

# The melting ice has brought Arctic into geostrategic prominence, Russia quickly projects its military power

As the Global warming is melting the Arctic ice, and opening up new shipping trade routes and real estate, intense resource competition over an estimated \$1 trillion untapped reserves of oil, natural gas and minerals has started. Human activities have grown in the Arctic by almost 400 percent in the last decade, the U.S. board estimated, in terms of shipping, mining, energy exploration, fishing and tourism

Considering its geostrategic importance many countries including Russia and US are planning military presence to protect their interests. Russia is acting quickly to become dominating Geostrategic and Military power in the Arctic. Russia has been carrying out rapid Arctic militarization by building New airbases, icebreakers, ground forces, missiles and and carrying out military exercises there. Russia's new military doctrine signed into effect on December 26, 2014, identified Arctic as one of three geopolitical arenas that Moscow has deemed vital to national security.

Coast Guard Commandant Adm. Paul Zukunft warned that Russia was militarizing the Arctic and accused Moscow of "saber-rattling" by conducting unannounced military drills in the Arctic area involving thousands of troops. Adm. Mark Ferguson, commander of U.S. Naval Forces Europe, expressed similar concerns about aggressive Russian activity in the Arctic, noting that Russian submarine activity was at its highest point in 20 years.

Russia isn't alone in its Arctic ambition. The United States,

Russia, Canada, Denmark, Norway, and Iceland all lay claim to the area and its abundant natural resources. China is the latest entry to have arctic ambitions. US has intensified its intelligence activities in Arctic, through U.S. spy satellites orbiting overhead and Navy sensors deep in the frigid waters. Most of the 16 U.S. intelligence agencies have assigned analysts to work full time on the Arctic. The U.S. intelligence focus is chiefly aimed at Russia's military buildup in the far north under President Vladimir Putin.

China has outlined its ambitions to extend President Xi Jinping's signature Belt and Road Initiative to the Arctic by developing shipping lanes opened up by global warming. Releasing its first official Arctic policy white paper in Jan 2018, China said it would encourage enterprises to build infrastructure and conduct commercial trial voyages, paving the way for Arctic shipping routes that would form a "Polar Silk Road".

The white paper said China also eyes development of oil, gas, mineral resources and other non-fossil energies, fishing and tourism in the region. It said it would do so "jointly with Arctic States, while respecting traditions and cultures of the Arctic residents including the indigenous peoples and conserving natural environment".

The Arctic is currently a staggering 36 degrees warmer than normal at this time of year, according to information from the Danish Meteorological Institute. NASA report also shows that a vast region in the Arctic Ocean has gone missing and people from NASA think that the polar ice caps are now more vulnerable than ever. "What we've seen over the years is that the older ice is disappearing," said Walt Meier, a sea ice researcher at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland. "This older, thicker ice is like the bulwark of sea ice: a warm summer will melt all the young, thin ice away but it can't completely get rid of the older ice. But this older

ice is becoming weaker because there's less of it and the remaining old ice is more broken up and thinner, so that bulwark is not as good as it used to be.

The diminishment of Arctic ice could lead in coming years to increased commercial shipping on two trans-Arctic sea routes—the Northern Sea Route close to Russia, and the Northwest Passage; more exploration for oil, gas, and minerals and increased tourism (cruise ships) in the Arctic. Although there is significant international cooperation on Arctic issues, the Arctic is increasingly being viewed by some observers as a potential emerging security issue. Some of the Arctic coastal states, particularly Russia, have announced an intention or taken actions to enhance their military presences in the high north. U.S. military forces, particularly the Navy and Coast Guard, have begun to pay more attention to the region in their planning and operations, says *Changes in the Arctic: Background and Issues for Congress*.

## **How would future war would be in Arctic**

Kyle Mizokami writes in *The Week*, “It would be two wars: one against the human enemy, which would often be hundreds of miles away and seldom seen, and another, constant war against the elements. Both would be trying to kill you. War would mostly be conducted by aircraft and submarine, the better to avoid actually operating on the ice.”

“The weather and the flat, featureless terrain would mean long-range subs and planes that pack plenty of firepower would play decisive roles. Unmanned, autonomous drones that can survive the harsh weather would be particularly useful. Large numbers of ground forces would be difficult to manage, so small Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine units trained to parachute, ski, or infiltrate by submarine would be used to

attack and defend isolated Arctic bases. Search and rescue, to recover pilots shot down in such a bleak, hostile environment, would be a must," he further says

## **Russia dominating military power in Arctic**

Russia is trying to claim 460,000 square miles of the Arctic Ocean as its national territory – an area that includes the North Pole. Russian divers even planted a national flag on the North Pole seabed in a symbolic claim to the region's energy riches.

