



Russian Coastal Defense Division Forming to Protect Chukotka Peninsula and Northeast Entry to North Sea Route

OE Watch Commentary: According to the excerpted article from the pro-Kremlin daily *Izvestia*, a Russian Coastal Defense Division will protect the northeast entry into Russia's Arctic northern sea route. The Northern Fleet controls the western approaches to Russia's northern sea route through most of its Arctic coastline and waters. The article indicates the dividing line between the Northern and Pacific fleets' areas of responsibility is Wrangel Island. The United States disputes Russian claims to much of the Arctic Ocean and northern sea route as national waters, stating that they are international waters not under Russian jurisdiction. The weakest Russian control of this vast area has been the northeast entry point. The establishment of a coastal defense division is designed to strengthen Russian claims in this area. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

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Source: Anton Lavrov and Roman Kretsul, “Нужен берег чукотский: северо-восток России защитит новая дивизия (New division protects northeast Russia’s Chukotka shores),” *Izvestia* (pro-Kremlin daily), 4 February 2021.

<https://iz.ru/1120276/roman-kretcul-anton-lavrov-aleksei-ramm/nuzhen-bereg-chukotskii-severo-vostok-rossii-zashchitit-novaia-diviziia>

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Sources in the Military Department told Izvestiya that the formation of the division began at the end of last year. The first coastal defense regiment has already been deployed on Chukotka. Monitoring the coast along the Northern Maritime Route is its important mission. The unit that is being formed in the region, where snow lies and strong winds blow for nine months in the year, will get special equipment - snowmobiles, modular life support systems, and the mobile field kitchen all-terrain vehicles. When the division will be completely manned and ready to perform its mission has not been announced.

Minister of Defense Sergey Shoygu discussed the creation of a division on Chukotka in 2016. Unique subunits would use four and six-wheeled ATVs to patrol the coast and to prevent the landing of saboteurs. In the event of a large-scale enemy amphibious assault, the arctic infantry would rapidly advance to the threatened axis and join the battle from the march. In December 2020, the Defense Minister reported on the formation of the first regiment in the region. xxxx

According to military expert Vikton Murakhovskiy, “The division will be able to cover the Air Defense facilities, which are deployed in the region. But the main mission is to support navigation along the Northern Maritime Route. The transit of some Northern Fleet ships to the Pacific Ocean along this route was part of the “Vostok-2018” Exercises. This is a major strategic mission for the Navy, which has four fleets. It is important to have a formation on Chukotka, which is capable of providing both defense and the coverage of this axis.”

According to Admiral Valentin Selivanov, the former Chief of the Russian Navy Main Staff, with the creation of the division on Chukotka, navigation along the Northern Maritime Route will become safer. “A division - is the most powerful tactical formation, which is capable of operating independently. It can accomplish various missions. Foreign vessels, especially military ships, cannot sail along the Northern Maritime Route without Russia’s authorization. If some vessel violates this rule, our servicemen will be able to board it from a helicopter or from small craft and conduct an inspection.

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Chukotka has once again become a center of military activity in the country’s northeast during the last five years. The renovation of Ugolnyy Airfield in Anadyr supports all types of aircraft and helicopters. They not only provide the defense of the borders but are also involved in the supply of the more remote garrisons.

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In December of 2020, the Ministry of Defense reported on the initiation of permanent combat alert at Anadyr by Naval Aviation MiG-31BM fighter-interceptors from the aviation regiment on Kamchatka. UAV subunits with “Orlan-10” and “Forpost” drones have also been performing alert duty at Ugolnyy for several years. They permit the monitoring of not only the peninsula but also its coastal waters.

A composite army aviation detachment has been located on Kamchatka for five years. Mi-8 And Mi-26 transport helicopters assist in the supply of the subunits on Mys Shmidta and on Wrangel Island. They have tested the latest arctic modification of the Mi-8AMTSh-VA, which was specially developed for operation in the most difficult conditions of the Far North.

Russia has been actively strengthening the Navy’s coastal forces in recent years. The naval infantry formation has been reorganized and transformed into rapid reaction troops, which are capable of operating throughout the entire world. They are upgrading the Coastal Missile-Artillery Troops from the obsolete “Redut” and “Rubezh” complexes to the latest “Bastion” and “Bal” complexes. Furthermore, state-of-the-art battalions are being formed and the coastal missile regiments are being transformed into full-fledged brigades.