

Russian strategic bombers' fly over of the American nuclear-powered aircraft carrier Nimitz

Contributed by RIA Novosti
Wednesday, 13 February 2008

MOSCOW. (Nikita Petrov for RIA Novosti) - "The uproar in the press about Russian strategic bombers' fly over of the American nuclear-powered aircraft carrier Nimitz is beyond me," General of the Army Pyotr Deinekin, a former commander-in-chief of Russia's Air Force (1991-1998) and Hero of Russia, said.

"I want to congratulate our pilots on an undoubted success - the fulfillment of a very complex mission," he said. "To find a supercarrier in the open ocean is a very difficult task. It is like finding a needle in a haystack, and the fact that our fliers were able to do so speaks highly of their skill," he said.

Those were the general's remarks on the reports about an incident that happened in the Pacific the other day when one of the Russian strategic bombers Tu-95MS (whose NATO's reporting name is Bear) twice flew over the Nimitz at a height of about 2,000 feet. The second Tu-95MS was at that time about 50 miles away, seemingly covering and protecting the first.

The foreign press reported that after the bombers approached the carrier, four F/A-18Cs took off and "accompanied the Russian planes out of the area."

This is normal combat training, General Deinekin said. Actually, it was joint training. "We, Russia and the U.S., are not opponents. We are partners in the fight against terrorism. There are no serious threats posed by our planes appearing over American ships in neutral waters. Their mission was not just to fly over, but to take a picture of the vessel to make sure that it was not a dry cargo or container ship, but the Nimitz - the pride and a beauty of the American naval forces."

The general did not mention that a Russian naval strike group led by the aircraft carrier Admiral Kuznetsov during her maneuvers in the Atlantic was accompanied by American and German warships.

British and Norwegian fighters tracked Russia's long-range Tu-160 Blackjack, Tu-95MS Bear and Tu-22M3 Blinder bombers, A-50 early warning and reconnaissance planes, Il-78 Midas tankers and Su-33 carrier-based fighters.

French, Italian and Portuguese ships exercised together with Russia's submarine destroyers Admiral Chabanenko and Admiral Levchenko and the missile cruiser Moskva. No one was surprised. It is normal combat practice for partners.

NATO and Russia, as well as Russia and some NATO countries, have signed an agreement on rescue at sea and other documents, in particular on the role of Russian ships in Operation Active Endeavour, mounted by the Mediterranean countries to prevent illegal migration and the transit of drugs and weapons of mass destruction.

This job needs to be greeted and continued despite conflicts and problems between partners. "There is no need to go into hysterics over all that," Deinekin said. "The best approach is a calm, easy one."

American pilots and sailors on the Nimitz know that Russian long-rangers do not carry live weapons, as Major General Pavel Androsov, commander of the 37th Air Force Battalion, has said time and again. (Tu-169 and Tu-95MS strategic bombers belong to his battalion).

Aboard the planes there are no cruise missiles either with nuclear or conventional warheads. They are not on combat mission, but only on air patrol. Accountable launches are carried out on computers.

The carrier's command did not expect an attack from the Russian Bear, and none came. They did not file a protest against the Russians. Just as NATO pilots never protest about the Tu aircraft they accompany over the ocean, General Androsov said.

Joint training goes on.

And if the media and some politicians seek a pretext for sensational charges and claims, no one can ban them from doing that. They will find one all the same.

The opinions expressed in this article are the author's and do not necessarily represent those of RIA Novosti.