

## Russia could deploy bombers in Latin America, North Africa: report

Moscow, July 24 (RIA Novosti) Russian strategic bombers may soon be deployed at airbases in Cuba, Venezuela and Algeria as a response to the US missile shield in [Europe](#) and NATO's expansion, Russian daily Izvestia reported Thursday.

Moscow has strongly opposed the possible US deployment of 10 interceptor missiles in Poland and an accompanying tracking radar in the Czech Republic as a threat to its security. Washington says the defence is needed to deter a possible strike by Iran, or other 'rogue' states.

Moscow has also expressed concern over NATO's expansion to Russia's borders and pledged to take 'appropriate measures' to counter the US and NATO moves.

Izvestia cited sources in the Russian defence ministry as saying that crews of Tu-160 Blackjack and Tu-95MS Bear strategic bombers recently visited Cuba and conducted an inspection of a site and facilities for a possible forward landing airfield that could be used as a refuelling stopover for Russian strategic bombers.

Russia resumed strategic bomber patrol flights over the Pacific, Atlantic, and Arctic oceans last August, following an order signed by the then president Vladimir Putin.

At present the Russian military is considering the possibility of establishing so-called 'jump-up' bases in various regions of the world to provide refuelling and maintenance support for the patrolling bombers.

'The flight to the US (from southern Russia where the bombers are based) takes about 10 hours and even with two mid-air refuellings the aircraft can spend only one and a half hours near the US coast,' said Pyotr Deinekin, former commander of the Russian Air Force.

The use of forward landing airfields in Latin America would practically remove the time constraints for the Russian bombers and make their presence near the US borders almost permanent, he said.

If a political decision is made, Cuba will most likely host Russian Il-78 aerial tankers, which will provide nuclear-capable strategic bombers with mid-air refuelling, sources in the defence ministry told Izvestia.

Both Tu-160 and Tu-95MS bombers have been recently modernized and fitted with new X-555 cruise missiles with a range of over 3,500 km. The bombers do not have to be permanently based near the US borders to hit any target on US territory in case of a potential conflict.

However, another Russian publication, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, said Thursday that the ambitious plans of Russian politicians and some military commanders may be nothing more than 'sabre-rattling in empty air'.

The prospect of maintaining refuelling posts for Russian bombers all over the world would require an enormous amount of investment in construction of infrastructure, fuel supplies and re-supplies.

The Russian defence budget simply does not have sufficient resources to ensure the

implementation of these plans, the newspaper said.

Russian bombers with nuclear missiles on board policing the globe would only harm Russia's image in the international arena, and it is unlikely that their presence near the US borders will scare the Americans.

The US military consider long-range bombers an obsolete and highly vulnerable component of the nuclear triad. The Pentagon stopped strategic bomber patrols almost two decades ago.

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