



Russia Bolstering Arctic Air Umbrella

OE Watch Commentary: Russia continues to strengthen its northern border with significant air defense and anti-shipping capability. According to an unattributed article in *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye*, a weekly newspaper supplement to *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Russian MiG-31 interceptor aircraft are now operational in the far Arctic reaches of the Novaya Zemlya Archipelago. The presence of MiG-31s significantly enhances security on the western approach to the Russian Northern Sea Route. The improved air posture also extends over the Northern Sea Route and the North Pole approach to Russia. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

“Russia has constructed an air umbrella over the northern and northwestern parts of the Northern Sea Route but its combat capabilities in the Polar Regions will be further strengthened in the near future. And unlike the Soviet-era 10th Air Defense Army, its air assets in the Arctic are small and compact but effective and multirole. Their combat capabilities are more than enough to parry any military threats in the region.”



Kara Sea map featuring Severnaya Zemlya.

Source: Created by Norman Einstein, November 29, 2005, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kara_Sea_map.png, Attribution: CC By-SA 3.0 <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/deed.en>



Continued: Russia Bolstering Arctic Air Umbrella

Source: “Крылья Арктики (Wings over the Arctic),” *Nezavisimoye Voyennoye Obozreniye* (a weekly newspaper supplement to *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* published since 1996, with an estimated circulation of 12,000), 18 February 2021. https://nvo.ng.ru/nvo/2021-02-18/5_1129_aviation.html

MiG-31 heavy interceptors commenced combat alert duty on Novaya Zemlya in January of this year.

... According to Russia's Defense Ministry, having the MiG-31s on combat alert duty will substantially extend the reach of the Northern Fleet's fighter aviation in the Arctic and the airspace it can control above the Northern Sea Route.

... For the first time since the collapse of the Soviet Union, there is an aviation group of forces in the Arctic that should resolve a large number of issues.

One of the primary tasks of the 45th Army is to protect the military bases, industry, and social infrastructure on the Kola Peninsula and in Arkhangel'skaya Oblast. Another priority is to cover the North Pole direction. American strategic aviation has been holding training exercises there for the past few years. In August of last year six B-52 bombers conducted joint maneuvers with Norwegian F-16 fighters.

The current composition of the 45th Air Force and Air Defense Army includes three fighter regiments. The 98th Composite Regiment is based at Monchegorsk, and the 279th and 100th

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The 279th Regiment's third squadron has flown Su-30SM fighters since 2016. ... It also has two squadrons of MiG-31 heavy supersonic interceptors.

Each MiG-31 squadron has its own mission. One guards the airspace over the Kola Peninsula, including the bases of nuclear and ICBM submarines, and operates in conjunction with the MiG-29Ks, Su-33s, and Su-30SMs of the two naval aviation regiments.

The second squadron will be rotating to various polar region airfields beginning this year. And the MiG-31Bs of the 98th Regiment's second squadron now have combat alert duty on Novaya Zemlya. The plan is that these interceptors will subsequently use other bases.

The Defense Ministry announced late last year that 19 airfields in the Arctic have been refurbished or rebuilt since 2016. All-weather year-round runways are being built on Ostrov Zemlya Aleksandry on the Franz Josef Land Archipelago and on Ostrov Kotel'nyy in the New Siberian Islands, which can support the combat as well as the transport aircraft that keep the bases supplied.

... If the situation were to escalate, MiG-31s of the 98th Regiment's second squadron would be tactically dispersed across the Northern Fleet strategic command's zone of responsibility and have sufficient assets to cover the entire Northern Sea Route and the Novaya Zemlya Archipelago, and also to present an obstacle to strategic bombers and cruise missiles coming across the North Pole.

The MiG-31s will be supported by the Arctic bases that Russia has built on islands in the Arctic Ocean, including the “Arctic Shamrock” and “Northern Clover.” These have long-range radar stations to provide early warning of attack and to support the interception of airborne targets.

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The arrival of Su-34s and MiG-31Ks with Kinzhals will fundamentally alter the balance of forces in the Polar Regions. These aircraft will be able to effectively strike at the bases, headquarters, control rooms, and other important facilities of the likely adversary on the western flank and their new weapon systems will give them total control of the entire Northern Sea Route. The Su-34s and MiG-31Ks will be able to quickly and efficiently rout a hostile naval task force, even if it has modern air defenses. And when necessary can rapidly deploy to other airfields in the Arctic, including those on the islands.

Russia has constructed an air umbrella over the northern and northwestern parts of the Northern Sea Route but its combat capabilities in the Polar Regions will be further strengthened in the near future. And unlike the Soviet-era 10th Air Defense Army, its air assets in the Arctic are small and compact but effective and multirole. Their combat capabilities are more than enough to parry any military threats in the region.