



The Arctic Will Have Prominent Role in 2019 Operational-Strategic Exercise “Center”

OE Watch Commentary: The Central Operational Strategic Command (and Military District) borders Central Asia and China in the south, the Arctic in the north, the Eastern Operational Strategic Command in the east and the Western Operational Command in the west. Its ground forces are deployed along Russia’s southern border. Every year, Russia rotates its major strategic exercise among the Southern (Kavkaz), Western (Zapad), Eastern (Vostok), and Central (Tsentr) Military Districts. This year, it is the Central Military District’s turn in August and September, according to the accompanying excerpt from *Izvestia*. Although the exercise will focus on the Central Military District, it will be a nationwide exercise and possibly involve Chinese and Central Asian participation. The Arctic borders the Central Military District and the Northern Fleet Operational Strategic Command has conducted several significant exercises on its Arctic territory. The Northern Fleet Operational Strategic Command will play a major role with its 14th Army Corps, Aerospace Forces and Fleet.

The 200th Separate Coastal Motorized Rifle Brigade and the 80th Arctic Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade will evidently disembark and maneuver on the Novaya Zemlya Archipelago. The 61st Naval Infantry Brigade and the Northern Fleet’s Tactical Group (based on the New Siberian Islands Archipelago) will probably conduct amphibious landings in the New Siberian Islands Archipelago. Part of the Pacific Fleet, which controls the eastern entrance to the Northern Maritime Route, will probably join the Northern Fleet in Arctic naval maneuvers.

What will likely be missing from these maneuvers is Russia’s sole aircraft carrier. In late October 2018, the *Admiral Kuznetsov* was leaving dry dock in Murmansk when its floating dry dock sank and a 70-ton crane fell onto the vessel and punched a four-by-five meter hole into its deck. The Swedish-built dry dock is the only Russian dry dock that can handle the *Admiral Kuznetsov*. How long it will take to salvage and repair the 330-meter long dry dock is unknown, but a year is a conservative guess. The *Admiral Kuznetsov* was undergoing extensive rebuild and modernization which was scheduled for completion in 2021. The accident has put the carrier bilge repairs on hold for at least six months and how long this accident will delay repairs of the carrier completion is guesswork. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grua)**

“The Tsentr-2019 Exercises will also prove a large-scale inspection of the effectiveness of the Armed Forces Arctic Grouping.”

Source: Aleksandr Kruglov and Aleksey Ramm, “В Арктике будет жарко: войска испытывают Крайним Севером (It Will Be Hot in the Arctic: The Troops Are Being Tested by the Far North),” *Izvestia*, 18 December 2018. <https://iz.ru/822691/aleksandr-kruglov-aleksei-ramm/v-arktike-budet-zharko-voiska-ispytaiut-krainim-severom>

A Ministry of Defense spokesman stated that the Tsentr-2019 Strategic Exercises will occur in August-September of next year. Several important exercise phases will occur in the Arctic Region on the territory from Novaya Zemlya to the Novosibirsk Islands. The infrastructure for the maneuvers is being prepared right now. Port and mooring areas are being built for troop redeployment.

The manpower of the Northern Operational-Strategic Command will be involved in the exercises to the maximum extent possible. Two arctic motorized rifle brigades will “fight” at full strength. The ground forces will have to operate under difficult climactic conditions. They will pay special attention to the accomplishment of tactical missions and also to rear services and maintenance support in the Arctic.

The defense of the Northern Maritime Route is a priority and its defense should be rehearsed during the exercises.

According to Military Historian Dmitriy Boltenkov, “Pacific Fleet forces will certainly participate. Northern Fleet forces passed through the Bering Strait into the Pacific Ocean and participated in the maneuvers at the Vostok-2018 Exercises. It is possible that Pacific Fleet ships will conduct a ‘return visit’ to the northern seas next year. Air Defense forces will deploy and bomber aviation will mass. The arctic motorized riflemen and naval infantry will be on alert and load onto ships so they can rehearse offensive and defensive combat in the Polar Region.”

The maneuvers will verify the capabilities of the armored vehicles, which have been specially developed for the region. Tor-M2DT and Pantsir-SA air defense systems, MT-LBV and BTR-82A armored vehicles, the T-80BV tank, and the Toros fire support and escort armored vehicle will be exercised. The DT-10PM and DT-30PM all-terrain vehicles will demonstrate their capabilities.

Northern Fleet ships, nuclear submarines, and Naval Aviation will participate in the exercises, as will coastal forces, including Bastion anti-shipping missile systems.

The Tsentr-2019 Exercises will also prove a large-scale inspection of the effectiveness of the Armed Forces Arctic Grouping. According to Military Expert Viktor Murakhovskiy:

“A full-fledged air, naval surface, and underwater situation monitoring system has been created in the Arctic. We need to maintain this system in a combat ready state. The grouping’s strategic mission is to guarantee the security of navigation along the Northern Maritime Route. Control of this area also permits us to efficiently conduct the regrouping of the Navy’s forces and to redeploy ships from the Northern Fleet to the Pacific Fleet and back along the shortest route. That regrouping was already conducted this year during the Vostok-2018 maneuvers.”

The exercise is also a test of the aerospace defense system and the coordination between the ground grouping and the Navy. Special Operations Forces and Naval Infantry will play a very important role in the exercises. According to Military Expert Vladislav Shurygin, the arctic summer is challenging... It is extremely difficult to move along the tundra because, having been freed from the ice, it is transformed into a continuous swamp. “It is impossible to involve a major ground grouping in these exercises...but they don’t fight using divisions and armies in the Arctic. Summer and the beginning of fall – is the most favorable time for the Navy because the waters of the coastal sea will be ice free”...