

RUSSIA'S ARCTIC MILITARY BUILDUP IN ONE MAP

27.01.2017

Popularmechanics Jan 26, 2017

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The top of the world is now the newest military frontier.

North of the Arctic Circle has traditionally been a demilitarized zone. The militaries of the world tend to stay clear of that part of the world for two reasons: It's hard to defend and there's generally nothing worth fighting over. Unfortunately climate change is changing that, and Russia is taking the lead in fortifying its share of the region.



The Arctic Circle is generally regarded as north of the 66 degrees, 34 minutes north latitude. It covers roughly four percent of the Earth's surface and is in a perpetual winter, with most of the arctic region locked in ice. But rising temperatures are contributing to a decline in the amount of that very ice. Less sea ice means previously unreachable resources [] oil and natural

gas now be accessed and a new ice-free Arctic shipping route servicing the northern hemisphere appears almost certain.

Russia, which spans eleven time zones across the Northern Hemisphere is staking a claim to the Arctic. Perhaps predictably, it's going a little overboard about it. In 2007, Russian robotic submarines planted the national flag under the North Pole. Russia claims the North Pole on the grounds that the Lomonosov Ridge, an extension of Russia's continental shelf territory, passes underneath the pole.

As this new map at Foreign Policy shows, Russia is prepared to back up those claims. By 2015, it had established six new bases north of the Circle, including 16 deepwater ports and 13 airfields. While many of these ports are minor ones for resupply of distant, lonely outposts and many airfields are for emergency use only, it's a network that is growing increasingly robust and well defended. Russia has deployed advanced S-400 long range surface to air missiles, as well as "Bastion" supersonic anti-ship missiles, to protect some of the larger bases.

The map was released by Senator Dan Sullivan of Alaska, who is pressing the new Trump Administration to hammer out an Arctic strategy. The U.S. has no major bases north of the 66 degree parallel but is increasingly training to go there if necessary. In 2015, a combined Army and Air Force exercise deployed Stryker combat vehicles to Deadhorse Alaska, one of the northernmost communities in the United States. In March, ICEX 2016 saw two nuclear submarines rendezvousing at the North Pole, where they were joined by helicopters and paratroopers.

Map source: Foreign Policy

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