



Arctic Portion of Tsentr-2019

OE Watch Commentary: As promised, the Northern Sea Fleet added an Arctic portion to the major Tsentr 2019 exercise far to the south. As the first accompanying passage discusses, this was the first time that an exercise of this kind was held on Bolshevik Island, located by the entrance to the Vilkitsky Strait, the waterway used by ships sailing on the Northern Sea Route. According to the passage, they conducted an amphibious landing, which involved Navy divers, helicopter aviation, and landing craft and vehicles. Earlier, this force was involved in a larger riverine landing from the north-flowing Arctic Yenisei River. Although remote to the much larger Tsentr 2019 exercise, it secured the northern flank of Central Russia and tested communications and command and control over a very extensive area. The landing was part of the summer training program. It was staged here because the landing area is on the periphery of a potential chokepoint on the Northern Sea Route—the Vilkitsky Strait. As the second passage reports, Russia is spending some serious money (\$19 million) to construct a radar installation south of the landing site to help control the area. (Also see: “Center 2019: More than a Military Exercise,” *OE Watch*, October 2019) **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**



Bolshevik Island.

Source: Kennorv via Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Severnaya_Zemlya.svg, Public domain

“More than 500 soldiers were involved in the exercise that... took place on the Bolshevik island, the piece of land that separates the Kara Sea and Laptev Sea. The training came shortly before Russia launched this year’s biggest drills, the Tsentr-2019.”

Source: Atle Staalesen, “As Russia launches war games Tsentr-2019, Arctic troops advance on Bolshevik Island,” *Barents Sea Independent Observer*, 16 September 2019. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2019/09/revanchist-forces-advance-bolshevik-island>

A team of armed divers first made it to the Arctic shore and was soon followed by two high-speed light boats and two Ka-27 helicopters. Large landing vessels Aleksandr Otrakovsky and Kondopoga subsequently put 10 BTR-82A amphibious vehicles and troops ashore. The large anti-submarine vessel Vice-Admiral Kulakov was nearby on station.

Reportedly this is the first time that an exercise of this kind was held on the 11,300 square kilometer large island located by the entrance to the Vilkitsky Strait, the waterway used by ships sailing on the Northern Sea Route. The Bolshevik island is located at 78 degrees North and constitutes the southern part of archipelago Severnaya Zemlya.

The exercise was held as part of an ongoing major voyage of the Northern Fleet vessels. The ships set out from the Kola Peninsula in early August and several exercises have subsequently followed including the [Riverine landing on the] Taymyr Peninsula.

Following the drills in the Bolshevik Island, the troops proceeded towards the island of Uyedineniya in the Kara Sea.

Source: Atle Staalesen, “New Major Radar to be built a Russia’s northernmost point,” *Barents Sea Independent Observer*, 17 September 2019. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/arctic-security/2019/09/new-major-radar-be-built-russias-northernmost-point>

The facility is to be built in 33 months. A tender on its development was recently announced by Rosgranstroy, the federal border development authority. The project is officially called “Radio-technical point Chelyuskin” and includes a cost frame of 1.2 billion rubles (€17 million). The radar installation is classified as a military project and few details are known about the contract. Cape Chelyuskin is the northernmost point on the Russian mainland. It is located on the coast of the Taymyr Peninsula, where the Vilkitsky Strait separates the mainland with the archipelago of Severnaya Zemlya. Practically all shipping along the Northern Sea Route runs through the Strait and it is consequently considered a strategically key point in Russian Arctic development.