

## Three Russian Submarines Surface Simultaneously Near North Pole

By Les Grau  
OE Watch Commentary

Russia continues to demonstrate an increased military and security commitment to the Arctic region. According to an article from *Zvezda Weekly*, a Russian Ministry of Defense publication, the Russian Navy recently completed the Umka-21 expedition. The Umka-21 expedition is billed as a joint expedition between the Russian Federation Navy and Russian Geographic Society. According to the article, the expedition pulled off a remarkable piece of underwater choreography as three strategic missile nuclear submarines simultaneously broke through 1.5 meters of polar ice and surfaced within 300 meters of each other. A Ministry of Defense video release captured the event. *The Independent Barents Observer*, an independent Norwegian internet news service in Russian and English, which is now blocked in Russia, concluded that the expedition was Russia's most complex military exercise in the Arctic to date. In addition to the headline grabbing submarine movements, the article claims there were a total of 43 unique components to the exercise, including air, air defense, and



**The sail of one of the Delta-IV class ballistic missile submarines breaking through the ice.**

Source: <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2021/03/three-russian-nuclear-ballistic-missile-subs-broke-through-ice-north-pole>, Attribution: Screenshot from Russian Ministry of Defense video from Barents Sea Observer article

ground forces. The event also included a tactical exercise conducted by a unit of the Arctic motorized rifle brigade that was intended to challenge soldiers in difficult weather conditions and in unfamiliar terrain.

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**Source:** “Ludmila Gundarova, “Umka-21-Showing the Andrew Flag with a subtle hint of missiles,” *Zvezda Weekly* (a Russian Ministry of Defense publication that is part of the Krasnaya Zvezda group of publications), 30 March 2021. <https://zvezdaweb.ru/news/20213291639-EzNZP.html>

*While discussing the unofficial results of the joint arctic expedition of the Russian Navy and the Russian Geographic Society, Vice-Admiral Anatoliy Shevchenko stated that the Russian nuclear submarines that surfaced near the North Pole graphically demonstrated that it is actually not that far to the United States of America. One can boldly state that these crews have circled the globe. On 26 March, three Russian nuclear submarines, having broken through 1.5 meter-thick ice, simultaneously surfaced in the high polar latitudes. After which, Navy Commander-in-Chief Nikolay Yevmenov promptly reported to Vladimir Putin on the accomplishment of the primary mission of the “Umka-21” Arctic Expedition.... A total of 600 military and civilian specialists participated in the polar military research event and 200 items of equipment were utilized.*

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*The fact that three nuclear submarine cruisers, surfaced through the polar ice at the same time at a distance of 300 meters from each other is a strong statement. But then, there have been even more complicated cruises under the arctic ice in the history of the domestic submarine fleet. But it was strictly prohibited to talk about them in the past...*

*But the most impressive thing is that Anatoliy Ivanovich Shevchenko was the captain of both of those submarines. Later, having transferred into the reserve as a vice-admiral, he developed the procedures for training nuclear submarine crews for the conduct of combat under the arctic ice. The Admiral's last duty station was the “Naval Academy” Training Center in Obninsk, where our most famous Arctic Submariner - the only one who has been at the North Pole three times and who conquered the pole of inaccessibility - trained missile submarine crews.*

*President Putin stated that the “Umka-21” Arctic Expedition has no precedent in history*

*Vice-Admiral Anatoliy Shevchenko stated: “We demonstrated that we have not forfeited the school of arctic cruises. This is not the first instance*

## Continued: Three Russian Submarines Surface Simultaneously Near North Pole

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*when several ships have participated in these operations at the same time. We simply try to talk a bit less about this and to do our work. I recall how US President George Bush and behind him his National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice announced to the entire world that apparently the Russians “have steered clear of the Arctic”. But we undertook and fired missiles from the North Pole a couple of months later....Well, there’s your “have steered clear” and there’s your “forfeited the school of arctic cruises”...*

*It is customary for the Americans to shout to the entire world about how tough they are, but we are operating without any ado and with few words. We have a different nature, and we have different ethical standards. But if the mission has been assigned, we will accomplish it.*

*[Reporter Gundarova] “one can certainly consider the event in the Arctic ice of 26 March to be showing the flag. But didn’t we go overboard with the number of flags during the “Umka-21” Exercises - three at once? You certainly wanted to make a stronger impression on the Americans and, as they say, to bring to bear on their psyche?*

*[Shevchenko] Partners... The Americans call us enemies without any hesitation whatsoever, but why do we hesitate to call them that same thing? And they are worse than enemies, they are malefactors and hypocrites! They want to be better than others, higher than others, and, I think, they will never calm down. And only not everything is turning out for them. Something has turned out for us, but for the time being the crews are still at sea, and it is early to make definitive conclusions on the Arctic Expedition.*

**Source:** Thomas Nilsen, “Three nuclear ballistic missile subs surfaced simultaneously through the ice in complex Russian Arctic exercise,” *The Independent Barents Observer* (an independent Norwegian internet news service in Russian and English which is now blocked in Russia), 26 March 2021. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2021/03/three-russian-nuclear-ballistic-missile-subs-broke-through-ice-north-pole>

*Exercise Umka-21 is Russia’s most complex military drill in the high Arctic, involving fighter jets, torpedo shootings and Arctic brigade soldiers training warfare on Franz Josef Land. “As part of the Arctic expedition, three nuclear-powered submarines surfaced from under the ice inside an area with a radius of 300 meters for the first time in the history of the Russian navy,” said Admiral Nikolay Yevmenov in a direct video-call with President Vladimir Putin in Moscow.*

*The three submarines, two Delta-IV class and one Borei class can carry up to 16 ballistic missiles each. It is assumed each missile can be armed with four to six nuclear individual warheads (up to 64 to 96 on each sub), bringing the total number of nuclear warheads surfacing in the high Arctic to more than 200.*

*Russia’s comprehensive Arctic military drill began on March 20th. “Under the leadership of the Headquarters of the Navy, the integrated Arctic expedition Umka-2021 is being conducted. For the first time, in accordance with a single concept and plan, complex combat training, research and practical measures of various directions is carried out in the circumpolar region.” Admiral Yevmenov stated in his video link to the President’s office. “A total of 43 events have taken place at Franz Josef Land and the nearby ice-covered waters in the frame of the exercise. Also, a tactical exercise was conducted for a unit of the Arctic motorized rifle brigade in difficult weather conditions, in unfamiliar terrain away from the main base.*

*The main base is located at Nagurskoye on the Aleksandra Island where Russia recently upgraded the airport with a 2,500-meter long runway capable of serving both fighter jets and larger military transport planes for year-round flights. Temperatures reached minus 25 to 30 degrees Celsius during the exercise and wind was up to 32 meters per second.*

*Simultaneously as the soldiers were training on the archipelago and the submarines were sailing under the ice-cap and shooting torpedoes, a pair of MiG-31 fighter jets were in the skies above the North Pole. The flight included mid-air refueling.*



**In 2016, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov instituted sweeping changes that have reorganized the country’s security forces and reestablished the nation’s military prowess. This study, *Kremlin Kontrol*, aims to describe how control over the security services and the military have hastened those changes.**

<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/ml/fmso-books/197266/download>