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Two Russian Military Fighter Jets Crash In Under 3 Hours

By The Moscow Times

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Two different types of Russian military jets crashed during training flights within hours of each other, news agency RIA Novosti reported, citing law enforcement and Defense Ministry officials.

The first plane, a MiG-29 fighter jet, crashed near its base in Astrakhan late last week. The pilot ejected safely, but the plane "exploded, caught fire and was destroyed," RIA quoted an unidentified government source as saying.

Two and a half hours later, a Su-34 fighter-bomber aircraft in Voronezh flipped over while landing. The crew survived, and the plane did not catch fire or explode, RIA reported, but the aircraft sustained heavy damage.

According to sources quoted by the agency, the plane veered off the runway shortly after landing and then turned over. A Defense Ministry source said the plane didn't deploy its drag chute — a small parachute deployed by heavier aircraft such as the Su-34 to slow down after

touching the runway.

The MiG-29 (NATO reporting name: Fulcrum) is an air superiority fighter first fielded by the Soviet Union in 1983. It has seen a number of upgrades over the past two decades and is comparable to the U.S. F-15 Eagle and F-16 Fighting Falcon.

The incident was the third loss of a MiG-29 aircraft in the last year. Last summer, another MiG-29 based in Astrakhan crashed, and its pilot was killed. In December, a sea-based MiG-29KUB also went down. One of the plane's pilots survived, while the other died in the hospital, according to RIA.

The Su-34 (NATO reporting name: Fullback) is one of Russia's newest aircraft, having only entered service last year. It is classified as a strike aircraft, adept for tactical bombing missions and providing support to ground troops.

Russia is halfway through a 20 trillion ruble ($360 billion), decade-long rearmament and modernization program that will end in 2020.

Accidents are frequent in military aviation, especially during training flights. The U.S. has suffered at least four crashes of military aircraft in 2015, resulting a handful of deaths and dozens of injuries.

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