

Putin Vows to Protect Polar Bear Habitat as Russia Militarizes Arctic

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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President Vladimir Putin, publicly known as an advocate for preserving endangered and rare animals from extinction, has said he will ensure that Russia can militarize its Arctic territory without adversely impacting the region's polar bear population, RIA Novosti reported Tuesday.

Russia has recently begun reopening Soviet-era military installations in addition to constructing entirely new ones throughout the Arctic this year, in a bid to ensure that Moscow retains control over a large swath of the increasingly contested and resource-rich Arctic.

One of the military bases, located on Wrangel Island, a nature preserve, has been particularly controversial.

In August and September, the head of Greenpeace Russia complained to Putin via the Kremlin's human rights council that the island is essentially "the polar bear's maternity ward."

Putin, who once hugged a polar bear while visiting the Arctic in 2010, said these concerns would be addressed, but also sought clarification on whether the base had in fact been a threat to polar bears during its period of use under the Soviets.

"The fact is that we are restoring what was lost," Putin said.

Tsyplenkov was quoted by RIA Novosti as replying that he was not aware of the Soviet-era base, but stood by his belief that human presence on the island is threatening to polar bears.

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