

Russia to Form Arctic Military Command by 2017

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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The new specially trained and outfitted military brigades will patrol Russia's Arctic coastline.

As part of Moscow's drive to militarize the Arctic, Russia's will establish a military command structure with two brigades of mechanized infantry supported by snowmobiles and hovercraft by 2017, the commander-in-chief of Russia's ground forces said Wednesday.

"For the defense of national interests in the Arctic, a multiservice task force will be formed," Colonel General Oleg Salyukov was quoted by RIA Novosti as saying.

"A motorized rifle arctic brigade is now being formed in the Murmansk region [northwest Russia]. The second arctic brigade will be formed in 2016 and will be stationed in the Yamal-Nenets autonomous region [east of the Ural Mountains in the Arctic Circle]," he added.

Russia has stepped up its military activity the Arctic in recent years, taking up positions in the area abandoned in the 1980s by the Soviet Union — which in its heyday had heavily

militarized and industrialized its vast Arctic regions.

Moscow's renewed interest in the region stems from the recent discovery of vast swaths of untapped oil and natural gas reserves below the Arctic Ocean and a desire to secure access to the Northern Sea Route — a strategic trade artery that can potentially reroute East-West global trade flows.

The new specially trained and outfitted military brigades will patrol Russia's Arctic coastline, protect current and future military installations along the shore and in the Russian Arctic, ensure free passage of the Northern Sea Route and — perhaps most important of all — demonstrate to other Arctic nations Russia's military presence in the increasingly contested region, according to Salyukov.

In parallel with the creation of a Northern Command, Russia has been expanding its Arctic forces piecemeal.

By the end of this year, Russia will have moved military units under other commands to Kotelny Island, north of the Sakha republic in eastern Siberia, and a motorized rifle brigade to Alakurtti, a village in Murmansk oblast. This coincides with deployments to Novaya Zemlya, a landmass protruding into the Arctic Ocean from the Ural Mountains, and Franz Josef Archipelago, a cluster of islands located even further north.

Also by 2015, Moscow hopes to reopen the entirety of its former Soviet defense infrastructure in the region.

In early September, Russia began construction on two brand new military installations in the Arctic, marking the first expansion of post-Soviet Russian power in the region. Russia plans on building six new bases throughout the Arctic.

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