

Chinese military

Russia and China fly joint air patrols near US for first time

Manoeuvre marks further deepening of military co-operation between Moscow and Beijing



A Tu-95 strategic bomber of the Russian air force is refueled in the air during a joint Russia-China air patrol © Russian Defense Ministry Press Service/AP

Kathrin Hille in Taipei and **Max Seddon** in Riga 5 HOURS AGO

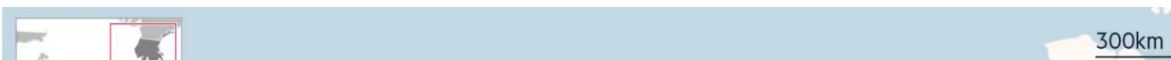
Russia and China have flown a joint strategic bomber patrol near Alaska for the first time, highlighting the growing scale and capability of a military partnership that has raised growing concern among the US and its allies.

US and Canadian fighter jets detected, tracked and intercepted two Russian TU-95 and two Chinese H-6 aircraft late on Wednesday, according to the North American Aerospace Defense Command (Norad), under which the US and Canada jointly operate satellites, radars and fighters.

Norad said the four bombers did not enter US or Canadian airspace but operated in the Alaskan air defence identification zone and did not present a threat.

An ADIZ is a self-declared buffer zone in international airspace in which countries monitor flight movements for potential security threats.

“It is not unusual for Russian bombers flying through the [Alaska] ADIZ to be intercepted, but I believe it is the first occurrence of a joint Russian and Chinese flight in that zone,” said Alexander Korolev, an expert on Russian-Chinese military co-operation at the University of New South Wales in Sydney.





Russia's defence ministry said the joint patrol took place in a "new area of joint action" over the Arctic and northern Pacific oceans over a five-hour period. It said Russian Su-30 and Su-35 fighters provided cover for the bombers during the flight.

The Russian and Chinese planes "acted strictly in accordance with international legal statutes" and "did not violate the airspace of foreign countries", the ministry said.

China confirmed it had conducted joint strategic air patrols with Russia over the Bering Sea, according to its annual plan for joint military engagements. The defence ministry said the manoeuvre deepened bilateral strategic mutual trust and co-ordination and was not aimed at any third country.

The patrols had "nothing to do with the current international situation", a spokesperson said on Thursday.

The Chinese-Russian manoeuvre marks a further expansion of the countries' substantial military co-operation.

Senior US defence officials told lawmakers earlier this year that the US military was [revising its force structure and planning](#) to take into account Chinese-Russian military co-operation in a potential future conflict.

Alexey Muraviev, a professor of national security and strategic studies at Curtin University in Perth, said the Alaska manoeuvre was "a continuation of their efforts

to put pressure on the US in the Arctic region”.

Although Beijing and Moscow do not have a mutual defence treaty, they have been training together for almost 20 years. That activity has intensified over the past six years, with the countries’ forces conducting annual joint naval exercises since 2018 and starting joint patrols with bombers in 2019.

The countries have continued to hold joint military manoeuvres after Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, which China has refused to condemn.

Last August, an 11-ship flotilla of Russian and Chinese warships sailed into waters close to Alaska during a bilateral naval exercise. But the two militaries’ bomber patrols had previously only extended to [airspace around Japan](#) and over the western Pacific Ocean, east of Taiwan and the Philippines.

The latest patrol was “notable for being the first intercept of Chinese military aircraft near Alaska”, Korolev said.

Defence experts said the joint drills and patrols offered more practical benefits for China’s People’s Liberation Army, which has not fought a war since 1979 and could learn from the Russian military’s ample recent combat experience. For Moscow, the military alignment with Beijing strengthens its claim to being a global military power.

[Copyright](#) The Financial Times Limited 2024. All rights reserved.
