

Russia bids to expand Arctic border to seek gas

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A 2007 picture of Novy Urengoi, just below the arctic circle in far northern Russia. Russia will submit a claim to the United Nations to expand its Arctic borders, a top official said Wednesday, as scientists embarked on a new expedition to prove its ownership of energy-rich territory.

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"I expect that next year we will present a well-based scientific claim about expanding the borders of our [Arctic](#) shelf," Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Ivanov said in the Far Northern town of Naryan-Mar in the [Arctic Circle](#).

Ivanov was speaking as Russian scientists embarked on a new expedition

aimed at proving its claims to territory on the Arctic shelf, in the latest exploration venture that risks sparking tensions with neighbours like Canada.

"The expedition is equipped with modern equipment and everything necessary for a proper and scientific claim," he said, quoted by the RIA-Novosti and ITAR-TASS news agencies.

Russia had alarmed its Arctic neighbours including Canada and Norway when it planted a flag on the [ocean floor](#) under the North Pole in 2007 in a symbolic staking of its claim over the region.

The latest expedition is aimed at proving that the underwater Lomonosov and Mendeleev ridges in the Arctic constitute a geological continuation of the Russian Arctic shelf.

Both ridges are named after great Russian scientists but so far the UN Commission has neither accepted nor rejected Russia's claim to the area.

But Russia is hoping its claim will win it an additional million square kilometres of territory and the rights to explore for more gas reserves in the energy-rich Arctic.

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin had said last month that Russia would "strongly and consistently" defend its interests in the Arctic although it remained in constant contact with its regional partners over the issue.

He warned that Russia intended to "expand its presence" in the Arctic and Defence Minister Anatoly Serdyukov said that the armed forces intended to create two Arctic brigades for the defence of its interests.

At the meeting in Naryan-Mar, the head of the Russian navy Admiral Vladimir Vysotsky warned that the Arctic was seeing a build-up of

"challenges and threats that could have a negative effect on Russia's economic interests."

He said that NATO had in particular defined the Arctic as part of its zone of interest while there had also been a surge in interest on the part of Asian countries.

These included China, Japan and Korea as well as Malaysia and Thailand, Vysotsky added, sarcastically describing the latter two southeast Asian states as "well known Arctic nations".

The five Arctic nations -- Canada, Denmark, Norway, Russia and the United States -- are locked in a tight race to gather evidence to support their claims amid reports that global warming could leave the region ice-free by 2030.

Russia signed a treaty with Norway last September to end a 40-year dispute over a 176,000-square-kilometre (67,950-square-mile) maritime area straddling the two countries' economic zones in the Barents Sea and the Arctic Ocean.

The deal regulates energy resources in the region, requiring the two countries to jointly develop oil and gas deposits that cross over the borderline.

The Arctic seabed is believed to hold 90 billion barrels, or 13 percent of the world's undiscovered oil reserves and 30 percent of the gas resources yet to be found, according to the US Geological Survey.

The giant Russian tanker Baltica -- escorted by the world's two most powerful nuclear ice breakers -- last year made a historic voyage across the famed Northeast passage carrying gas condensate to China.

Ivanov said he expected the Northern sea route along Russia's Arctic coast to see the transit of five million tonnes of goods in 2012, a dramatic rise from this year's estimated figure of three million tonnes.

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