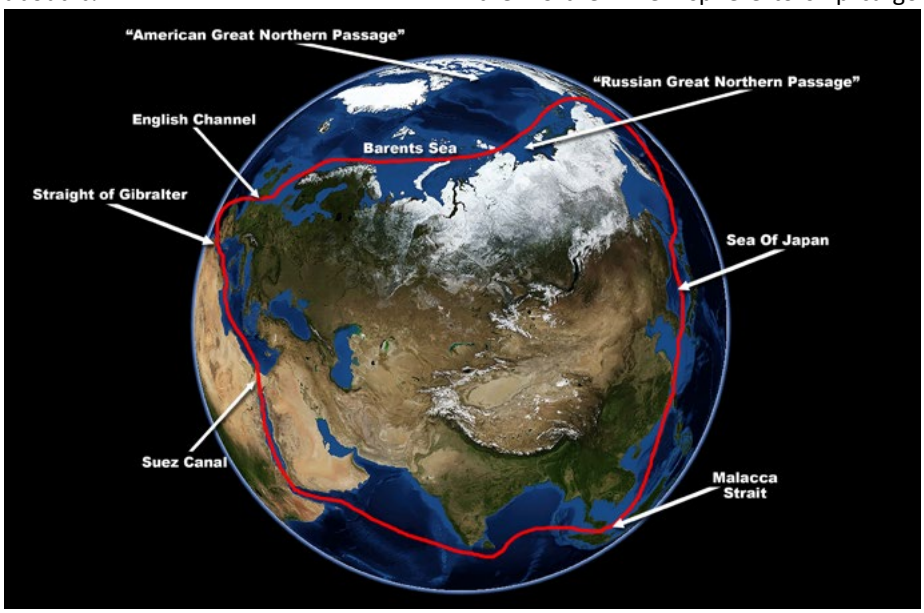
Arctic Summit

"By 2025, the Arctic waters are to be patrolled by a squadron of next-generation stealthy PAK DA [Russian] bombers."

~ Mark Galeotti, Russia expert, New York University

By MAJ Eric Comette

From expert statements like the one above coupled with the recent massive increase in Russian military buildup in the Arctic, as well as from announcements within Russia herself, it is clear that Moscow has plans for the Arctic. This Russian Arctic activity stirs questions; namely, why is Russia doing this, and what—if anything—will we do about it?



So, why does Russia have plans that necessitate repopulating the Arctic with military bases designed for long-term habitation and patrolling the Arctic waters with stealthy bombers? The answer is simple; ice melts at thirty-three degrees. Arctic warming is occurring more rapidly than in any other place on the planet. As a result, the sea ice that blocked routes like the Great Northern Passage from our continental ancestors is now melting away and opening new sea lanes to the world.

Between 2007 and 2012, satellites recorded more Arctic sea ice melting than they ever have since space-based ice observation began in 1979. Having routes like the Great Northern Passage finally open will allow trading nations in the Northern hemisphere to ship cargo between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans via a much shorter sea route. Shipping destined for Hamburg, Germany from Shanghai, China while using a Northern passage sea lane instead of a route traversing the Suez Canal will enjoy a trip thirty percent shorter in waters relatively devoid of pirates.[1] Consequentially, those who regulate and fund that trip will also enjoy savings.

To take advantage of this new Northern Passage, Russia is not only moving to guard her interests on, around, and under this freshly unveiled sea lane with its access to natural resources, but to control it all as well. However, Russia is not the only country with economic and strategic interests in the Arctic. The United States, Canada, Denmark—whose territory includes Greenland—and Norway all stand to benefit greatly from the Arctic waters being open for shipping, commercialization, and energy production.

Shipping cargo through the Arctic will be very lucrative for the government that controls and taxes it. However, there is also extreme value to be had/controlled/taxed far beneath the cargo laden hulls floating above the Arctic sea floor. According to the U.S. Geological Survey, there is one quarter of the entire planet's undiscovered recoverable petroleum in the Arctic, over eighty percent of which is offshore. It also says, "The extensive Arctic continental shelves may constitute the geographically largest unexplored prospective area for petroleum remaining on Earth." It is estimated that thirty percent of planet Earth's natural gas, twenty percent of her liquefied natural gas, and thirteen percent of all her oil can be found, recovered and used by countries that have access to the Arctic and the means to take its resources.[2]

Unless Russia's plans also include breaking the United Nation's Convention on the Law of the Sea (1982) that established freedom of navigation rights, set territorial sea boundaries twelve

miles offshore, exclusive economic zones up to 200 miles offshore, and established rules for extending continental shelf rights up to 350 miles offshore, her buildup in the Arctic suggests that Moscow believes someone else will. "We'll be restoring airfields, reviving Soviet-era hydro-meteorological services, and deploying the naval means to convoy ships and defend Russia's economic zone of interests," said Viktor Litovkin, military affairs editor of the Nezavisimaya Gazeta newspaper. Russia plans to reopen ten Arctic search-and-rescue stations, sixteen deep-water ports, thirteen airfields, and ten air-defense radar stations.[3]

Today, Russia is better equipped for Arctic buildup and operations than any of the other countries listed above. The United States has only two heavy and one medium icebreaker ship while the U.S. Coast Guard has said that the U.S. needs at least three of each to accomplish its statutory missions. Canada has six icebreakers. Russia, on the other hand, has over thirty icebreaking ships and is the only country in the world to operate a nuclear-powered icebreaker fleet. The Russian nuclear-powered icebreaker Arktika was the first surface ship in history to reach the North Pole. Militarily, Russia's Northern Fleet has nearly eighty ships including thirty-five submarines and six missile cruisers. This constitutes one third of Russia's total naval power.[4]

The United States and partner countries are not sitting idly by while Russia repopulates the Arctic with military bases. The U.S. has significant geopolitical and economic interests in the Arctic and is taking steps not only to protect them but also to ensure that the Arctic is preserved, shared, and protected for all who have interests in or around it. Reflecting rising concerns from within the Arctic Council (formed in 1991), which includes Russia, there have been calls for the council to move beyond environmental issues and become a forum to address defense and security matters. Rob Huebert of the Canadian Defense and Foreign Affairs Institute comments, "The militaries of most Arctic states are taking on new and expanded roles in the region that go beyond their traditional responsibilities, which may create friction in the region." It is easy to see that tensions are building in the Arctic.

