’re going and what they are doing,” Persson said.

Two Gripen fighter jet were scrambled to keep a close eye on the Russian planes.

Even though Sweden is somehow used to such activity in the Baltic Sea area, the aggressive posture of the Russians makes the drills a bit annoying for the Swedish.

“The difference is that when we practice, we do it together with a nation, we do not practice on any target in any country without the country being involved in the exercise. The Russian behavior is far more aggressive in their exercises,” Anders Persson, comments.

Image credit: Alex Beltyukov
U.S. F-15s performing Estonia independence flyby diverted to intercept Russian spyplane

U.S. F-15s scheduled to perform a flyover in Estonia, intercepted a Russian spyplane then took part to the parade.

On Feb. 24, Estonia celebrated its independence day.

Part of the celebrations was also a military parade in the city of Pärnu. U.S. F-15C fighters belonging to the 48th FW, currently deployed to Lithuania’s first air base in Zokniai, near Siauliai, took part to the flyby but they were forced to do double duty since they were first diverted to intercept a Russian plane.

Unfortunately, no details about the aircraft that was intercepted were released. The official statement by Estonian authorities says only: “Fighters identified the plane as a spy plane belonging to Russia.”

The U.S. Air Force has four F-15s from RAF Lakenheath deployed to Lithuania to undertake air policing in the Baltic states. The aircraft have replaced the Belgian F-16AMs and, since January, they guard the airspace over Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, whose air defense is provided on a rotational basis by 14 NATO states since 2004.

Aircraft on QRA (Quick Reaction Alert) at Siauliai are often scrambled by CRP (Control and Reporting Post) of Amari, Estonia, to intercept Il-20 spyplanes, Tu-22M Backfire bombers and Su-27 fighter jets, skirting Baltic states airspaces as images posted in 2013 show.

Image credit: U.S. Air Force
RUSSIAN SU-24 FENCER ATTACK PLANE PERFORMS MULTIPLE PASSES NEAR U.S. WARSHIP IN BLACK SEA

A RUSSIAN ATTACK PLANE PERFORMED MULTIPLE PASSES NEAR AN AMERICAN WARSHIP IN THE BLACK SEA.

The aircraft, reportedly a Russian Air Force Su-24 Fencer, flew within 1,000 yards of the USS Donald Cook, the U.S. Navy destroyer currently operating in the Black Sea. According to the Associated Press, the Fencer flew at 500 feet ASL (Above Sea Level) and performed passes that the ship commander considered “provocative and inconsistent with international agreements.”

The ship, that has been operating in the Black Sea since Apr. 10, issued several radio calls and warnings to the Fencer, that was unarmed and was never in real danger of coming in contact with the ship.

Noteworthy, the U.S. warship was also being shadowed by a Russian Navy frigate, but this is just routine during operations conducted in international waters east of Romania.

Such close encounters are quite frequent is seas around the world. Some years ago a pair of Tu-95 Bear flew quite close to USS Nimitz in the Pacific. For sure, when this happens in the Black Sea and amid raising tensions following the Russian invasion of Crimea, the episode assumes a completely different meaning.
CHAPTER 2

RUSSIAN BOMBERS FLY OFF CALIFORNIA AND AROUND U.S. PACIFIC BASE AT GUAM

As U.S. and NATO planes gather around Ukraine, long range air activity by Russian bombers in the Pacific is increasing and concerning.

Russian activity in Crimea has been accompanied by an increased presence in the Asia-Pacific region by Moscow’s long-range bombers.

Commander of the U.S. Pacific Air Forces, General Herbert “Hawk” Carlisle, said that Russian patrols included air activity off the coast of California, and around the U.S. Pacific base at Guam, Reuters reported.

Speaking at Washington’s Center for Strategic and International Studies think tank, Carlisle showed also a slide of a U.S. F-15 fighter jet intercepting a Russian Tu-95 “Bear” aircraft that was circumnavigating Guam, a base where U.S. strategic bombers are usually deployed.

Along with missions flown as far as the U.S. West Coast, Russian patrols around the Japanese islands and Korea have increased “drastically”.

Few days ago, Tu-95s were intercepted by RAF Typhoons off UK islands.

Image credit: U.S. Air Force
RUSSIAN BOMBERS FLY 50 MILES OFF CALIFORNIA. F-22S AND F-15S INTERCEPT THEM.

FOUR RUSSIAN AIR FORCE TU-95 BEAR WERE INTERCEPTED BY F-22S NEAR ALASKA. TWO OF THE STRATEGIC BOMBERS CAME WITHIN 50 MILES FROM CALIFORNIA COAST.

As we reported few days ago, a U.S. Air Force RC-135U performing a routine surveillance mission in international airspace over the Sea of Okhotsk, north of Japan, some 60 miles off eastern Russia on Apr. 23, was intercepted by a Russian Su-27 Flanker.

Just in case you thought only U.S. (spy)planes fly in the vicinity of the Russian airspace, the Washington Free Beacon unveiled that U.S. fighter planes were scrambled to intercept four Tu-95 Bear H bombers, two of those came within 50 miles of California coast.

Two USAF F-22 Raptor stealth jets, most probably from 3rd Wing at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson intercepted the “intruders”, that were seemingly conducting a training attack run, over the Aleutians.

Then, two of the four Tu-95s headed back home, whereas the remaining two flew off Northern California, triggering another alert scramble by NORAD (North America Aerospace Defense Command) that dispatched two F-15s to intercept and shadow the Russians.

