Zashchitnyy Kupol: Russia’s Protective Three-Ocean Dome along the Northern Sea Route — Redux. Part of the Northern Fleet's operational roles.

12 March 2026

In 2015 it was reported that Russia had plans to build 13 aerodromes and six cantonments in the Arctic. The string of new and refurbished bases between theÂ

Atlantic and the Pacific via the Arctic Ocean was described by Northern Fleet commander Admiral Nikolay Yevmenov as a “protective ocean dome”.

In late 2019 Vice-Admiral Alexander Moiseyev confirmed that additional S-300 and S-400 systems would be deployed across the Russian Arctic to create a comprehensive anti-aircraft umbrella across the region.

Introduction

Russian military bases north of the Arctic Circle and along a coastline exceeding 20,000

kilometres are of increasing importance in defending, monitoring and controlling the Northern Sea Route.

The route is no longer simply a “Polar Silk Road” but also a strategic maritime link between Russia’s Northern and Pacific fleets.

Significant investment has resulted in the restoration or reconstruction of a number of Arctic bases abandoned following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The operational striking power of the Northern Fleet remains concentrated on the Kola Peninsula, while the chain of Arctic installations extending eastwards functions primarily as a surveillance and monitoring architecture.

Kola Peninsula Basing Complex

The operational logic underpinning this system derives from the Soviet-era “bastion” concept, under which Russia’s sea-based nuclear deterrent is protected within heavily defended maritime zones close to home waters. In the Northern Fleet theatre this bastion is centred on the Barents Sea, where ballistic-missile submarines can operate under the protection of layered air defence, naval forces, and coastal infrastructure based on the Kola Peninsula. The Arctic basing chain extending eastwards along the Northern Sea Route should therefore be understood primarily as a surveillance and control architecture supporting this defensive bastion rather than a forward naval deployment system.

The Russian Northern Fleet is headquartered in Severomorsk near Murmansk (69°04′N 33°25′E). Some sources list an order of battle of roughly forty surface warships and a similar number of submarines, although others suggest the deployable fleet is smaller when vessels laid up or undergoing overhaul are excluded. The fleet is widely assessed to control the majority of Russia’s maritime nuclear forces. An approximate ORBAT can be found in Appendix 1.

Ground and littoral combat capability supporting Northern Fleet operations is provided by formations including the 61st Naval Infantry Brigade, the 80th Independent Motorised Rifle Brigade (Arctic), and the 200th Separate Motor Rifle Brigade.

Nearby airfields at Severomorsk-1 and Severomorsk-3 host tactical aviation, transport aircraft, and rotary-wing units and can accommodate long-range maritime aircraft.

The peninsula hosts a dense cluster of naval bases, submarine facilities, aviation nodes, and support installations that collectively form the core of Russia’s Northern Fleet bastion defence system. These installations are distributed along the northern coastline of the Kola Peninsula, generally following the deep fjord systems that provide protected access to the Barents Sea.

For analytical purposes the basing system can be understood as three main groupings running broadly west to east.

Western Submarine Complex

Bolshaya Lopatka (Litsa Guba) — Operational Submarine Facilities

Location: 69°25′N 32°26′E

Bolshaya Lopatka forms part of the Zapadnaya Litsa naval complex, historically one of the Northern Fleet’s principal submarine basing areas. Developed during the Soviet expansion of nuclear submarine forces, the complex includes multiple piers, protected berths, and supporting infrastructure designed to host nuclear-powered submarines.

The site lies close to the Norwegian frontier and provides direct access to the Barents Sea through deep fjord channels. Zapadnaya Litsa historically hosted several submarine divisions

and continues to function as an operational element of the Northern Fleet submarine infrastructure.

Vidyayevo — Attack Submarine Operations

Location: 69°19′N 32°48′E

Vidyayevo, located on Ura Guba within the western Kola fjord system, is associated primarily with nuclear-powered attack submarine units and the shore infrastructure supporting their operational readiness cycles. Facilities include berthing areas, logistics support, and personnel infrastructure for submarines engaged in anti-submarine warfare, maritime strike, and patrol missions.

Its position allows rapid access to open ocean operating areas while benefiting from the protective geography of the fjord system to provide flexible undersea warfare capabilities.

Polyarny — Submarine Support and Repair Facilities

Location: 69°20′N 33°45′E

Polyarny serves as a longstanding submarine support and repair centre within the Alexandrovsk naval district. Historically associated with attack submarine operations and fleet sustainment functions, the base provides maintenance, logistics, and harbour services that complement the operational roles of nearby submarine bases.

Within the contemporary basing system Polyarny contributes to the sustainment and resilience

of the Northern Fleet's undersea component rather than serving as a primary operational deployment point.

