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NATO to Deploy Reconnaissance Aircraft in Poland and Baltics

By The Moscow Times

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A NATO E-3 reconnaissance plane with F-16 fighter escort.

NATO will deploy reconnaissance planes in Poland and Romania to monitor the Ukrainian crisis, an official said, shortly after the U.S. announced that it was sending fighter jets to the same region in a show of support for its allies.

The flights, carried out by E-3 Airborne Warning and Control System, or AWACS, aircraft, "will enhance the alliance's situation awareness and all will take place solely over alliance territory," a NATO spokesman said, Reuters reported.

The recommendation to begin AWACS flights in Eastern Europe came from U.S. Air Force General Philip Breedlove, the alliance's top military official, on Monday and was approved by the NATO ambassadors shortly thereafter.

Last Tuesday Poland invoked Article 4 of the North Atlantic Treaty, which entitles any NATO

member the right to consultation with allied military officials if it feels threatened. As a result, NATO has doubled its air presence in the region, deploying six F-15 fighter jets to the Baltic states, while U.S. and Polish military officials are finalizing plans for a ramped up joint-training exercise between their air forces.

The chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Martin Dempsey, said last Friday that the dispatch of Russian troops to Ukraine presented a threat to other European nations with large ethnic enclaves, and that the U.S. would "respond" if fellow NATO members are attacked.

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