

Russia Accuses Norway of Restricting Its Activities on Arctic Islands

By [Reuters](#)

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The archipelago of Svalbard is seen as a potential flashpoint between Moscow and the West as climate change has opened up the region and Russia has built up its military presence. **Christopher Michel / Flickr (CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)**

Russia on Tuesday accused Norway of restricting its activities on a remote chain of islands in the Arctic and said it wanted talks with Oslo to have the issue resolved.

The archipelago of Svalbard, about 850 kilometers (500 miles) north of mainland Norway, is seen as a potential flashpoint between Moscow and the West as climate change has opened up the region and Russia has built up its military presence.

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Though the tourism and services sectors are growing on Svalbard, the traditional industry is

coal mining and a Russian coal mining company has operated in the town of Barentsburg for decades. There is no oil or gas exploration near the islands.

The territory is regulated by a 1920 treaty, which grants Norway sovereignty but allows other signatories, including Russia, residence and commercial rights.

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has formally asked Oslo for talks to address what Moscow believes are restrictions that go against the treaty's guarantees of "equal liberty of access and entry," the Foreign Ministry said.

"We expect a positive reply from the Norwegian side," it said.

Of particular concern, Moscow listed issues including a deportation procedure exclusively for Russian nationals, the establishment of a fish protection zone it called illegal and the "expansion of nature protection zones that limit economic activity."

It also pointed to restrictions on the use of a Russian helicopter and said there were also several other problems.

"We do not intend to curtail our presence there. On the contrary, we have long-term plans for strengthening, diversifying and modernizing it," it said.

The Norwegian foreign ministry confirmed receiving the letter, but said Moscow's grievances were well known.

"The issues put forward in the letter are regularly raised by Russia and are well-known to Norwegian authorities," the ministry said in an email to Reuters.

"All activities in Svalbard must take place in accordance with Norwegian law," it added, without giving further details.

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