The U.S. National Strategy for the Arctic Region outlines our strategic priorities including advancing U.S. security interests, pursuing responsible stewardship, and strengthening international cooperation. It also sets an aggressive agenda for Arctic oil, gas, and mineral reserves exploitation as well as recommending enhancing national defense, law enforcement, navigation systems, environmental response, and search and rescue capabilities in the Arctic. In concert with the National Strategy for the Arctic, Congressman Don Young (R-Alaska) has called for "extensive Arctic training" to enable the U.S. to project power in the region.

Moreover, the U.S. is increasing cooperation with Canada to enhance its presence and security in the Arctic. Both countries signed the Tri-Command Framework for Arctic Cooperation which merges the United States Northern Command, the Canadian Joint Operations Command, and the North American Aerospace Defense Command. The Tri-Command Framework's purpose is to "promote enhanced military cooperation in the Arctic and identify specific areas of potential Tri-Command cooperation in the preparation for and conduct of safety, security, and defense operations." The Arctic is set to become an even more important part of North American perimeter security.[5]

Adding to the U.S. Arctic presence and power projection, specifically the Army's, is the 1-25th Attack Reconnaissance Battalion (ARB) flying and maintaining the AH-64 Apache in the extreme conditions found in the Arctic. Based in Fairbanks, Alaska, the 1-25th ARB is poised to lead the way for Army attack aviation in some of the most harsh and unforgiving conditions the military operates in. The lessons the 1-25th learns in Alaska will be extremely valuable to any unit called to deploy or relocate to the Arctic. Learning on the job, so to speak, should conflict arise against a power that is superior in Arctic equipage, training, and presence is a situation that the U.S. must never find herself in.

The 1-25th ARB is currently learning Arctic lessons that the rest of Army Aviation may need to employ at a moment's notice sometime in the future; and, though never to wish for it, that future could be near. As a mechanism to ascertain, categorize, and disseminate lessons, the 1-25th ARB and her sister units are learning the hard way. In order to gain an understanding of the systemic issues related to aviation operations in the Arctic that will enhance U.S. Army Aviation capabilities, the U.S. Army Aviation Center of Excellence (USAACE), working in close concert with the 1-25th ARB, formed a lessons learned collection team consisting of representatives from a variety of Army Aviation agencies to travel to Fort Wainwright, Alaska in February 2016.
Upon arrival to Fort Wainwright, the collection team consisting of members representing the USAACE's Department of Training and Doctrine Aviation Mission

COL Blake Alexander welcomes the Arctic Summit lessons learned collectors to Fort Wainwright, AK

Survivability Branch, the Directorate of Evaluation and Standardization, Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) Capabilities Manager (TCM) for Reconnaissance and Attack, TCM Utility, TCM Cargo, Program Manager (PM) Apache, PM Blackhawk, the Concepts and Requirement Directorate (CRD) Aviation Logistics, CRD Army Combat Information Systems, the Program Director Medical Evacuation, and representatives from Boeing and Lockheed Martin received numerous Arctic related briefings from the unit. In addition to unit facilitated briefings, the agencies conducted collection sessions with unit personnel, toured the facilities and were also treated to an orientation flight/remote drop off that truly conveyed the impact of the Arctic environment on all aspects of operations.

Upon the collection team's return, the results of the Arctic Summit lessons learned collection were packaged into various reports and articles for further action and study as well as possible incorporation into Army Aviation training and doctrine. As a result, Army Aviation now stands better fortified to confront the challenges offered by the Arctic and deliver steel colder than any Arctic winter to such adversaries that dare test her will.

[1] Masters, Jonathan. The Thawing Arctic: Risks and Opportunities. Council on Foreign Relations. Web. 2 March 2016. <http://www.cfr.org/artic/thawing-artic-risks-opportunities/p32082>

[2] Council on Foreign Relations InfoGuide Presentation, "The Emerging Arctic," http://www.cfr.org/polar-regions/emerging-arctic/p32620#!/?cid=otr_marketing_use-arctic_Infoguide#!

[3] Bender, Jeremy. Russia just put the finishing touches on 6 Arctic military bases. Business Insider. Web. 4 March 2016. <https://ca.finance.yahoo.com/news/russia-just-put-finishing-touches-211528322.html>

[4] Polmar, Norman. Guide to the Soviet Navy. Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1983. Print

[5] Gabriel, Dana. U.S. Arctic Ambitions And The Militarization Of The High North. COUNTERCURRENTS.ORG. Web. March 2016. <http://www.countercurrents.org/gabriel230713.htm>

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Acronym Reference

ARB - attack reconnaissance battalion	**TCM** - TRADOC capabilities manager
CRD - Concepts and Requirement Directorate	**TRADOC** - Training and Doctrine Command
PM - program manager	**USAACE** - U.S. Army Aviation Center of Excellence