The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Norway Intent on Keeping Up Military Channels to Russia Despite Tensions

By The Moscow Times

May 05, 2015



Norwegian Minister of Defense Ine Eriksen Soereide

OSLO — NATO-member Norway is keeping some military channels open to its neighbor Russia even as it braces for more bad surprises after Moscow annexed part of Ukraine last year, Norway's defense minister has said.

Ine Eriksen Soereide also said Monday that Norway was stepping up monitoring of what she called aggressive Russian military activity, especially in the Baltic Sea region, and keeping a wary eye on increased Russian flights off Norway.

Oslo and Moscow were maintaining some cooperation even after Nordic nations last month agreed closer defense ties and branded Russia's actions in Ukraine "the greatest challenge to European security architecture."

Some contact was needed to "to try to reduce the room for miscalculations or

misunderstandings," Soereide said. The two nations were keeping up cooperation on search and rescue in the Arctic and on controlling their joint border.

"And we are keeping open lines between our headquarters in [the northern city] Bodoe and the [Russian] northern fleet. We do that even if we have frozen the bilateral military cooperation," she said.

There have been misunderstandings before. A research rocket fired from a Norwegian Arctic base in 1995, meant to study the northern lights, triggered in Moscow a brief false alert of a nuclear attack.

Soereide said the West had to get used to a "different Russia" after the shock of Moscow's annexation of Ukraine's Crimea region last year. "We have to prepare for being surprised again," she said.

She said it was understandable that Russia wanted to build up its armed forces after scant investments after the Cold War, but Moscow was going about it in an aggressive way, for instance by violating the airspace of Baltic states.

"They are not clear about their intentions, they are making all countries insecure," she said of Russia. Norway has not registered any Russian violations of its airspace or territorial waters since the Ukraine crisis, she said.

Even so, fighter jets in Bodoe were scrambled 49 times in 2014 to check on Russian planes and carried out 74 identifications of Russian planes off Norway in 2014, both up from recent years, Norwegian statistics show.

The numbers are far below Cold War levels in the 1980s, when Norway carried out 500 or 600 identifications a year.

Separately, NATO launched one of its biggest-ever anti-submarine exercises in the North Sea on Monday, inviting non-member Sweden for the first time, amid increasing tensions between Russia and its neighbors.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2015/05/05/norway-intent-on-keeping-up-military-channels-to-russia-despite-tensions-a46298