Posted on June 12, 2014
According to the defense officials who talked to the Free Beacon, the bombers were supported on their (typical) long range mission by two IL-78 tankers.

Even if such close encounters are quite normal across the world, we can’t but notice that they have become at least more frequent in the last couple of years.

For sure Russia’s annexation of Crimea and growing tension between Washington and Moscow have given headlines like “Tu-95s flying close to Guam”, “Su-27s performing reckless interception of U.S. spyplanes”, “B-52s and B-2s temporarily deployed to the UK” and so on, a completely new meaning.

*Top: File Photo of F-22 intercepting Tu-95 (U.S. Air Force)*
On Jun. 17, Royal Air Force Typhoons were scrambled to intercept multiple Russian aircraft as part of NATO’s Baltics Air Policing mission.

According to the information released by the RAF, the Typhoon aircraft, from 3 (Fighter) Squadron, were launched after four separate groups of aircraft were detected by NATO air defences in international airspace near to the Baltic States.”

The “zombies” (how unidentified aircraft are dubbed in fighter pilots jargon), turned out to be a Tupolev Tu-22M “Backfire” bomber, four Sukhoi Su-27 ‘Flanker’ fighters, one Beriev A50 ‘Mainstay’ early warning aircraft and an Antonov An-26 ‘Curl’ transport aircraft “who appeared to be carrying out a variety of routine training,” even though the Flankers appear to be armed to the teeth, with 4x R-27 medium range and 2x R-73 short range air-to-air missiles.

As usual, the Russian aircraft were shadowed and escorted on their way.
Image credit: SAC Dan Herrick / RAF /Crown Copyright
"U.S. SPYPLANE VIOLATED SWEDISH AIRSPACE TO ESCAPE INTERCEPTION BY RUSSIAN JETS"

A U.S. RC-135 RIVET JOINT VIOLATED THE SWEDISH AIRSPACE RECENTLY IN AN (UNCONFIRMED) ATTEMPT TO ESCAPE INTERCEPTION BY RUSSIAN FIGHTER JETS, SWEDISH MEDIA OUTLET SAYS.

Posted on August 1, 2014

According to DN.se, on Jul. 18, an RC-135 Rivet Joint spyplane crossed the Swedish airspace, during a reconnaissance mission flown over the Baltic Sea.

U.S. SIGINT (Signal Intelligence) aircraft from RAF Mildenhall have been flying daily missions over the Baltics since the beginning of the Ukraine crisis.

Noteworthy, on Jul. 18, the day after Malaysia Airlines MH17 was shot down over eastern Ukraine, the American aircraft was met twice by Russian interceptors launched by the Russian base just outside Russian Baltic enclave of Kaliningrad.

Even if this kind of close encounters take place quite often with Russian and U.S. planes intercepting one another all around the world, the RC-135 reacted in a different way to the second intercept attempt by the Russian fighters. Indeed, the RC-135 asked the permission to cross the Swedish airspace, but when the ATC (Air Traffic Control) center denied the clearance, the Rivet Joint decided to proceed and flew over Gotland island.

Although UK-based RC-135s have flown more than 50 missions in the region, sometimes flying over Poland, sometimes into Lithuania and Latvia, and sometimes over the Baltic Sea near the Russian base in Kaliningrad to eavesdrop Russian signals and collect intelligence data, this was the first time, according to DN.se, that the American plane apparently reacted to the interception attempted by the Russians with an unauthorized short-cut over Sweden.

After overlying Sweden largest island, the RC-135 turned southbound reached the international
airspace before entering the Swedish airspace off Oland.

Violations of Swedish airspace are quite frequent (and, sometimes they do not face a response by the Swedish Air Force’s Gripen jets): seven violations were recorded in 2014, and a total of 53 aircraft have flown without permission inside Stockholm’s airspace since 2009, DN reported.

*Image credit: DN.se*

*H/T to Lars-Gunnar Holmström for the heads-up*
RUSSIAN "BEAR" STRATEGIC BOMBERS INTERCEPTED BY TYPHOON JET FROM BASE IN SCOTLAND FOR THE FIRST TIME

RAF TYPHOONS FROM RAF LOSSIEMOUTH, SCOTLAND, INTERCEPTED RUSSIAN TU-95 BOMBERS.

This news would sound different if Scotland got independent anyway, on Sept. 19, Royal Air Force Typhoon FGR4 aircraft, based at RAF Lossiemouth were scramble for the first time since they relocated from RAF Leuchars, Scotland, to the most northerly Scottish base, to identify, intercept and escort Russian Air Force Tu-95 Bears.

This was the very first time the Quick Reaction Alert (QRA) was launched since the Scottish base took on the role of defending the UK’s Northern airspace on Sept. 1.

The Bear bombers were flying a routine long-range training mission off the British Isles and did not enter UK airspace (unlike what two Su-24 did in Sweden earlier this week to probe Swedish Air Force readiness).

This is not the first time Typhoon from the 6 Sqn intercept Russian strategic bombers skirting the UK airspace: on Apr. 23, two RAF Typhoons from RAF Leuchars (where the squadron was previously based), intercepted and escorted two Tu-95 "Bear-H" aircraft that were approaching the British Isles.