It has created a new Arctic Joint Strategic Command, tasked to protect Russian interests in its Arctic territories. Moscow is training two Arctic warfare brigades in addition to constructing 16 deepwater ports, 13 airfields, and ten air-defense radar stations in the region. A shipyard in northern Russia also is constructing four nuclear-powered submarines.

Moscow formed the 45th Air Force and Air Defense Army as part of its Northern Fleet in December 2015. Shoigu said that modern military technology was "necessary for guarding borders" in the Arctic. Russian officials have previously said that the air base facilities are essential for protecting shipping routes that link Europe with the Pacific region across the Arctic Ocean.

Russia plans to develop a "self-sufficient" standing military force by 2018, based in the territory it owns in the Arctic, according to a report. The military force will include Air Force and air defense subunits. Russia will also create a new training center in the Arctic. Sergei Shoigu told Russian news agencies that the "creation and arming" of the Arctic military unit should be completed by 2018.

The next important thing is that Russia has established the Independent Military Group of Aerospace Forces in the Arctic region. The Aerospace Forces as a new branch of the military was activated on the 3rd August.

Moscow launched its latest Arctic military base in April 2017 on one of the northernmost points of its remote Franz Josef Land archipelago. The base can comfortably support 150 staff for up to 18 months, establishing the mold for Russia's post-Soviet military strategy. The Russian government announced plans in March 2014 to reopen 10 former Soviet-era military bases along the Arctic seaboard, including 14 airfields, that were closed after the end of the Cold War. Shoigu also said four were completed in 2015, a base on the Franz Josef Land archipelago is nearly complete. "We are not hiding this from anyone: we are have practically finished building bases on the Novosibirsk Archipelago and on Kotelny island." .

Shoigu said Russian troops will be stationed in the Arctic on a permanent basis, with a focus on increasing the Kremlin's control over the region's airspace. "We are creating comfortable living conditions for our military personnel who will serve in the Arctic on a permanent basis," Nikolai Yevmenov, the fleet's chief of staff, said.

The new base on Franz Josef's northern Alexandra Land has limited conventional combat capabilities and is primarily focusing on radar and surveillance. "The problem with Russian defense is that until recently the Russian military had a huge gap in its radar coverage on its Arctic coast," Igor Sutyagin, a Russian military expert at London's Royal United Services Institute, says, noting that Moscow had few facilities along the Northern Sea Route that spans the majority of the country's length. "It meant that virtually everybody could enter the waters without notice. Now you need radar so you are just aware of what passes through." Sutyagin estimates that the base will have standard self-defense capabilities, such as Russia's surface-to-air missile system Pantsir, for air

defense, and a cruise missile battery with up to 400 kilometers in range.

Russia's nuclear-powered Yuri Dolgoruky submarine has successfully test-launched an intercontinental ballistic missile in the Barents Sea in the Arctic, according to state news agency Itar-Tass. "The launch was carried out from an underwater position in accordance with the combat readiness plan," a statement from the Ministry of Defense read, reported in Itar-Tass. The launch "hit the designated targets on the course."

Russia plans to step up its fourth Sunflower (Podsolnukh-E) radar system, which, according to Russian experts, is capable to detect US stealth aircraft, such as B-2 Spirit, flying over the ocean at a height of 500 kilometers, the China Topix informational website reported. As the website reported, citing sources in the Russian Defense Ministry, the new Sunflower will be stationed in the Novaya Zemlya archipelago in the Arctic Circle. According to the media, Russia intends to build six over the horizon radar systems in the Arctic.

For more information on Over the Horizon Radars: <http://idstch.com/home5/international-defence-security-and-technology/technology/electronics/over-the-horizon-radars-being-improved-to-detect-and-target-stealth-aircrafts-and-aircraft-carriers/>

In March 15, Russia carried out a five-day massive military exercise in the Arctic that involved some 80,000 troops, 220 aircraft, 41 ships, and 15 submarines. The training exercises were reportedly meant to test the Russian military's ability to rapidly deploy forces from the mainland and to test the combat readiness of its Northern Fleet.

# Russia boosts Science and Technology in Arctic

In tandem with the military expansion, Russia is building the Yamal LNG plant in the Ob River estuary in collaboration with the French energy company Total. It will produce gas, liquefy it and ship it to European and Asian markets.

“This is where future Russian oil and gas resources are located,” Malte Humpert, executive director of the Arctic Institute, said of the region. “Most other areas are peaking and running out. So for Russia it will be important to develop more unconventional sources. Russia will need to invest \$100 billion per year in their oil and gas sector just to maintain their current levels.”

