



Implications of the Northern Fleet Assuming Military District Status

OE Watch Commentary: The Northern Joint Strategic Command (OSK-North) is an experimental inter-service combined strategic formation headquartered in Severomorsk. The command was formed on 1 December 2014 to defend Russia's national interests in the Arctic. The accompanying article from *Izvestiya* discusses Russia's plans to upgrade the status of OSK-North, so that it is also considered a Military District.

OSK-North was carved out of the Western OSK, consisting of the Komi Republic, Nenets Autonomous Okrug, Arkhangelsk Oblast, and Murmansk Oblast. In terms of military assets, OSK-North became responsible for most Ministry of Defense assets on these territories; and a few additional units were transferred to the command from the Central and Eastern OSKs. In regard to military assets, the commands assets can generally be described in terms of sea, land, air and components. The sea component consists of the North Sea Fleet, the Belomorsk Naval Base, and Flotilla. The land component is in the newly formed (2017) 14th Army Corps, which controls the 80th Motorized Rifle Brigade (Alakurtti) and 200th Motorized Rifle Brigade (Pechenga), the 61st Naval Infantry Brigade, and supporting units. The Air component is in the 45th Air and Air Defense Army, which consists of the 1st and 3rd Air Defense Divisions, and the 98th Composite Aviation Regiment, and supporting units.

When OSK-North was formed Russia chose not duplicate the same command and control structures that was found in the other OSKs. Instead of creating a brand new staff element (joint headquarters) to provide command and control, Russia has chosen to simply augment the Northern Fleet. Another difference is that although the OSK-North was considered a 'Joint Strategic Command', it is not considered a Military District (MD) as the other four OSKs. According to the accompanying article from *Izvestiya*, this situation may change as Russia is now planning to upgrade the status of OSK-North, so it is also considered a Military District. Apparently, according to the article, Russia's experimentation with not basing an OSK on joint headquarters has been deemed a success, as it is seen as reducing the overhead associated with (large) joint headquarters, but having sufficient capabilities to command and control a OSK/MD. Although OSK-North is the only OSK/MD in this situation, there has been discussion of forming new Russian OSKs/MDs due to the current commands being too large to effectively control, especially if engaged in front-level operations. (There has been recent speculation that OSKs will be responsible for front-level command and control during large-scale combat operations.) If Russia decides to form any new OSKs/MDs, they could be based upon the OSK-North model.

End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)



Admiral Nikolay Yevmenov.

Source: Mil.ru via Wikimedia, https://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Евменов,_Николай_Анатольевич#/media/File:Nikolaj_Evmenov,_2016.jpg, CC BY 4.0

“The experience of the experimental combined formation was deemed a success ... [and] resulted in the Defense Ministry deciding to elevate its status.” -Military expert Anton Lavrov

Source: Aleksey Ramm, Alexey Kozachenko, Bogdan Stepovoy, “Северный флот получит статус отдельного военного округа (Northern Fleet to Assume Military District Status),” *Izvestiya* Online, 19 April 2019. <https://iz.ru/869512/aleksei-ramm-aleksei-kozachenko-bogdan-stepovoi/poliarnoe-vliianie-severnoy-flot-poluchit-status-voennogo-okruga>

The Defense Ministry is prepared to alter the status of the Northern Fleet Joint Strategic Command (OSK-North), as of December it will be an independent military-administrative entity equal in importance to a military district. Izvestiya Defense Ministry sources say that Admiral Nikolay Yevmenov will continue to command the fleet.

Izvestiya sources in the Northern Fleet command say that the OSK-North was until recently essentially an experimental combined formation: it was studied whether it could accomplish assignments involving defense of Russian interests in the Arctic region. Large-scale two-month exercises, at which interaction of the navy, aviation, and ground troops was rehearsed, were conducted in the Northern Fleet in 2016. Ships, submarines, strategic and long-range bombers, fighters, and S-300, S-400, and Pantsir air defense systems and also motorized riflemen and naval infantry were employed in the maneuvers...The experience of the experimental combined formation was deemed a success, which it was that resulted in the Defense Ministry deciding to elevate its status, Izvestiya sources report.

Military expert Anton Lavrov believes that the decision was brought about by a search for the optimum staffing structure of the Northern Fleet. “The Defense Ministry’s decision underscores yet again that the Arctic is for us a priority military sector,” Anton Lavrov told Izvestiya.

The northern territories are deemed particularly important for Russia’s defense, military expert Viktor Murakhovskiy confirmed. “The new status reflects the special role of the navy in the Arctic,” the expert emphasized.

For defense of the Northern Sea Route (NSR) the government recently drafted special rules of watercraft’s passage. Foreign warships and vessels will now have to give Russia 45 days’ notice of their plans and compulsorily take Russian pilots on board. Passage may even be denied, and in the event of unsanctioned NSR traffic, experts believe, Russia could take extraordinary action, up to and including detention or destruction of the vessel.