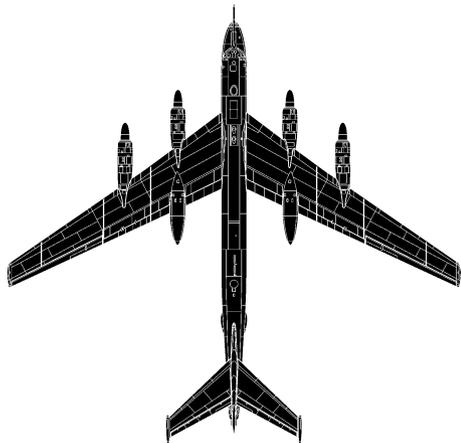


Tu-95/142 Bear



The Tu-95 Bear strategic bomber is a Cold War icon that has outlived its Soviet provenance. This large, four-engine turboprop aircraft, designed by Tupolev, was once a symbol of USSR power, mounting patrols near US and NATO countries' borders. The Soviet Union is gone, but the Bear lives on—more than 60 years after its birth—as a bomber and missile carrier in the Russian arsenal.

For the Bear, Tupolev chose turboprops rather than underpowered piston or fuel-guzzling (and therefore shorter-range) jet systems. The compromise worked. Four eight-bladed contrarotating propellers provided power and range. Fuselage design was conventional, with wings swept at a distinctive 35-degree angle. Tricycle landing gear retracted backward. It had—and still has—a tail gun. The Bear is the only prop-powered stra-

tegic bomber still in operation. Like the US Air Force B-52, it has enjoyed a long life because of adaptability. It was built to drop free-fall nuclear bombs but was modified for cruise missile carriage, maritime patrol, airborne surveillance, and electronic warfare.

The Russian Air Force fields Tu-95MS Bear-H bombers, while Tu-142 Bear-F and Bear-J maritime reconnaissance and communication aircraft serve with Russian Naval Aviation. Plans call for the Bear to remain in active service until 2040, at least. It has once again become an irritant in Washington-Moscow relations. In recent years, and especially since mid-2014, Bears have flown many missions into US and Canadian air defense identification zones, causing US fighters to scramble.

—Robert S. Dudley with Walter J. Boyne



This aircraft: Russian air force Tu-95MS Bear H—Bort 33 Black—as it looked in the early 2000s when assigned to 184th Guards Heavy Bomber Air Regiment, Engels AB, Russia.

In Brief

Designed, built by Tupolev OKB ★ first flight Nov. 12, 1952 ★ number built 500+ ★ crew (typical) of six: pilot, copilot, flight engineer, communications system operator, navigator, tail gunner ★ **Specific to Tu-95MS:** Four Kuznetsov NK-12M turboprop engines ★ defensive armament one or two 23 mm AM-23 autocannon in tail turret ★ load up to 33,000 lb, including Kh-20, Kh-22, Kh-55/101/102 air-to-surface missiles ★ max speed 516 mph ★ cruise speed 457 mph ★ max range (loaded) 5,282 mi ★ max weight (loaded) 407,848 lb ★ span 164 ft 2 in ★ length 161 ft 2 in ★ height 43 ft 8 in.

Famous Fliers

Notables: V. M. Bezbokov, A. G. Molodchi, M. P. Taran (all Hero of the Soviet Union awardees); M. M. Kharitonov, V. P. Pavlov. **Test pilot:** Alexey Pereliot.

Interesting Facts

Carried and dropped, in 1961, the 58-megaton “Czar Bomba,” the most powerful nuclear weapon ever detonated ★ produced for more than 50 years (1952-94) ★ recommenced patrols in August 2007, ending hiatus of 15 years ★ misnamed for years by NATO intelligence as Tu-20 ★ in 2008 exercise, fired live, strategic-range Kh-55 cruise missiles ★ used experimentally to carry and air-launch a MiG-19 aircraft ★ provided basic airframe design for Tu-114 airliner ★ Maritime reconnaissance, antisubmarine warfare, and communications variants received Tu-142 designation and serve with Russian and Indian navies ★ has propellers whose blade tips move supersonically, making it extremely loud.



A Soviet-built Tu-142 Bear F reconnaissance aircraft belonging to the Indian navy (r) and a US Navy F-14A Tomcat.