Central Kola Strategic Submarine Cluster

Gadzhiyevo — Strategic Submarine Base

Location: 69°15′N 33°25′E

Gadzhiyevo is one of the principal basing locations for Russia’s sea-based nuclear deterrent and hosts ballistic-missile submarine forces assigned to the Northern Fleet. The sheltered fjord geography and layered security posture make it well suited for the protection and rapid deployment of strategic submarines into patrol areas.

Supporting infrastructure includes specialised maintenance facilities, weapons handling areas, and crew support installations associated with the strategic submarine force to ensure a survivable second strike capability.

Okolnaya Bay — Strategic Weapons Storage and Support Node

Location: 69°04′N 33°26′E

Okolnaya Bay forms part of the wider Severomorsk naval complex and has been reported since at least 2019 as a major strategic weapons support and storage site associated with Russia’s sea-based nuclear deterrent.

Infrastructure development has been linked to the storage and handling of submarine-launched ballistic missiles, most plausibly associated with the Bulava system used by Borei-class SSBNs. The facility functions primarily as a technical and logistical node supporting nearby submarine bases rather than an operational fleet base.

Severomorsk — Fleet Headquarters and Surface Forces Hub

Location: 69°07′N 33°42′E

Severomorsk functions as the administrative and operational centre of the Northern Fleet and is the principal hub for surface combatant command, naval staff functions, and fleet logistics coordination. The base supports operational planning, fleet maintenance, and maritime air-defence integration.

Its extensive infrastructure, protected harbour, and proximity to Murmansk's industrial capacity enable sustained fleet readiness and command continuity. Strategically, Severomorsk anchors the command architecture linking naval operations with broader Arctic theatre planning.

Eastern Kola Support and Depth Layer

Olenya Air Base Area — Naval Aviation and Long-Range Patrol

Location: 68°15′N 33°45′E

The Olenya air base complex supports Northern Fleet long-range aviation and maritime patrol capability, including aircraft engaged in reconnaissance, anti-submarine warfare, and strategic deterrence missions. Long runways and hardened infrastructure allow operation of large aircraft types, providing reach across the Barents Sea and into the wider Arctic theatre for roles in surveillance, targeting support and integration with naval forces at sea.

Gremikha (Yokanga) — Submarine Storage and Support Complex

Location: 68°03′N 39°30′E

Gremikha, located on the eastern Kola Peninsula near the closed town of Ostrovnoy, historically supported submarine operations but later became primarily associated with the storage, maintenance, and reactor servicing of decommissioned or reserve nuclear submarines.

Although its operational role is more limited than during the Cold War, the site remains part of the broader support and storage architecture underpinning Northern Fleet resilience.

Pechenga / Sputnik Area — Ground Forces Component

Location: 69°30′N 31°18′E

Facilities in the Pechenga region, including the Sputnik garrison complex, support ground force formations responsible for Arctic and border defence missions. The area hosts the 61st Naval Infantry Brigade and elements of the 200th Motor Rifle Brigade, providing a land component responsible for infrastructure protection, territorial security, and reinforcement of coastal and rear-area nodes.

Identified Arctic Bases (West to East)

Kola / White Sea Approaches

1. Alakurtti Naval Air Base
   66°58′24″N 30°20′42″E
   Location of the 80th Arctic Motor Rifle Brigade.

Additional units reported:
• 4th Naval Bomber Regiment (Su-24)
• 485th Independent Helicopter Regiment (Mi-24 / Mi-8)

FSB: Border-zone regime likely.

1. Sputnik Base, Pechenga
   69°30′30″N 31°18′02″E
   Garrison location of the 61st Naval Infantry Brigade.

FSB: Border-zone regime likely.

1. Severodvinsk
   64°34′N 39°50′E
   Major submarine construction complex (Sevmash).

FSB: Administrative security presence likely.

1. Arkhangelsk / Talagi
   64°36′N 40°43′E
   Regional airfield supporting transport aviation and patrol activity.

FSB: Administrative control.

1. Cape Kanin
   68°39′N 43°18′E
   Monitoring installation covering the entrance to the White Sea.

FSB: Border monitoring.

Barents / Pechora Sector

1. Nagurskoye (Franz Josef Land)
   80.8°N 47.7°E
   Arctic Trefoil air base complex.

FSB: Confirmed Border Guard base.

1. Rogachevo (Novaya Zemlya)
   71°36′N 52°28′E
   Air base supporting interceptor operations and radar coverage.

FSB: Probable Border Guard element.

1. Belushya Guba (Novaya Zemlya)
   71°32′N 52°18′E
   Administrative centre of Novaya Zemlya archipelago.

FSB: Administrative presence.

