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Russia Will Restrict Foreign Warships in Arctic Ocean, Defense Official Says

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Russia plans to restrict the passage of foreign warships in the Arctic Ocean next year, a top defense official has said.

Russia has worked hurriedly to reassert its military presence in the Arctic frontier and secure access to a strategic northern shipping corridor — the Northern Sea Route — between Asia and Europe. The corridor takes about two weeks less to traverse than the Suez Canal.

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On Friday, Defense Ministry spokesman Mikhail Mizintsev said that Russia's ministries were working on amending legislation that would require foreign warships to notify Russia before being able to pass through the Arctic.

The work will be completed by the time the waters are navigable in 2019, Mizintsev was cited by Interfax as saying at a conference on Friday.

Earlier this year, Denmark's shipping giant Maersk tested the Northern Sea Route, completing a 37-day journey from the Pacific port of Vladivostok to the port of St. Petersburg in September. After the trip was completed, Maersk Chief Technical Officer Palle Laursen said that passage through the route was currently only feasible in three months out of the year.

In 2017, an International Monetary Fund (IMF) report found that climate change and the melting of the polar ice cap would free up navigation in the Arctic and benefit Russia economically.

Russia is fortifying the Arctic, pouring in money and missiles, building a new generation of nuclear icebreakers and opening new bases in the biggest Arctic military push since the fall of the Soviet Union.

No other country has a nuclear breaker fleet, which Moscow uses to clear channels for military and civilian ships.

Reuters contributed reporting to this article.

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