Image credit: Crown Copyright
TWO RUSSIAN ATTACK PLANES INTENTIONALLY VIOLATED THE SWEDISH AIRSPACE TO PROBE LOCAL AIR DEFENSE

TWO RUSSIAN AIR FORCE SU-24 FENCER ATTACK JETS VIOLATED THE SWEDISH AIRSPACE TO PROBE THE SWEDISH AIR FORCE READINESS.

On Sept. 17, two Russian Su-24 Fencer combat planes intentionally violated Sweden’s airspace the Expressen newspaper reported.

According to the Swedish media outlet the incursion saw the two aircraft skirt the Polish airspace before heading north, at low altitude, towards the island Öland, in the Baltic Sea. At around 12:00 PM LT, the Russian planes entered the airspace over the Swedish territorial waters south of Öland.

Swedish Defense officials confirmed some Jas-39 Gripen fighters were scrambled from Ronneby airbase, in southern Sweden, to intercept the Russian planes but they did not reach the intruders as the Su-24s, after flying a couple of kilometers on the wrong side of the border, turned again eastbound, most probably towards Kaliningrad.

Even though the Swedish Armed Forces have not officially commented the incident, sources who talked to the Expressen said authorities believe the violation was aimed at probing the Swedish air defense readiness.

Last year Russian Tu-22 bombers conducted some mock attacks on Sweden; more recently an airliner almost collided with a Russian spyplane off Sweden. The increased Russian activity in the area and the crisis with Moscow caused by the situation in Ukraine, pushed Stockholm to move some Gripen jets to Gotland island, off the eastern coast of Sweden, in the Baltic Sea.

The Su-24 Fencer is a supersonic, all-weather attack aircraft developed in the Soviet Union and serving, among the others, with the Syrian, Iranian and Libyan Air Force. It’s twin-engined two-seater plane with a variable geometry wing, designed to perform ultra low level strike missions.

H/T to Lasse Holmstrom for the heads-up

Image credit: File photo Swedish Air Force
GERMAN TYPHOONS HAVE INTERCEPTED 7 RUSSIAN AIR FORCE
COMBAT PLANES OVER THE BALTIC SEA TODAY

NATO BALTIC AIR POLICING MISSION IS QUITE BUSY THESE DAYS..

According to the Latvian military, on Oct. 28, the German Air Force Eurofighter jets on QRA (Quick Reaction Alert) at Amari, Estonia, to provide NATO Baltic Air Policing were scrambled to intercept seven Russian Air Force planes flying in international airspace over the Baltic Sea.

The German interceptors identified the Russian planes as a large package, made of attack planes and escort, which included 2x MiG-31 Foxhound, 2x Su-34 Fullback, 1x Su-27 Flanker and 2x Su-24 Fencer jets.

Regardless to whether the Russian aircraft were involved in one of the frequent training missions in the Baltics or were commuting to/from the Russian airfield in Kaliningrad oblast, the package on Oct 28 represents one of the largest "formations" intercepted by NATO fighter planes during the last couple of years.

Usually, close encounters involve Russian, Swedish or U.S. spyplanes intercepted before (or after) violating sovereign airspaces. Sometimes, scrambles are required to greet Moscow’s Tu-22or Tu-95 bombers on long-range training patrols or strike packages involved in (alleged) simulated air strikes on one of North Europe’s states (usually, Sweden).
Anyway, Russian Air Force missions in the Baltic area have surged, to such an extent NATO presence has quadrupled in the last year: from one nation providing four aircraft in QRA at one base in Lithuania (Šiauliai), to four nations (currently Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal and Canada) at two airbases (the second being Amari, in Estonia).

*Image credit: Eurofighter – Geoffrey Lee, Planefocus Ltd*
NATO Worried by an "Unusual Level of Russian Air Activity Over European Airspace": 19 Warplanes Intercepted Today

Russian air activity across Europe is surging: three more formations intercepted today.

As reported yesterday, on Oct. 28, the German Air Force Eurofighter jets on QRA (Quick Reaction Alert) to provide NATO Baltic Air Policing were scrambled to intercept 2x MiG-31 Foxhound, 2x Su-34 Fullback, 1x Su-27 Flanker and 2x Su-24 Fencer jets over the Baltic Sea.

The following day, Oct. 29, three large packages of Russian planes skirting NATO “airspace” were detected and monitored by aircraft on QRA (Quick Reaction Alert) in both northern Europe and Turkey.

“These sizable Russian flights represent an unusual level of air activity over European airspace,” said NATO in an official statement.

At approximately 3:00 a.m. CET NATO radars detected and tracked eight Russian aircraft flying in formation over the North Sea, in international airspace.

The Royal Norwegian Air Force scrambled its F-16s in QRA that intercepted and identified the Russian aircraft as four Tu-95 Bear H strategic bombers and four Il-78 tanker aircraft.

In what can be seen as a “show of force”, two of the Russian strategic bombers flew parallel to the Norwegian coast, heading to the south-west and were intercepted by Eurofighter Typhoon jets.
scrambled by the Royal Air Force (whereas the remaining 6 Russian Air Force planes returned towards Russia).

West of Portugal the two Bears were intercepted by F-16s from the Portuguese Air Force.

According to NATO, “The bomber and tanker aircraft from Russia did not file flight plans or maintain radio contact with civilian air traffic control authorities and they were not using on-board transponders. This poses a potential risk to civil aviation as civilian air traffic control cannot detect these aircraft or ensure there is no interference with civilian air traffic.”

