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Russian Bombers Disrupt Commercial Flights in Ireland's Airspace

By The Moscow Times

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Two Russian Tu-95 strategic bombers.

Irish air traffic controllers diverted commercial airliners in mid flight to avoid possible collisions with two Russian Tu-95 strategic bombers flying across civilian routes last month with their transponders switched off, the Irish Examiner reported.

The dangerous maneuvers are the latest in a streak of provocative Russian bomber flights along the sovereign airspace of Western European nations.

According to the Irish Examiner, the Tu-95 "Bear" long-range strategic bombers weaved through major civilian air routes on Feb. 18 about 40 kilometers off the Irish coast, crossing flight lanes used by incoming flights from North America.

The bombers cloaked their presence by switching off their transponders, which broadcast to air traffic controllers an aircraft's type, altitude, location and other information.

The Irish Aviation Authority told the Irish Examiner that British authorities had notified them that the bombers were moving toward Irish air space and warned that steps should be taken to ensure the safety of civilian flights. One flight from Dublin Airport had to be delayed to prevent a collision with the Russian aircraft, the paper said.

The incident come just weeks after Irish airspace was buzzed by Russian bombers that flew down the English Channel in late January.

After that scare the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade sought assurances from the Russian ambassador in Dublin that military aircraft would not fly unannounced into Irish-controlled airspace, according to the Examiner. Irish airspace extends 22 kilometers from the Irish coast, but the country manages air traffic over a large area of the north Atlantic Ocean.

The flights are part of a resurgence of Russian naval and aerial activity around Europe over the past year as Moscow seeks to demonstrate its military muscle amid a stand-off with the West over Ukraine.

Ireland is not a member of the U.S.-led NATO military alliance, which raised hackles in Russia by incorporating former Soviet republics after the collapse of communism in 1991.

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