

Government to Establish Airfield to Boost Arctic Presence

By [Alexander Bratersky](#)

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The Defense Ministry will establish a permanent airfield in the Arctic as part of Russia's plan to boost its presence in the oil- and gas-rich Arctic Ocean and facilitate shipping on the Northern Sea Route, officials said at a meeting chaired by Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu.

The ministry announced the plans following a journey of several Northern Fleet ships, including the Peter the Great nuclear-powered missile cruiser, in the Arctic late last week.

"We have come, and we'll stay there forever. This is the beginning of a big journey," First Deputy Defense Minister Arkady Bakhin said.

"Our presence will lower the potential for conflicts in the Arctic," a military official told The Moscow Times.

The airfield is expected to fully function by November and will be located near the New

Siberian Islands Archipelago between the Laptev Sea and the East Siberian Sea.

Military officials said the new facility would be built at an old military airfield abandoned in 1991 and would receive An-72 and An-74 transport aircraft as well as Il-76 cargo planes.

"You all know our plans for the upcoming year and the tasks set by our commander in chief," Shoigu said, referring to President Vladimir Putin.

Putin stated in 2011 that the Northern Sea Route might become more useful than the Suez Canal for commercial freight transportation. The government has developed the strategy to develop the route up to 2030 as a part of broader government transportation policy passed in 2008.

Government officials have said that cargo traffic via the Northern Sea Route could be increased to 50 million tons annually.

Contact the author at newsreporter@imedia.ru

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