

Russia to Replace Helicopters With Drones in Inhospitable Arctic

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At least two major Russian companies have developed and begun tests of helicopter drones with higher payloads and longer ranges adapted for the Arctic. **Vladimir Smirnov / TASS**

Russian companies are racing to send drones into the Arctic as the country expands its foothold in the forbidding region and climate change gradually opens shipping lanes, experts [told](#) Forbes magazine.

Manned crews in the Arctic face aircraft icing, volatile sea ice and extreme temperatures without support or communications infrastructure, the U.S. defense think tank RAND has explained.

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Russian state industrial conglomerate Rostec is the latest player to enter the unmanned aerial vehicles market, with one of its subsidiaries [announcing](#) last week a partnership with a Latvian startup to make tiltrotor convertiplanes for the Arctic.

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Russian researchers are [looking](#) into ways to make drones fly for four straight days and take off and land vertically at top speed, while the government is funding university-level research into Arctic UAVs.

The Russian military said last month it was [considering](#) using attack drones to protect its national borders in remote parts of the Arctic and the Far East.

Drones in the Arctic are attractive for their potential to save both money and lives, Center for Naval Analyses adviser Samuel Bendett told Forbes.

“A tiltrotor aircraft offers the advantages of both helicopter and aircraft in terms of lift capacity, in-flight stability and airspeed,” he said.

“The Russian industry and military is turning to unmanned systems specifically developed for the Arctic weather conditions as a way to save money, expand capabilities and prevent potential human pilot losses.”

Bendett predicted that Russia will step up investments in its Arctic infrastructure to tap the region’s rich natural resources and secure a coveted shipping lane known as the Northern Sea Route.

Ice in Russia’s Arctic waters [disappeared](#) last summer, further increasing the Northern Sea Route’s accessibility to container ships.

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