Later on the same day, whilst the Tu-95 returned towards Russia, NATO radars detected and tracked four Russian aircraft flying over the Black Sea in international air space: 2 Tu-95 Bear-H bombers and 2 Su-27 Flanker fighter jets.

Turkish Air Force F-16s were scrambled and intercepted the Russian aircraft in international airspace.

During the afternoon of Oct. 29 October, NATO radars detected and tracked 7 Russian planes over the Baltics (needless to say, in international airspace): 2x MiG-31 Foxhound, 2x Su-34 Fullback, 1x Su-27 Flanker and 2x Su-24 Fencer jets (these were probably the very same aircraft intercepted on Oct. 28).

Portuguese F-16 Fighters assigned to the Baltic Air Policing Mission were scrambled from Šiauliai, Lithuania. It’s unclear whether they reached the package or not; anyway, the Russian Air Force planes returned to Russia’s airspace.

Image credit: UK MoD / Crown Copyright
SPIKE IN RUSSIAN AIR FORCE ACTIVITY IN EUROPE MAY BE A REACTION TO LARGE US STRATEGIC COMMAND BOMBERS EXERCISE

USUALLY, AFTER EVERY GLOBAL THUNDER, THE RUSSIANS LAUNCH SIMILAR LONG RANGE BOMBER MISSIONS.

On Oct. 29, the U.S. Strategic Command concluded its largest yearly exercise. On the very same day, the Russian Air Force launched three packages which included a mix of bombers and escort fighters for a total of 19 warplanes (26 if we consider also the close encounter on Oct. 28): a surge in missions flown close to European airspaces that NATO defined “unusual.”

A mere coincidence? Maybe, maybe not.

Exercise Global Thunder 15 (first exercise for FY 2015, hence the 15)”is a command and control exercise designed to train Department of Defense forces and assess joint operational readiness across all of USSTRATCOM’s mission areas with a specific focus on nuclear readiness.”

Conducted in coordination with North American Aerospace Defense Command and U.S. Northern Command’s Exercise Vigilant Shield 15 (attended by tactical warplanes with the aim to train homeland defense forces), Global Thunder 15 is a realistic exercise during which nearly every
USSTRATCOM component, task force, unit, command post and bomb wing takes part in the training events which are aimed at improving all the Command capabilities: space, cyber, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, global strike, and ballistic missile defense.

On a 24-hour period, yearly Global Thunders foresee intense B-52 and B-2 perform their MITO departures and going up to the Arctic and back, controlled by several E-6B Mercury aircraft.

Some strategic bombers route up over Nova Scotia and up past Thule/Greenland and either go all the way around North of Canada and back down through Canada/Alaska or they turn round and go back the way they came. Other waves go up over Alaska first and come back down vice versa.

A one-day simulated nuclear war.

Richard Cliff, a reader of The Aviationist and military aviation expert noticed that, usually after every Global Thunder, the Russians seem to launch similar long-range bomber missions, as those that caused the alert scrambles by NATO QRA (Quick Reaction Alert) cells across Europe.

Therefore, Global Strike proves Russian bombers are not the only ones to fly in the Arctic or perform simulated long-range nuclear missions. At the same time, the exercise may be one of the reasons behind the spike in the Russian activities in Europe (even though we can’t but notice that the amount of close encounters has increased in the last couple of years regardless to whether there was a US Strategic Command in the same period or not).

*Image credit: U.S. Air Force*
HERE ARE THE PHOTOS OF THE RUSSIAN TU-95 BEAR BOMBERS INTERCEPTED BY RAF TYphoon JETS

ONCE AGAIN, THE RAF RELEASES AIR-TO-AIR IMAGES OF THE LONG-RANGE RUSSIAN TU-95 BOMBERS INTERCEPTED OFF UK EARLIER THIS WEEK.

On Oct. 29, the RAF scrambled two Typhoons on QRA (Quick Reaction Alert) to intercept two Tu-95 Bear H strategic bombers.

The two Russian strategic bombers flew parallel to the Norwegian coast, heading to the south-west, were part of a larger package that included four more Bears and four Il-78 tanker aircraft that returned to Russia after skirting the Norwegian airspace.

During the time the Typhoons shadowed the Tu-95s, the RAF pilots had the opportunity to get some nice shots of the Bears, like the one you can see in this post.
Even the Portuguese Air Force has Intercepted and Photographed Russian Bombers Wandering Across Europe

The two Russian Bears that skirted European airspaces on Friday were also intercepted by the F-16s of the Portuguese Air Force.

On Oct. 31, two F-16 Fighting Falcon jets of the FAP (Portuguese Air Force) were scrambled to intercept two Russian Air Force Tu-95 Bear strategic bombers.

The Russian planes were detected by Portugal’s Air Defense System (DA) as they approached the northwestern part of Portugal’s FIR flying southbound, not in contact with any Air Traffic Control agency.

The two F-16son permanent alert at Monte Real Air Base were launched to perform a visual identification of the two “intruders”.

The QRA (Quick Reaction Alert) fighter jets performed a very similar mission to that they had flown on Oct. 29; however, this time the intercepted aircraft kept heading toward the south until they turned north.

The two Portuguese interceptors escorted the Bears until they departed the airspace of Portugal’s responsibility.
Another pair of F-16s was readied for take off just in case the Russian aircraft reversed their northbound route.

