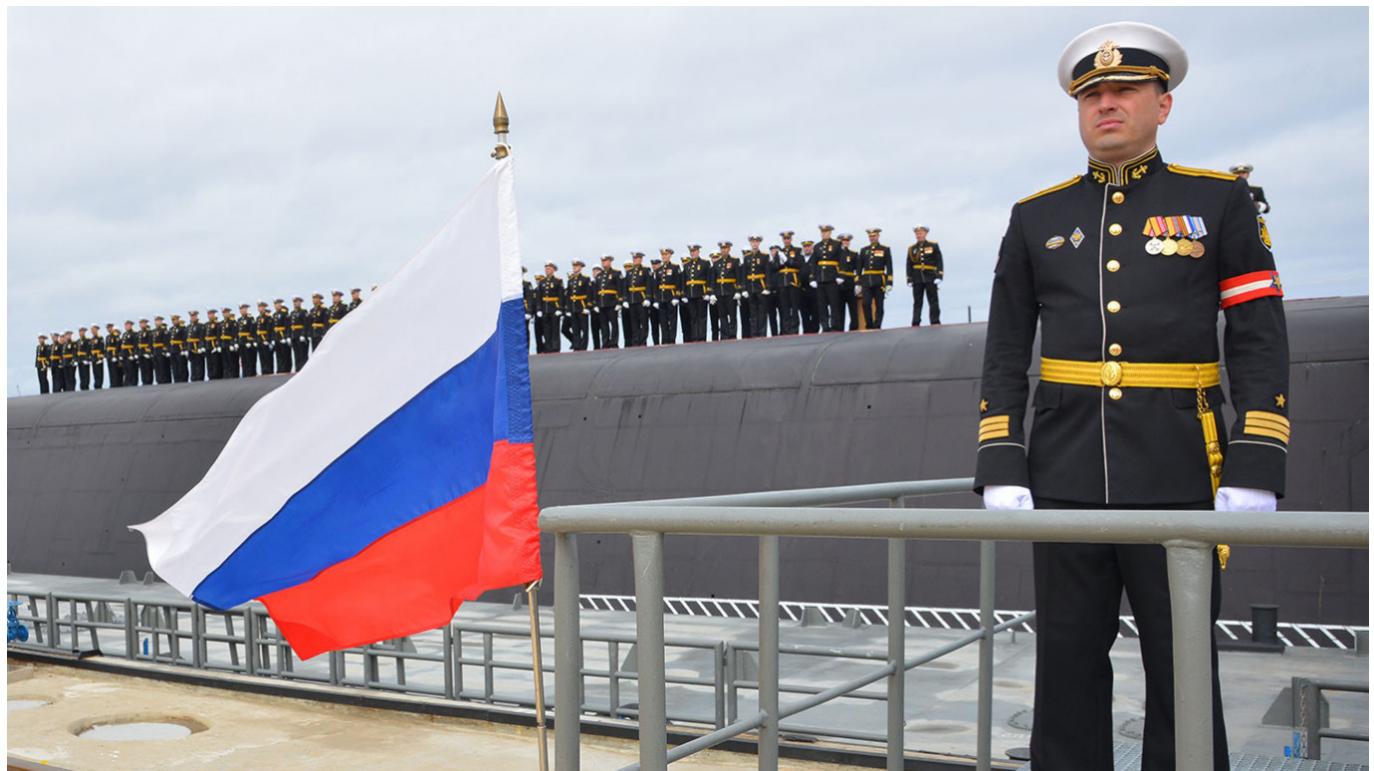


Russia Kicks Off Arctic Military Drills to Secure Sea Route

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Some 8,000 troops, 120 aircraft and 50 warships have been deployed across Russia's strategic shipping lane in the fast-melting Arctic. **Sevmash Shipbuilding Company / TASS**

Russia's military has [kicked off](#) Arctic drills to secure a key navigation route Thursday against the backdrop of major exercises held simultaneously in neighbor Belarus.

Some 8,000 troops, 120 aircraft and 50 warships have been deployed across waters abutting the entire stretch of Russia's vast northern coast, according to the Russian Armed Forces' Northern Fleet.

"The practical actions of the Northern Fleet troops will take place in the waters of the Barents, Kara, Chukchi, East Siberian and Laptev seas, New Siberian Islands and the Franz Josef Land archipelago," Interfax quoted the fleet as saying.

The drills will see the establishment of an 800-piece Arctic unit consisting of 40 tanks, 460 armored combat vehicles and up to 240 weapons, mortars and multiple launch rocket systems, it added.

Related article: [Russian Emergencies Minister Dies in Arctic Drills](#)

“The Northern Fleet will conduct practical actions to protect the communications of the Northern Sea Route, secure and defend the fleet’s posts,” the fleet said, referring to Russia’s strategic shipping lane in the fast-melting Arctic.

The fleet added that the drills will also involve “the study of possible areas of combat operations and conditions for the use of various fleet forces in the western and eastern Arctic sea zones.”

No timeframe has been provided for the Arctic drills, but state media [reported](#) in August that the Northern Fleet vessels left their home base in Severomorsk for a two-month mission.

The military exercises come on the heels of major Arctic-wide civil defense drills led by Russia’s Emergency Situations Ministry. Those civil defense drills — the first of their kind in Russia — were marked by tragedy Wednesday when Emergency Situations Minister Yevgeny Zinichev [died](#) while carrying out his duties.

Also on Thursday, Russia and Belarus kicked off Zapad-2021 military drills in both countries involving some 200,000 troops, 760 tanks and multiple launch rocket systems, as well as 80 aircraft and 15 warships.

NATO is expected to closely monitor Zapad-2021 amid tensions between Moscow and the West.

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