The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russia Strengthens Air Defenses With Bases in Belarus and Central Asia

By The Moscow Times

October 15, 2014



The new airbase in Belarus will be home to a wing of Russian Su-27 fighter jets.

As Moscow moves to bolster its military presence in ex-Soviet allied states, the head of the Russian air force announced that Russia will establish an airbase for fighter jets in eastern Belarus in 2016, state media outlets reported Wednesday.

Colonel General Viktor Bondarev also said Moscow planned to expand its airbases in Armenia and Kyrgyzstan.

The three nations are members of a loose Russia-dominated security alliance known as the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), which has accelerated efforts to create a unified air defense network as the Ukraine crisis reenergizes the West's military powerhouse, NATO.

The new airbase in the Belarusian city of Babruysk will expand Russia's already strong air

presence in Belarus. The base will be home to a wing of Russian Su-27 fighter jets, news agency TASS reported.

Even before the conflict in Ukraine, Russia under President Vladimir Putin had been making major efforts to re-establish its historical military presence in Eastern Europe, Central Asia, the Arctic and beyond. Negotiations with Vietnam, Cuba, Venezuela and Nicaragua to establish bases for Russian strategic bombers are ongoing.

"By 2020 ... 47 airfields, including in Crimea in the Arctic, will be renovated under the state armaments program," Bondarev was quoted as saying by Interfax. By 2025, he added, the Russian air force will have restored and reopened over 100 military airbases.

Last year, a unit of Russian fighter jets were deployed to a Belarussian airbase in Baranovichi as part of the countries' integrated regional air defense network. Russia also announced that it would station fighter jets at a Russian-built airbase in the Belarussian city of Lida, near the country's border with Poland and Lithuania.

Russian defense officials have characterized these deployments as a response to NATO's beefed-up air patrols in the Baltics and Poland.

Bondarev was also quoted by RIA Novosti as saying on Wednesday that Moscow is negotiating with Bishkek to reconstruct the Kant airbase in Kyrgyzstan, which is a home for Russian fighter jets under CSTO auspices. While the base is usable, further construction is needed to support Russian strategic bombers, he said.

Bondarev said similar work will be done on an airbase in Armenia, the Soviet-era Erebuni base, which is already home to Russian MiG-29 fighter aircraft.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2014/10/15/russia-strengthens-air-defenses-with-bases-in-belarus-and-central-asia-a40433