H/T Armando “Squid” Leitao for the heads-up

*Image credit: Portuguese Air Force*
CHAPTER 3

RUSSIAN SPYPLANE VIOLATES LITHUANIA AIRSPACE, CANADIAN HORNETS INTERCEPT IT

TWO ROYAL CANADIAN AIR FORCE CF-18 HORNET JETS INTERCEPTED AND SHADOWED A RUSSIAN AIR FORCE IL-20 COOT OVER LITHUANIA.

On Nov. 8, two RCAF CF-18 (or CF-188) Hornet jets deployed to Lithuania for NATO Baltic Air Policing mission were radar-vectored to intercept and escort a Russian Ilyushin Il-20 Coot-A plane flying off the Baltic coast.

According to Canadian media outlets, the CF-18s were conducting a routine training sortie out of Siauliai airbase, when they were re-tasked to visually ID the Russian ELINT (Electronic Intelligence) plane that had violated Lithuania’s airspace (even if some sources say the Il-20 was reached by the Canadian Hornets as it was flying over international waters - hence, in international airspace).

The CF-18s shadowed the Il-20 for 5 minutes, took some photographs (not yet released), then were ordered to return to base.

The Il-20 electronic reconnaissance plane is, by far, the Russian aircraft most frequently intercepted by NATO fighter jets in the Baltic region.

On Oct. 20, a Russian Il-20 was intercepted by Royal Canadian Air Force CF-188s scrambled from Siauliai in Lithuania; on Oct. 21, Portuguese AF F-16s, also deployed to Siauliai airbase for NATO Baltic Air Policing mission were scrambled to intercept and shadow an Il-20 Coot intelligence gathering aircraft.
The same type of aircraft was involved in the near-miss incident on Mar. 3, 2014, when SAS flight SK 681, a Boeing 737 with 132 people on board from Kastrup - Copenhagen to Rome had to change course in order to avoid colliding into an Il-20, flying without transponder and therefore not visible to the civil Air Traffic Control, about 50 miles to the southwest of Malmö.

*Image credit: RCAF*
Norwegian F-16s took some stunning pictures of Russian Su-34 fighter bombers flying off Norway.

At the end of October, Royal Norwegian Air Force F-16s intercepted Russian Air Force Su-34 Fullback long-range strike fighters off the northeastern coast of Norway.

On Oct. 29, the Royal Norwegian Air Force had an interesting close encounter with Russian Su-34 Fullback jets on long-range armed patrol off Norway.

According to the Norwegian newspaper VG, that got access to the images taken by the RoNAF during the intercept mission off Finmark, this was the first time the Su-34s were observed and identified while flying in international airspace off Norway.

The photographs released by the RNoAF was taken by one of the F-16sin QRA (Quick Reaction Alert) at Bodo airbase and depict a Su-34 Russian aircraft carrying what looks like a single external fuel tank and two Vympel R-73 air-to-air missiles, shadowed by another F-16 carrying two drop tanks and two AIM-120 AMRAAM (Advanced Medium Range Air-to-Air Missiles).

According to Norway’s Joint Chief of Staff spokesperson, although the Russian air traffic in the Nordic region of Europe has been relatively stable for several years, the Russian planes are becoming newer and more advanced.

Indeed, even if it made its maiden flight in 1990, the Su-34 has been inducted into active service by the Russian Air Force beginning in 2012.
Noteworthy, the Su-34s were part of a large formation of 10 Russian planes which included Tu-95 Bear H bombers and Il-78 tanker aircraft launched from the Kola Peninsula: two Tu-95s skirted the British Isles and reached the Atlantic off Portugal, where they were intercepted by the Portuguese F-16s.

*Image credit: RNoAF via VG.no

H/T LasseHolmstrom and @geirfl for the heads-up*
RUSSIAN BOMBERS TO FLY OVER THE GULF OF MEXICO. THIS IS WHAT HAPPENED LAST YEAR IN CENTRAL AMERICA.

RUSSIAN BOMBERS ABOUT TO BECOME REGULAR VISITORS OF THE CARIBBEAN AND THE GULF OF MEXICO. NOT A FIRST THOUGH.

After visiting the Arctic and Europe, Russian bombers prepare to perform long-range training sorties over the waters of the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico.

According to Russia’s Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu Moscow is in the “need to ensure a military presence in the western Atlantic and eastern Pacific oceans, the waters of the Caribbean basin and the Gulf of Mexico.”

Therefore, along with probing NATO air defenses in northern Europe, Turkey and possibly in the Mediterranean Sea, Russia will increase its presence closer to the Continental U.S.

One year ago, two Russian Tu-160 Blackjack strategic bombers completed a 10,000 miles, 13-hour long-range training flight (supported by two Tu-95 Bear strategic bombers that provided radio communications relay in remote areas along the route) and landed in Venezuela, at the airport in Maiquetía Caracas, for the first time since 2008.

On their way home the Tu-160s visited Nicaragua but the flight over Central America brought the two Russian bombers to fly inside the Colombian airspace without the required diplomatic clearance.
For this reason they were intercepted by two Colombian Air Force Kfir fighter planes approximately 80 miles from Barranquilla.

Eventually, the Blackjacks returned to the Engels base on Nov. 5 where they landed about 15 hours later after; the return trip included aerial refueling by Il-78 tankers over the Norwegian Sea...

Earlier this year, Russia discussed with its regional partners the possibility to base its assets in Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua.

NATO has recently reported “unusual” spike in Russian military aircraft flying in international airspace in northern Europe.

