

Russia versus US-NATO in the Arctic: Moscow Strives for Arctic Shelf Rights

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Region: [Russia and FSU](#)

Global Research, August 06, 2010

[The Voice of Russia](#) 4 August 2010

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The cold Arctic may become a volatile region as Russia, the US and Canada are searching for evidence to support their claims for a huge territory on the Arctic shelf. Last week, a Russian expedition on board the “Academician Fyodorov” left for the Arctic. This was followed by the US Coast Guard icebreaker “Healy” and the flagship of the Canadian Coast Guard, icebreaker Luis St. Laurent”.

The demarcation of national borders on the Arctic shelf concerns its littoral states, especially, Britain, Denmark, Canada, Norway, Russia and the US. The Russian research ship will conduct geological, seismological and other studies in the Arctic for one hundred days. The results should be arguments to substantiate Russia’s claims that will be presented to the United Nations, says Vladimir Gruzdev, a Russian MP and a participant of several Arctic expeditions.

“The task of the expedition is to gather evidence in addition to those collected during the deepwater expedition of 2007. At present, the government is studying the issue in detail. We hope to gather convincing evidence to defend our rights,” said Vladimir Gruzdev.

The American and Canadian icebreakers plan to draw up a map of the Arctic bed to determine which regions can lay claims to natural resources.

Experts say that one fourth of the world’s oil and gas reserves are lying near the North Pole, and most likely, there are gold, diamond and platinum deposits too. The climate change and melting ice may prompt the countries to develop these deposits.

Each Arctic littoral country is drawing its own programme to develop the ice-free territory. It has become clear that military component of these plans occupies a significant place.

For one, in July 2009, Canada presented a government report on its northern strategy. It openly talked about the creation of a military training centre in Resolute Bay, the increase in the number of Arctic rangers units and the construction of a new icebreaker for the Coast Guard. Norway moved its Operational Command Headquarters from Stavanger to Reitan in the Arctic. The US has insisted on the development of its icebreaker fleet. Last year, Russia’s National Security Council discussed a draft Arctic doctrine that provides for the formation of an “Arctic Force”.

Understandably, no one wishes a serious conflict in the region. The countries interested are

cooperating in the Arctic Council and are determined to solve all outstanding issues at the negotiating table. However, many politicians say when diplomats and scientists are backed by the military, diplomatic and scientific evidence become more convincing and consequently, the negotiations become more successful.

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