In 2014-2016, the government unveiled funds for 31 R&D projects in the Arctic. In these years, nearly two billion rubles (\$32 million) were spent from the federal budget and non-budget sources on Arctic development.

St. Petersburg is now becoming the centerpiece of the Arctic development program since the city boasts significant industrial and scientific capabilities. Among the leading scientific organizations are the Arctic and Antarctic R&D Institute, the Russian R&D Institute for Geology and Mineral Resources of the World Ocean and the Karpinsky Russian R&D Geological Institute.

Currently a new Russian nuclear-powered icebreaker is being built at the Baltic Shipyard. The Arktika, the first project 22220 class ship and the first nuclear icebreaker to be fully built in modern-day Russia, was successfully launched on June 16.

Russia operates a fleet of 40 icebreakers and is working on adding about a dozen new ships over the next couple of years. Out of the 40 around 27 are ocean-going icebreakers,

some of which are nuclear-powered. Russia is also planning to introduce a new class of super-nuclear icebreakers, by the end of 2020. According to Russian Deputy Defense Minister Dmitry Rogozin, the layout of the new vessel, purportedly capable of cutting through 13-foot-thick ice sheets, will be presented by the end of 2015.

The Ilya Muromets could be the lead ship of a new class of icebreakers, depending on how well the vessel will do perform in service. The 6,000-ton ship is 85-meter (280-feet) long and can purportedly break through a meter of ice. It can traverse the entire 5,600 kilometer (3,500 mile) length of the Northern Passage and can operate autonomously for up to 60 days, according to Russia's Ministry of Defense. The icebreaker will have a crew of 35.

Any industrial project in the Arctic would require tons of electric energy, and this is why Russia is also developing floating nuclear power plants. Russian company Rosenergoatom (part of Rosatom state-owned corporation) launched a project in 2006 to build floating NPPs in regions with limited energy capabilities.

## **China's growing Arctic ambitions**

"China hopes to work with all parties to build a 'Polar Silk Road' through developing the Arctic shipping routes," the paper, issued by the State Council Information Office, said. Among its increasing interests in the region is its major stake in Russia's Yamal liquefied natural gas project which is expected to supply China with four million tonnes of LNG a year, according to the state-run China Daily.

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A report by the State Department's International Security Advisory Board (ISAB) expresses concern about the rapid expansion of China's activities in the Arctic. China, which is geographically far from the North Pole, is now claiming to be a near-Arctic country, to match its "long-term, strategic objective of pursuing economic development and growth in the Arctic," the ISAB report said.

The search for a shorter route from the Atlantic to Asia has been the quest of maritime powers since the Middle Ages. The melting of Arctic ice raises the possibility of saving several thousands of miles and several days of sailing between major trading blocs. If the Arctic were to become a viable shipping route, the ramifications could extend far beyond the Arctic. For example, lower shipping costs could be advantageous for China (at least its northeast region), Japan, and South Korea because their manufactured products exported to Europe or North America could become less expensive relative to other emerging manufacturing centers in Southeast Asia, such as India, says *Changes in the Arctic: Background and Issues for Congress*.

Economic opportunities in the Arctic are important to China in the short term, the report said, such as "sea and air routes [that] would allow for expanded shipping to markets in Europe and North America." "In the long term," the report added, "China could benefit from access to resources including oil, other hydrocarbons, minerals and fisheries, and expanding its tourism and bioprospecting industries to the region."

The report notes China's cooperation with Russia in the development of natural-gas deposits in the Arctic Siberian Yamal Peninsula. ISAB member Sherri Goodman, former deputy undersecretary of defense said the impact of Sino-Russian cooperation on Arctic regional security has not attracted enough attention from the U.S. government.

China has begun work on its second large-scale icebreaker. In

addition, two mid-size military icebreakers recently joined the PLA Navy's North Sea Fleet.

Shipyard Jiangnan confirms that it has officially started the construction of the vessel, and that it is planned to be ready for sailing in 2019. Ship designed by Finnish company Aker Arctic Technology Co, will be 122,5 meter long and 22,3 meter wide. It will have a deadweight of 13,000 tons and will be able to carry supplies for 60 days of uninterrupted operation. The ship design will allow it to break 1,5 meter thick ice both with its front and its rear.

China has previously announced that it intends to build also a nuclear-powered icebreakers. An agreement was signed this year between the National Nuclear Corporation and State Shipbuilding Corporation development of the nuclear-powered ships.

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