The increased activity of Russian bombers and spyplanes close to national airspaces caused alert scrambles in the Baltic Sea area and in the Portuguese FIR (Flight Information Region). In one case, an Il-20 almost collided with a civil plane off Sweden.

*Image credit: Alan Wilson*
FINNISH AIR FORCE HORNET JETS HAVE TAKEN SOME COOL SNAPSHOTS OF RUSSIAN BOMBERS SKIRTING FINLAND'S AIRSPACE

SURGE IN RUSSIAN AIR FORCE FLIGHTS IN NORTHERN EUROPE IS PROVIDING AN OPPORTUNITY FOR LOCAL AIR FORCES TO TAKE SOME INTERESTING PICTURES OF MOSCOW WARPLANES.

Posted on December 11, 2014

Russia has launched several missions flown over the Gulf of Finland and the Baltic Sea region in the last few days.

Beginning on Dec. 6 and continuing through this week, Russian Air Force has been particularly busy in international airspace close to the Finnish airspace forcing the Finnish Air Force to scramble its F/A-18 Hornet sand shadow Moscow’s warplanes.
Fortunately, the Finnish fighter pilots involved in these close encounters have taken some interesting pictures of the once rarer Russian heavy bombers and attack planes.

According to the Finnish air force, Tu-95s, Tu-22Ms, Su-34s, Su-27s, Su-24s and MiG-31s were intercepted by the Hornets in the last weeks.
Image credit: Finnish Air Force
RUSSIAN SPYPLANE NEARLY COLLIDED WITH AIRLINER OFF SWEDEN. AGAIN.

RUSSIAN PLANES THAT OPERATE CLOSE TO AIRSPACES OF NORTHERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES POSE A THREAT TO CIVIL AVIATION.

A civil plane, en route from Denmark to Poland, almost collided with a Russian spyplane minutes after departure, Swedish authorities said on Friday.

The Russian aircraft was flying with the transponder turned off; the Swedish Air Force scrambled its JAS-39 Gripen jets to intercept and escort the “intruder”, that they identified as an intelligence gathering type (most probably an Il-20 Coot).

According to Flightradar24.com, the flight involved in the near-miss was SK1755, a Canadair CRJ-200 (registration OY-RJK) from Cimber Airlines departed from Copenhagen, with destination Poznan.

Based on the analysis of the ADS-B data they collected, the dangerous close encounter occurred about halfway between Ystad, Sweden and Sassnitz, Germany, between 11:21 CET and 11:25 CET.

Here’s how the incident developed:

11:18: SK1755 got permission to climb to 25,000 feet
11:21: SK1755 urged to stop the climb at 21,000 feet due military traffic between 23,000 and 25,000 feet.
11:23 SK1755 advised to turn right to avoid military traffic.
11:24 SK1755 reached 21,000 feet and stopped climbing.
11:24 SK1755 passed just behind the military plane and then allowed to continue the climb.

At this link you can see the Sk1755 turn to the right to avoid the collision and stop climbing to 21,000 feet.
feet. Obviously, you can’t see the Russian plane, as it was flying, in international airspace, with the transponder turned off, hence invisible to civilian radars.

Image credit: Flightradar24.com

The near collision comes in a period of intense Russian Air Force activity in the Baltics; a surge in missions that are flown without FPL (Flight Plan) nor transponders (sometimes to probe local air defenses readiness) that may pose a threat to civilian traffic in the region.

On Mar. 3, SAS flight SK 681, a Boeing 737 with 132 people on board from Copenhagen to Rome almost collided with an Il-20 Coot, about 50 miles to the southwest of Malmö, Sweden. Thanks to the good visibility, the SAS pilot could avoid the Russian SIGINT (Signal Intelligence) aircraft: the two planes passed 90 meters apart.

Russian Air Force bombers, including Tu-95s, Tu-22s, Su-34s escorted by MiG-31s and Su-27s, as well as Il-20s regularly fly in the Scandinavian region causing alert scrambles by NATO planes providing QRA (Quick Reaction Alert) for the Baltic Air Policing mission.

Top image credit: French Air Force
NEW PHOTOS OF RUSSIAN PLANES INTERCEPTED BY NORWEGIAN FIGHTER JETS

HERE’S A NICE COLLECTION OF IMAGES SHOT BY THE ROYAL NORWEGIAN AIR FORCE DURING THE RECENT CLOSE ENCOUNTERS WITH RUSSIANS OFF NORWAY.

On Dec. 18, two RNoAF F-16s in QRA (Quick Reaction Alert) were scrambled from Bodo airbase to intercept an unidentified aircraft flying off the north of Norway.

The aircraft was later identified as an Il-20 Coot intelligence gathering plane, flying in international airspace off Finmark.

The news of the latest close encounter was given by the Norwegian media outlet Nordland in an article on their website which included an extremely interesting collection of images (some of those posted below) taken by RNoAF pilots during recent intercept missions of Russian Air Force combat planes.

Here below, an armed Mig-31:
A couple of weeks ago, the RNoAF released HUD (Head Up Display) footage of an F-16 almost colliding mid-air with a Russian Mig-31 Foxhound flying alongside Su-34 Fullbacks.

