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Russia's MiG-29 Fighter Jets Grounded After Yet Another Crash

By The Moscow Times

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A Russian MIG-29 fighter aircraft

Russia grounded its fleet of more than 200 MiG-29 fighter jets on Friday after one crashed during a routine training exercise in the southern Krasnodar region, news agency Interfax reported.

The incident marks the fourth crash of a Russian military plane over the past month and the fourth loss of a MiG-29 in the past year.

"Flights of the MiG-29 are suspended until the reasons for the crash are identified," Russian air force chief Colonel General Viktor Bondarev was quoted by Interfax as saying Friday. It is common practice to ground all airplanes of a given model after a crash to ensure other planes of the same design are safe to fly.

The MiG-29 is a Soviet-designed air superiority fighter comparable to U.S. fighter jets such as

the F-15 and F-16. It is still widely used by the Russian air force, with around 200 in active service, and has been exported to almost 30 militaries worldwide.

Interfax earlier on Friday quoted an unidentified source in the Defense Ministry as saying the MiG-29 was not carrying ammunition and crashed in an uninhabited area. The pilot ejected and his life is not in danger, the source added.

This is the fourth time a MiG-29 has crashed in the past year. On June 4, a MiG-29 flying out of a base in the nearby Astrakhan region "exploded, caught fire and was destroyed," an unidentified government source told news agency RIA Novosti at the time. The pilot ejected and was unharmed.

Two and a half hours after that crash, a Sukhoi Su-34 fighter-bomber aircraft in the Voronezh region, about 500 kilometers south of Moscow, flipped over while trying to land. The crew survived and the plane did not explode, but was heavily damaged.

A few days later, a Russian Tu-95 "Bear" strategic bomber ran off a runway at the Ukrainka bomber base in Russia's far eastern Amur region after an engine caught fire during takeoff. One airman was killed and another hospitalized. No other members of the crew were injured.

The air force temporarily grounded the Tu-95 fleet after the crash to give investigators time to identify why the plane's engine had caught fire.

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