RUSSIA IS BUILDING UP ITS ARCTIC MILITARY PRESENCE AND NATO SHOULD BE WORRIED, SAYS NEW REPORT

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The Henry Jackson Society says Moscow reopened old Soviet-era military bases and deployed a missile early-warning radar system

Russias militarisation of the Arctic has accelerated dramatically since 2014, according to a new study.

The country has established a permanent military district, increased training of troops and creating new brigades in the region and is continuing to exploit its natural resources, says the report from conservative UK think tank, The Henry Jackson Society.

It adds that Moscow has commissioned a new icebreaker fleet, reopened old Soviet-era military bases and deployed a missile early-warning radar system in the Arctic.

Russia is also currently restoring aerodromes such as the Rogachyovo airfield on Novaya Zemlya, and airfields in Tiksi, Vorkuta, Alykel, and Anadyr, the report states. Building work has also begun on the massive Arctic Trefoil military base in the region, it says.

It adds that the country is now regularly invading other countries airspace. Norway intercepted 74 Russian warplanes conducting air patrols on its coast in 2014 – up from 58 in 2013 - it says.

Nato urgently needs to adopt an Arctic strategy and ensure a common approach to the regions security challenges, the thinktank argues.

The report's author and director of its Russian Studies Centre, Dr Andrew Foxall, said: Over the last decade Russia has expanded its military capacities and capabilities in the Arctic on a scale far greater in depth and scope than anything the West has done in the same period.

Russias national interests in the Arctic explain certain activities, but not all. Some make it appear that Russia is engaged in a one-sided arms race in the region.

There is little the UK can do to prevent Russias activities per se, but a more sophisticated assessment of these activities and their implications would aid the development of more effective policies.

Commenting on the report, James Gray MP, a member of the House of Commons Defence Select Committee until the recent General Election, said: We can no longer ignore Russias growing military footprint in the Arctic. As the ice melts and new commercial opportunities emerge in the region, Britain and her allies must do more to ensure that the Arctic remains stable and peaceful.

We must also deter any possible return to the Cold War use of the Arctic and the North Atlantic to interrupt the Wests supply routes. To achieve that, we in Britain must work with Russia, but we must also be alert to the threats that Russian military activity in the Arctic poses to our ability to exercise our interests, and to protect ourselves and our allies in the High North and North Atlantic.

He said that during the Cold War the important of the Wests Northern flank was never in doubt and added that the report is a timely reminder that we must not let our attention there slip.

It comes as tensions between Russia and the West have continue to simmer since Russias annexation of the Crimea in Ukraine in 2014.

Russia has continued to build up its military strength on all of its borders, prompting Nato to send hundreds of thousands of troops to strengthen the defences of its eastern European members such as Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland.

The Arctic has become an even more dangerous potential zone of conflict as climate change is leading to the melting of the polar ice caps making it easier for countries to exploit the natural resources in the region and sail through it.

Kaynak/Source: