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Japan Scrambles Jets, Accusing Russian Bombers of Intrusion

By The Moscow Times

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TOKYO — Two Russian bombers briefly entered Japan's air space near its major southern island of Kyushu on Thursday, prompting Japan to scramble its fighter jets and lodge a protest, the Japanese defense and foreign ministries said.

If true, it was the first such intrusion since February, when two Russian fighter jets entered Japan's air space near its main northern island of Hokkaido.

The two TU-95 bombers arrived shortly after noon on Thursday for less than two minutes, the ministries said. Japan scrambled F-2 combat jets in response.

But Russia denied any intrusion.

"Two Tu-95MS strategic bombers conducted routine flights over the neutral waters in the Sea of Japan and the Pacific Ocean," the Russian Defence Ministry said in a statement.

“According to control equipment on board, state borders were not violated. The long-haul aircraft were accompanied by Japanese Air Force fighter jets throughout their flight over neutral waters.”

The incident comes after Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Russian President Vladimir Putin agreed in April to revive talks on resolving a long-running territorial dispute.

Tokyo and Moscow have conflicting claims over a string of islets called the Southern Kurils in Russia and the Northern Territories in Japan, which have prevented the two from signing a treaty formally ending their World War II hostilities.

Japanese defense and foreign ministry officials declined to speculate on the reasons behind the intrusion.

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