

Russian general says watching Arctic militarization

By [Global Research](#)

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MOSCOW (Reuters) – Russia said on Monday it was watching the extent of militarization in the Arctic as global warming makes potentially valuable resources in the polar region more accessible and would plan its strategy accordingly.

Russia has already staked its claim to a majority of the Arctic waters, which it shares with four NATO countries and planted a Russian flag on the seabed under the North Pole 18 months ago to reinforce its position.

“Overall, we are looking at how far the region will be militarized. Depending on that, we’ll then decide what to do,” Interfax news agency quoted General Nikolai Makarov, the head of Russia’s General Staff, as saying during a visit to Abu Dhabi.

Makarov was in the United Arab Emirates for an international arms fair.

NATO Secretary-General Jaap De Hoop Scheffer last month asked whether the Western military alliance should increase its focus on the region, saying that it was necessary to build confidence and trust among the five Arctic states — four NATO members and rival power Russia.

Private explorers in a Russian mini-submarine dived 4,200 meters (14,000ft) to the North Pole’s seabed, to symbolically plant their national flag in August 2007, to the annoyance of other Arctic claimants, such as Canada.

Russia air and naval power in the region has also become more visible. Long-range strategic bombers fly over the Arctic and are frequently shadowed by NATO aircraft. Russia’s Northern fleet based in Murmansk has expanded patrols, after a period of relative inactivity after the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union.

Moscow is counting on the United Nations to grant it access not just to the seas of the Arctic, but the right to exploit its seabed for valuable fossil fuels and mineral reserves.

NATO members with Arctic Sea coastlines — and in some cases competing claims — are Canada, the United States, Norway and Greenland, an autonomous island within the kingdom of Denmark.

The U.S. Geological Survey has estimated that about 13 percent of the world’s undiscovered oil and 30 percent of its undiscovered gas lie under the Arctic seabed.

New sea routes could also be opened up if, as expected because of climate change, ice continues to retreat from Arctic waters, shortening voyages between Europe and the Pacific.

Makarov also said in Abu Dhabi that Russia had not yet received any official proposals from Washington on significant cuts in strategic nuclear forces.

The Times of London reported earlier this month that President Barack Obama would convene ambitious arms reduction talks with Moscow, aiming to slash the number of intercontinental nuclear missiles on both sides by 80 percent.

“When there is a proposal, there will be a discussion,” Interfax quoted Makarov as saying. “It is much too early to speak about that now.”

(Reporting by Amie Ferris-Rotman, writing by Conor Sweeney)

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