

Russia Tacitly Recognizes China's Self-Proclaimed Status as a "Near-Arctic State"

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The reported Sino-Russo Coast Guard drills in the Arctic are proof of Russian support for this claim.

CNN reported last week that "[China's Coast Guard claims to have entered the Arctic Ocean for the first time as it ramps up security ties with Russia](#)", though at the time of writing, neither the Russian nor American Coast Guards confirmed their presence in the Arctic. CNN also noted that [TASS' report](#) on this only cited the China Coast Guard's (CCG) statement on its WeChat page. It's therefore dubious whether the CCG actually entered the Arctic or just remained in the Bering Sea.

This distinction is important since the perception that Sino-Russo Coast Guard drills were just carried out in the Arctic, no matter how possibly inaccurate as clarified by CNN to its credit, could [fuel the West's efforts](#) to [contain Russia along that front](#). It also adds false credence to the artificially manufactured speculation that Russia is willing to cede sovereignty rights there to China after becoming disproportionately dependent on it over the past two years since the [special operation](#) began.

About that, readers should be aware of several relevant pieces of Russian legislation for governing its Arctic maritime territory. A [2017 law](#) banned shipping oil, natural gas, and coal along the Northern Sea Route (NSR) under a foreign flag, while a [2018 one](#) mandates that these ships will also have to be built in Russia. These were complemented by a 2022 law stipulating that all foreign warships must require prior permission to transit the NSR, and only one can do so at a time. These three laws remain on the books.

Their purpose is to ensure that Russia profits as much as is realistically possible from the NSR and can properly protect its sovereignty there. China poses no threat to Russian sovereignty, but allowing its warships to operate unrestricted within Russia's territorial waters could raise the chances of an incident at sea with its Western Arctic rivals, especially the US. There's also no reason for them to be there anyhow since Russia is more than capable of ensuring security along this route on its own.

The same can be said for the CCG seeing as how the Arctic is obviously far away from the Chinese coast, but it's possible in theory that those of its icebreakers that already entered these waters [for the first time](#) over the summer could be escorted by the CCG as they lead the way for commercial vessels. If that happens, then this would likely be coordinated with Russia as part of a signal to the West as intuited by what [head of the new Maritime Board Nikolai Patrushev hinted at in an interview](#) over the summer.

This could possibly be preceded by formal naval drills in the Arctic Ocean, once again for the

same purpose of sending a signal to the West, albeit a misleading one since China isn't an Arctic naval power and it also has no mutual defense commitments to Russia like such a stunt might make some think. Those aforementioned false perceptions would be deliberately fanned in these scenarios for sending a signal to the West despite the likelihood that it would be exploited to fuel containment along this front.

Russia might conclude that there's nothing that it can do to stop these developments anyhow so it's therefore better to play along with these perceptions in order to boost its soft power across the Global South by making these countries think that it and China are jointly countering the West in the Arctic. Even in that case, however, Russia will remain the senior partner in this aspect of its relationship since it's an actual Arctic state while China claims to only be a so-called "near-Arctic" one.

China's policy is meant to ensure it a seat at the table in multilateral discussions about that body of water through which it plans to expand trade with Europe via the NSR. This is the natural evolution of its desire to play a greater role in global governance in general and specifically in all emerging frontiers like the Arctic, AI, climate change, etc. The CCG's drills with their Russian counterparts there, even if they were only in the Bering Sea, reinforces its claim as a "near-Arctic state" due to its adjacency to the Arctic.

Russia tacitly supports this claim as proven by the above, but it remains unclear whether it's comfortable with China playing a role in Arctic governance, which Russia is reluctant to internationalize since it fears that this could lead to more pressure to curtail the sovereignty rights that it enshrined into law there. All countries want to cut costs on trade so there's no reason why China wouldn't want its own natural gas, oil, and coal ships to sail along the NSR instead of having to contract Russia's for this task.

To avoid any misunderstanding, nothing is being implied about an impending problem in their strategic partnership over this issue since all that's being put forth is that they have natural differences over this issue, though they've thus far been [responsibly managed](#) and there's no reason to expect this to change. Sino-Russo cooperation in the Arctic is indisputably on pace to continue, including in the security dimension, though energy and logistical cooperation are expected to remain the drivers of this trend.

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