



China Adding Nuclear-powered Icebreakers in the Arctic

OE Watch Commentary: China conducted a successful campaign to gain observer status in the Arctic Council and has been involved in a variety of Arctic programs, including exploration, navigation, undersea mapping, scientific research, and the acquisition of liquefied natural gas from the Yamal Peninsula area. Chinese Arctic contacts are not exclusive to Russia. China is involved in the Finnish-Norwegian railroad extension to the Arctic coast that would shorten transit time and open up Central and Eastern European markets for Chinese goods transiting the Northeast Passage along Russia's borders. Now China will add a nuclear-powered icebreaker support ship to its expanding Arctic icebreaker effort as reported by the accompanying excerpt from *The Barents Observer*. China intends to be a player in the Arctic, and evidently not just a bit player. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

“China’s only current ocean-going icebreaker, the ‘Xue Long’ (Snow Dragon) is an icebreaking research vessel. Last summer, the ship sailed the entire Arctic rim with several stops.”

Source: Thomas Nilsen, “China Opens Bids For First Nuclear Powered Icebreaker,” *The Barents Observer*, 27 June 2018. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/arctic/2018/06/china-opens-bids-first-nuclear-powered-icebreaker>

The ship will be an “icebreaker support ship” indicating a multi-purpose vessel that does more than simply breaking the ice for other vessels in convoy. China’s only current ocean-going icebreaker, the “Xue Long” (Snow Dragon) is an icebreaking research vessel. Last summer, the ship sailed the entire Arctic rim with several stops... where the on-board scientists worked on different ice and climate-related research projects.

Today, Russia is the only country in the world that operates a fleet of civilian nuclear-powered vessels; four icebreakers and one container ship, all with Murmansk as their homeport. Three new, even more powerful, nuclear-powered icebreakers are under construction.

China has experience in naval nuclear propulsion from their in-service fleet of six military submarines of three different classes.

Song Zhongping, a military expert, stated that the new icebreaker’s reactor can be applied to a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier once updated. Also, nuclear-power could also be applied to other military vessels, allowing them to sail longer distances on the world oceans.

China’s interest in the Arctic is growing and in January the country issued its first white paper on its Arctic policy. China is already actively investing in Russian petroleum development and several huge-scale infrastructure projects including railway and deep-sea port in Arkhangelsk.

The white paper states that China aims to participate “in the exploration for and exploitation of oil, gas, mineral and other non-living resources”.... and stresses the importance of working together with other Arctic states.

Join the Army and See the Snow

OE Watch Commentary: So, you are an eighteen year-old able-bodied Russian lad from the City of Arkhangelsk, located just south of the Arctic Circle. It gets cold and stays cold during the long winter. Your government is calling you up for a year of mandatory military service. It is going to be a tough year, but you hope that at least it will provide a change of scenery- perhaps in the sunny south... But your orders come and you are going north to the island archipelago of Novaya Zemlya in the Arctic Ocean- the farthest north point in Europe. As the accompanying excerpted article from *The Barents Observer* reports, 170 young men were conscripted “from the Arkhangelsk region” and “were told prepare for transfer to Novaya Zemlya” in the Arctic. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

“Earlier this year, the Commander of the Northern Fleet, also in charge of Russia’s Arctic Brigades, said Novaya Zemlya is a top priority for 2018.”

Source: Thomas Nilsen, “170 Recruits Sent To Novaya Zemlya,” *The Barents Observer*, 6 July 2018. <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2018/07/170-recruits-sent-novaya-zemlya>

During the first week of July, 170 young men from the Arkhangelsk region, called up for mandatory military service, were told prepare for transfer to Novaya Zemlya.... They should be ready for severe tests in the Arctic with winter temperatures down to minus 40 degrees Celsius [also -40° Fahrenheit] and Polar Night for most of the winter.

The 170 conscripts were among the 1,500 young men from Arkhangelsk region called to do military service. The others went to serve in the navy, army, air force and Rosgvardia – the Russian government’s internal military force reporting directly to the President.

Conscription is a mandatory 12-month draft for all male Russian citizens ages 18 to 27. The service was ... reduced from 24 months to 18 months in 1993 and to 12 months in 2008...

At Novaya Zemlya, the main military settlement is Belushya Bay on the southern of the two islands. Nearby is the newly renovated and upgraded Rogachevo air base. Earlier this year, the Commander of the Northern Fleet, also in charge of Russia’s Arctic Brigades, said Novaya Zemlya is a top priority for 2018