

Tensions Growing in Arctic Airspace

By [Lucas Leiroz de Almeida](#)

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Russia is increasing its military presence in the Arctic, especially in airspace. Moscow is sending Su-34 fighter-bombers to the region and creating various patrol strategies following a series of aggressive incursions by NATO planes on the northern border. As arctic airspace becomes a scenario for bold military maneuvers, tensions rise significantly, raising concerns worldwide.

On April 19, after receiving an alert about a foreign aircraft approaching the northern border, a Russian MiG-31 fighter escorted two foreign aircrafts over the Barents Sea. Both planes were flying dangerously towards the Russian border. They were a P-8A Poseidon and a P-3C Orion, typical patrol aircraft of the US Navy and the Norwegian Air Force, respectively. The Russian aircraft followed them until they changed course and moved away from the border.

This week, a similar event took place in the same region. On May 26, a new Norwegian P-3C aircraft was detected operating dangerous and aggressive maneuvers near the Russian border and once again a Russian MiG-31 plane escorted the foreign aircraft until it moved away from the border. These episodes were not isolated cases, having been only the most alarming and dangerous ones in the midst of several incidents of aggressive NATO incursions into the airspace of the Russian border. In recent months, Western activities in the Arctic have increased considerably. NATO military jets often appear in the Russian zone in the Arctic to conduct intelligence operations, capturing data from the activities of the Russian Northern Fleet.

Moscow has severely criticized the actions of the Western military alliance. On May 17, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov called NATO's measures “an offensive”. The West responded saying that Russia has also ratcheted up its activities in the Arctic region - which is supposed to “justify” the West to send more planes to “inspect” the Northern Fleet.

In fact, regardless of whether Russian activities are increasing or not, there is no justification for NATO's aggressiveness. Russian military activities are taking place within the confines of the national territory and there is no reason for any “foreign supervision”. Also, every world power has a regional zone of influence beyond its borders. These areas are an important geopolitical reality that cannot be disregarded by any country that values international

peace and security. When NATO advances on the Russian border to “monitor” Russian activities in the Arctic, there is a real affront to Moscow.

However, Russian activities in the Arctic have only grown in response to NATO’s previous advance in the region. More and more, the US and Canada are investing in military activities in the Arctic because, in addition to being an area rich in natural resources, it is the shortest route for them to reach Russia – which makes the North Pole an extremely strategic area. The US and Canada are joined in this strategy by European countries, mainly Scandinavian ones, such as Norway, which also have a rapid access route to Russia at the north pole. For many years, the US neglected the strategic value of the Arctic, while Russia has always managed to be present in the region. China also has a strong military presence in the Arctic, with several vessels permanently deployed there. This scenario of inferiority in the region worries Washington deeply and causes a race for the “conquest” of the Arctic – which is expected to intensify more and more.

So, responding to the West, Moscow has intensified investments in the Northern Fleet in recent times, mainly with regard to air logistics. Several airstrips have been built or restored and Moscow still plans to invest almost 70 million dollars in an airfield on Kotelny Island in the near future. Air is the main strategic route for operations in the Arctic, considering the difficulties of locomotion in the region. Any combat logistics at the North Pole involves widespread use of airspace, so, it is no coincidence that the West has recently carried out so many maneuvers in the Arctic using airplanes: the dispute for the Arctic takes place in the air – and whoever dominates the air will control the North Pole.

It is also necessary to remember that occupying the Arctic is part of American plans to maintain an encircling strategy against Russia. The increase in Western incursions into the Arctic is just a continuation of what NATO has been doing for a long time on Russian border. And while this American strategy persists, threatening Russian security, Moscow will invest more resources in protecting its border areas – which means that tensions in the Arctic will not end anytime soon.

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Lucas Leiroz is a research fellow in international law at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro.

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