*Below, an armed Tu-22M:*
A Su-24 Fencer:

Bottow view of an armed Mig-31 Foxhound:
Il-78 refueling a Tu-95 Bear:

Image credit: RNoAF

H/T to Stefan Bøyum Schlömilch for the heads-up

RUSSIAN TU-95 BOMBERS ESCORTED BY MIG-31 INTERCEPTORS SKIRT UK, GET INTERCEPTED MULTIPLE TIMES
TWO RUSSIAN TU-95MS STRATEGIC BOMBERS PERFORMED A 19-HOUR MISSION OVER THE ATLANTIC OCEAN. THEY WERE INTERCEPTED MULTIPLE TIMES ALONG THE WAY.

On Jan. 29, two Russian Air Force Tu-95 strategic bombers from Engels airbase successfully completed a 19-hour long range mission over neutral waters near the Barents and Norwegian Seas, the Atlantic Ocean.

The Bears, accompanied by Mig-31 Foxhound long-range interceptors, were refueled twice by Il-78 Midas aerial refuelers and were intercepted and escorted by RAF Typhoons, Norwegian F-16s and French Mirage 2000s at various stages of their trip.

Even though according to the Office of Press and Information of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation "All flights of the [Russian] Air Force were carried out in strict accordance with international regulations on the use of airspace over neutral waters, without violating the borders of other states,” during their tour, the strategic bombers flew quite close to the UK airspace, causing “disruption to civil aviation”.

The Russian Tu-95s flew within 25 miles of the UK without filing a Flight Plan (FPL), without radio contact with the British ATC agencies and, obviously, without transponder switched on, and were shadowed by Typhoon jets scrambled from RAF Lossie mouth and RAF Conings by supported by a Voyager tanker.

This was not the first time Russian bombers skirted the UK air space and it won’t be the last one. However, the UK summoned the Russian ambassador after the latest “dangerous” episode.

Image credit: Russian Federation MoD
ITALIAN TYphoon jets have intercepted a Russian Air Force Il-78 tanker over the Baltic Sea

The Italian Eurofighter Typhoon interceptors have had their first close encounter with a Russian jet since taking over the lead nation role within NATO Baltic Air Patrol.

On Jan. 30, two Italian Air Force Typhoons deployed to Šiauliai, Lithuania, to provide Air Policing in the Baltic region, were scrambled to identify and escort a Russian Air Force Il-78 Midas flying close to NATO Baltic States airspace, Latvia’s Military said on its official Twitter account.

Although no further details about the mission have been disclosed, it looks like the Russian Il-78 shadowed by the Italians was not one of the tankers that supported the Russian Tu-95 Bear strategic bombers on their 19-hour mission to the Atlantic Ocean earlier this week, but it was probably only flying a training sortie over the Baltic Sea.

Still, the air policing mission marks the first intercept mission by the Italian F-2000s (as the Typhoons are designated within the Aeronautica Militare) on Russian planes since the Italian Air Force took over the lead role of BAP on Jan. 1.

Russian Air Force missions in the region often require NATO jet fighters on QRA (Quick Reaction Alert) at several airbase in Lithuania, Estonia and Poland, to perform Alert Scrambles, to intercept Il-20 spyplanes, Tu-22M Backfire bombers and Su-27 fighter jets. Such close encounters have become a bit more frequent since Russian invasion of Crimea and subsequent international crisis over Ukraine.

Image credit: Eurofighter
RUSSIAN TU-22 BOMBER SCARES NATO AIR DEFENSES FLYING AT SUPersonic SPEED OVER THE BALTIC SEA FOR THE FIRST TIME

THE LATEST CLOSE ENCOUNTER BETWEEN NATO AND RUSSIAN PLANEs OVER THE BALTIC SEA WAS DIFFERENT.

Early morning on Mar. 24, NATO and Swedish QRA (Quick Reaction Alert) interceptors were scrambled to identify and shadow a formation of two Russian Air Force Tu-22M Backfire bombers escorted by two Su-27 Flanker aircraft.

As usual, the aircraft were flying with no FPL, no transponder, in international airspace. But, unlike all the previous events the leading Tu-22M bomber was flying at supersonic speed!

As a consequence of the high-speed of the Russian planes, the Italian Air Force Eurofighter Typhoon jets, providing BAP (Baltic Air Patrol) duties from Siauliai airbase, Lithuania, had to perform a supersonic run to intercept and escort the Tu-22s and accompanying Su-27s.

According to our sources, this was the very first time a Russian Air Force plane flying from mainland Russia to Kaliningrad Oblast was flying abeam Latvia, within the Riga FIR (Flight Information Region), heading towards Denmark and the Scandinavian peninsula at supersonic speed.

The Backfire decelerated to subsonic speed and rejoined with the rest of the formation that was picked up by a flight of two Su-27s from Kaliningrad that relieved the other two Flankers.
Although the Russians did not violate any rule, their flying without transponder, without establishing radio contact with any ATC agency, may pose dangers to civilian aviation. Even more so, if the bombers or their escort jets fly at supersonic speed or aggressively react to aircraft that are launched to intercept them.

Some analysts believe the purpose of the flight was provocative: Moscow has recently warned Denmark that if it joins Nato’s missile defense shield, its navy will be a legitimate target for a Russian nuclear attack.

As a side note, on the afternoon on Mar. 24, the Italian Typhoons were scrambled again to perform another supersonic interception of two Su-27 Flanker returning to mainland Russia from Kaliningrad: the pair that had been relieved by the second flight of Flankers earlier on the same day.

