



Bear Foxtrot—A Tornado F3 from RAF Leeming shadowing a Russian Bear-H aircraft over the North Atlantic.

RAF jets intercept eight Russian Bears

RAF FIGHTER jets were scrambled to intercept Russian military aircraft heading for British airspace in the latest in a series of similar incidents.

Four Tornado F3 fighters were launched from RAF Leeming, where RAF Leuchars' Quick Reaction Alert jets are temporarily stationed, and RAF Waddington and turned back eight Tupolev Tu-95 Bear aircraft.

The incident occurred in the early hours of yesterday.

Last month two of the RAF's Typhoon Eurofighter jets intercepted a Bear over the Atlantic and in July two Russian aircraft were warned off by RAF jets as they headed towards UK airspace.

In May two Tornado F3s were dispatched from Leuchars to intercept another Bear which was observing the Royal Navy exercise Neptune Warrior.

In yesterday's incident, the eight Russian planes were also shadowed by four of Norway's F-16 fighters.

Norwegian armed forces spokesman Lt Col John Inge Oegland said the Bears had flown into international airspace from the Barents Sea, which lies between Russia's north coast and the Arctic, to the Atlantic, then turned back.

The incidents echo Cold War tactics and come during heightened tension between Russia and the West over issues including US President George Bush's decision to position missile defence bases in the Czech Republic and Poland, and Britain's extradition

demand for the suspected killer of Russian dissident Alexander Litvinenko.

The Bear is a propeller-driven long-range aircraft developed by the Soviet Union as a strategic bomber and missile carrier but now often used for surveillance missions.

● Jets from Leuchars are taking part in a major maritime and air exercise which will prepare them for coalition operations.

Neptune Warrior, which is run twice a year by the Royal Navy and RAF, and

the RAF's Exercise Sky Lance are being brought together for the first time.

Some 17 warships and around 100 aircraft from the UK and 11 allied nations will be tested beneath, on and above waters around the UK.

RAF Leuchars Tornados will be put through their paces alongside Harriers, Typhoons, Hawks and Royal Navy frigates.

Assurance was offered that risk mitigation had been carried out to reduce any environmental impact.