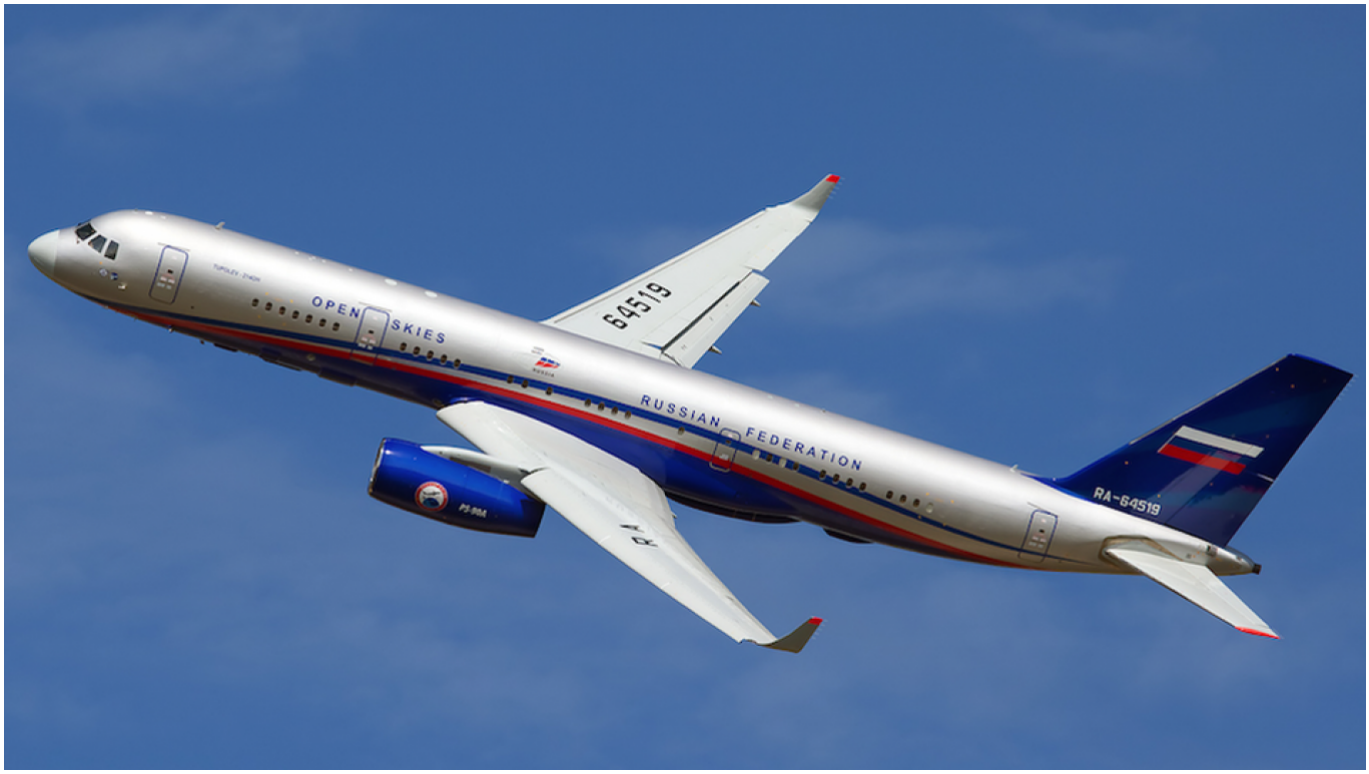
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Trump Signs Defense Bill Suspending Funding for Open Skies Treaty

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The United States has suspended funding for the Open Skies Treaty following the signing of a $717-billion national defense policy act into law by U.S. President Donald Trump on Monday.

The measure could have implications for Russia's ability to conduct observation flights over the United States.

Under the 34-member treaty that entered into force in 2002, countries are allowed to conduct unarmed observation flights to promote openness and transparency of military forces and activities. Russian aircraft had reportedly last conducted reconnaissance flights over the U.S. in August 2017 — over the Capitol, the Pentagon, the White House and Bedminster, New Jersey, where Trump was taking a working vacation.

The 2019 U.S. defense policy act withholds funds for the Open Skies Treaty until Trump provides Congress assurances that Russia "is in complete compliance with its obligations"

under the treaty.

Over the past year, Russia has cut the number of air bases the U.S. can observe after Washington accused Moscow of violating the treaty by limiting flights over the militarized Kaliningrad exclave in Europe.

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The defense act states that Russia must allow U.S. observation flights over Moscow, Chechnya, Kaliningrad and the breakaway Georgian republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

The act also commissions a report on the costs for "countermeasures to mitigate potential abuses of observation flights" by Russia over Europe and the U.S.

On Tuesday, Russian lawmakers said that the act had "contradicted" the treaty and vowed a tit-for-tat response, while Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said Moscow regretted that the U.S. had suspended funding for mutual military survey flights.

“This is an attempt to hide everything the Americans will be preparing in the course of a new arms race,” the RBC news website quoted Vladimir Dzhabarov, the deputy chairman of the Federation Council’s Foreign Affairs Committee, as saying Tuesday.

The chairman of the committee, Konstantin Kosachev, criticized the U.S. move for “undermining the foundations of international security cooperation,” the state-run TASS news agency reported.

An earlier version of this article incorrectly stated that the defense budget bill suspends Russian military flights over the United States. In fact, the bill only restricts funding for the U.S. implementation of the Open Skies Treaty.

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