*H/T to Erik Arnberg for providing additional details.*

*Image credit: Alex Beltyukov – RuSpotters Team /Wikipedia*
HERE ARE SOME COOL IMAGES OF RUSSIAN SU-34 ATTACK PLANES INTERCEPTED BY SPANISH TYPHOONS OVER THE BALTIC

SOME COOL PICS SHOWING THE “ZOMBIES” INTERCEPTED BY THE SPANISH EUROFIGHTER TYPHOONS HAVE EMERGED.

Deployed at Ämari airbase, in Estonia, four Eurofighter Typhoons and 114 personnel of the Ejército del Aire (Spanish Air Force) have been supporting the NATO Baltic Air Policing (BAP) mission since Jan. 1, 2015.

Four C.16s (according to the SpAF designation) belonging to Ala 11, from Moron airbase, contribute to the air defense of the airspaces of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

Just like the Italian Typhoons deployed at Siauliai, Lithuania, the Spanish C.16s of the “Detachment Amber” are frequently requested to scramble to identify and escort Russian warplanes flying over the Baltic Sea.

On the Spanish media outlet ABC.es, one of our readers, Antonio Valencia, has found some cool images that show the Spanish Air Force Typhoons escorting some Russian Air Force planes, including a couple of Su-34 Fullback bombers.
Once again, such photographs confirm that the Baltic is the stage for some really interesting close encounters between Baltic Air Patrol QRA (Quick Reaction Alert) jets with "Ivan".

Although no further detail about the images has been released, the fact that they depict two Su-34s at least one Su-27 and one An-26 may suggest the photographs were shot on Mar. 21, when two An-26s, two Su-27s, two Su-34s were identified according to the Latvia MoD:

However, needless to say, they may have been taken on different missions.
As leading service of the current BAP rotation, the Italian Air Force has recently claimed that its Typhoons have launched 27 times (currently 28) since the beginning of the year to intercept Russian aircraft flying in international airspace.

Although such "escorts" are no more than routine stuff most of the times, a few intercept missions have been a bit tense: in one case, a Tu-22 was unusually flying at supersonic speed towards Sweden; in another episode, a Mig-31 Foxhound almost collided (at least according to the Royal Norwegian Air Force report) with an F-16 involved in a Su-34 identification and escort mission.

Image credit: SpAF via Foro de las FAS españolas
RUSSIAN BOMBERS INTRUDE INTO THE U.S. AIR DEFENSE ZONE, NO INTERCEPTOR SCRAMBLED AFTER THEM

THE INTERESTING PART OF THE NEWS IS THAT THE TU-95 BOMBERS NEAR ALASKA WERE NOT INTERCEPTED.

On Apr. 22, two Russian Tu-95 Bear H bombers flew into the U.S. Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ), in what was the first such incursions since the beginning of the year: pretty routine, except that no U.S. or Canadian fighter jet were launched to intercept the “zombies.”

Quoting U.S. Northern Command and North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) spokesman Capt. Jeff Davis, Washington Free Beacon reported that unlike most of the earlier incursions, U.S. aircraft were not dispatched against the strategic bombers.

In fact, it seems that most but not all the Russian Bears flights near North America cause a scramble by the U.S. or Canadian QRA (Quick Reaction Alert) jets: last year only 6 out of 10 incursions saw U.S. or Canadian aircraft intercept Moscow’s long-range attack aircraft.

The reason may be that the Tu-95s (flying in international airspace) were still quite far from U.S. or Canadian sovereign airspace and/or just briefly transitioned inside the ADIZ. Still it’s a bit unusual
that the Russians were not intercepted considered that, for instance, in northern Europe, all the Bear or Backfire flights cause a scramble by the QRA fighters.

The ADIZ is an airspace surrounding a nation or part of it where identification, location, and control of aircraft over land or water is required in the interest of national security. This means that any aircraft flying in these airspaces without authorization may require identification through interception by fighter aircraft in QRA (Quick Reaction Alert).

The North American ADIZ (just like any other ADIZ around the world) extends well beyond the boundaries of the national airspace above territorial waters, but any civil aircraft that enters such closely monitored airspace is tracked and requested to provide its planned course, destination and any additional details that may help its identification.

Military aircraft that do not intend to enter the national airspace are not required to identify themselves or otherwise comply with ADIZ procedures but it is a common practice that any foreign (namely Russian) military aircraft flying close to the U.S. or Canada airspace, within the ADIZ, is intercepted, identified and escorted.

*Image credit: Anton Tsyupko / Airforce.ru*
David Cenciotti is a freelance journalist based in Rome, Italy. Born in 1975, he’s a private pilot, a former 2nd Lt. of the Aeronautica Militare (Italian Air Force, ItAF) and a graduate in Computer Engineering. Since 1996, he has written for major worldwide media outlets and magazines, covering aviation, defense, war, industry, intelligence, crime and cyberwar. He has reported from the U.S., Europe, Australia and Syria, and flown several combat planes with different air forces. His work has appeared on Air Forces Monthly, Combat Aircraft, Global Aviator, War is Boring, Revista Força Aérea, Fighter Tactics, Aeronautica & Difesa, Airline, RID, Rivista Aeronautica, Airplanes, Jack, Tech News Daily and Innovation News Daily and he’s regularly interviewed by newspapers, televisions and radios. He’s the founder and editor of The Aviationist, one of the world’s most read and followed military aviation blogs, and he has written four books and contributed to several publications.