1. Naryan-Mar
   67°38′N 53°01′E
   Airfield supporting Pechora Sea monitoring. Civil-military SAR.

FSB: Border-zone regime.

1. Amderma
   69°45′N 61°40′E
   Former air defence airfield with intermittent use.

FSB: Likely periodic presence.

1. Graham Bell Island
   81°09′N 64°17′E
   Contingency airstrip.

FSB: Likely periodic presence.

1. Vorkuta Sovetsky
   67°27′56″N 64°18′28″E
   Radar/support.

FSB: Border-zone regime.

1. Sabetta
   71.2733°N 72.0725°E
   Dual-use LNG port.

FSB: Probable maritime security presence.

Kara Sea / Taymyr Sector

1. Dikson
   73°30′N 80°30′E
   Arctic port and monitoring station.

FSB: Border Guard role reported.

1. Alykel (Norilsk)
   69°18′36″N 87°20′E
   Logistics hub supporting Arctic operations. Radar.

FSB: Administrative control.

1. Sredny Island
   79°31′42″N 91°04′30″E
   Surveillance airfield.

FSB: Frontier Guard role reported.

Laptev Sea Sector

1. Khatanga
   71°59′N 102°29′E
   Logistics and monitoring airfield.

FSB: Administrative presence likely.

1. Taymylyr
   72°37′N 121°55′E
   Radar detachment.

FSB: Border monitoring.

1. Tiksi
   71°39′N 128°52′E
   Air defence and monitoring airfield.

FSB: Probable Border Guard unit.

1. Temp Air Base (Kotelny Island)
   75°48′N 137°34′E
   Reconstructed Arctic air base.

FSB: Likely co-located presence.

1. Chokurdakh
   70°38′N 147°54′E
   Logistics node along East Siberian Sea sector.

FSB: Border-zone regime.

1. Chersky
   68°44′36″N 161°20′12″E
   Radar and resupply installation.

FSB: Administrative control.

Chukchi Sea / Bering Strait Sector

1. Pevek
   69°47′N 170°35′48″E
   Northern Sea Route port.

FSB: Maritime security presence likely.

1. Provideniya
   64°22′42″N 173°14′36″W
   Logistics support point near Bering Strait.

FSB: Border Guard activity probable.

1. Anadyr-Ugolny
   64°44′N 177°44′30″E
   Major interceptor base.

FSB: Eastern sector border command area.

1. Mys Shmidta (Cape Schmidt)
   68°55′N 179°27′12″W
   Airfield and radar site.

FSB: Integrated monitoring role.

1. Wrangel Island
   71°41′N 179°25′W
   Radar detachment monitoring eastern Arctic approaches.

FSB: Border enforcement presence probable.

Operational Context

Many installations with radar detachments and long runways can receive fighter aircraft and long-range bombers capable of operating over Europe and the North Atlantic.

Western assessments generally characterise the network primarily as bastion defence and domain awareness rather than complete denial of the Northern Sea Route.

Other Previously Abandoned Arctic Staging Bases (Status Unclear)

Chekurovka — 71°03′54″N 127°20′18″E
Dresba — 69°21′48″N 161°33′42″E
Ostrov Bolshevik — 78°35′06″N 100°59′42″E

Appendix 1

Northern Fleet ORBAT (Kola Core)

Major Surface Combatants

Admiral Kuznetsov — Aircraft Carrier — Project 11435
Pyotr Velikiy — Battlecruiser (Kirov-class) — Project 1144.2
Marshal Ustinov — Guided Missile Cruiser (Slava-class) — Project 1164
Admiral Gorshkov — Frigate — Project 22350
Admiral Kasatonov — Frigate — Project 22350
Severomorsk — Destroyer (Udaloy-class) — Project 1155
Vice-Admiral Kulakov — Destroyer (Udaloy-class) — Project 1155
Admiral Levchenko — Destroyer (Udaloy-class) — Project 1155

Amphibious Forces

Aleksandr Otrakovsky — Landing Ship (Ropucha-class) — Project 775
Kondopoga — Landing Ship (Ropucha-class) — Project 775
Georgy Pobedonosets — Landing Ship (Ropucha-class) — Project 775
Olenegorsky Gornyak — Landing Ship (Ropucha-class) — Project 775

Submarine Forces (Categories)

SSBN — Borei / Borei-A — Project 955 / 955A
SSBN — Delta IV — Project 667BDRM
SSGN — Oscar II — Project 949A
SSGN — Yasen / Yasen-M — Project 885 / 885M
SSN — Akula — Project 971
SSN — Sierra II — Project 945A

Attribution

Data curated by **Robin Ashby**, with AI assistance from material originally researched and published in **2019**

There's a great deal more about the Northern Fleet and its roles in the Mind the Gap series published recently