

As Russia Increases Military Activity, Norway Commits to F-35 Fighter Jets

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Top Norwegian officials on Monday underscored their commitment to buying up to 52 Lockheed Martin Corp F-35 fighter jets in coming years, saying the stealthy jet's capabilities provided an important counterweight to Russia's military buildup and increased military flights in the region.

Norwegian Defense Minister Ine Eriksen Soereide told Reuters that Norway was concerned about what she called an "obvious projection of power" by Russia in the Baltic Sea region, where Russian military flights increased threefold from 2013 to 2014.

Soereide, in Texas to see the rollout of Norway's first F-35 from the Lockheed plant in Fort Worth, had no detailed numbers about Baltic flights in 2015. But Norwegian monitoring had shown increasingly complex and longer flights by Russia in recent months and repeated violations of international airspace.

Norway, which shares a small border with Russia in the Arctic, was keeping a close eye on Russian activities in that region and the Baltic Sea, she said, and remained concerned that increased Russian activities could inadvertently trigger a potential conflict, Soereide said.

Norway is slated to receive its first F-35 fighter jets in 2017 to begin training, and expects to have an initial operational capability in 2019.

Soereide said the jets would give Norway new radar-evading capabilities and the ability to detect potential threats from further away and with greater precision, key capabilities at a time when all of Russia's neighbors are carefully monitoring Russia's more aggressive military activities.

Sweden and Finland, for instance, have expressed concerns about incursions by Russian submarines and other naval vessels.

Admiral Haakon Bruun-Hanssen, chief of defense of the Norwegian Armed Forces, told Reuters in a separate interview that Russia had also increased its submarine activities in the Arctic, due to increased training.

"They are closing the gap in a number of areas," he said.

Bruun-Hanssen said it was difficult to provide details without delving into classified material, but Russian fighter jets flying in the Baltic states were now often joined by refueling aircraft, command and control planes and intelligence aircraft.

"They are using various types of aircraft together tactically, so they are capable of extending their ranges. They are capable of using their weapons systems in a better way than we have seen previously," he said. "They are operating their aircraft in a way in which long-range weapons are used in a manner very similar to the tactics we have had in the West."

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