

# **NORTHERN FLEET**

**Johanna Granville**

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**The Russian Northern Fleet is the largest of the four Russian naval fleets. It differs from the Baltic and Black Sea fleets in that the Northern Fleet (like the Pacific Fleet) has operated nuclear-powered vessels for more than 40 years. In fact, two thirds of all nuclear-powered vessels are assigned to the Northern Fleet at the Kola Peninsula. The remaining vessels are based at Pacific Fleet bases near Vladivostok. The Northern Fleet is organized into departments with separate spheres of responsibility. Other duties are divided among government committees and ministries. While the Russian Navy is responsible for the nuclear submarines and the three shipyards that service and maintain them, the State Committee for the Defense Industry (*Goskomoboronprom*) maintains the other shipyards. The Russian Ministry for Atomic Energy (*Minatom*) is responsible for nuclear fuel used in naval reactors, and the Russian Ministry of Transport is in charge of freight of new and spent nuclear fuel sent by railroad.**

**Before the Soviet collapse in 1991, nuclear submarines from the Northern and Pacific Fleets regularly patrolled both the east and west coasts of the United States, the South China Sea and outside the Persian Gulf. Today, however, Russian nuclear submarines rarely patrol any of these waters. The number of nuclear powered**

submarines in operation in the Northern Fleet has decreased from 120 in the late 1980s to less than 40 submarines in 2001. The Northern Fleet has six naval bases and shipyards on the Kola Peninsula to serve its nuclear vessels: Severomorsk, Gadzhievo, Gremikha, Vidyaevo, Sayda Bay, and Zapadnaya Litsa. The Northern Fleet's main base and administrative center is Severomorsk, a city with a population of 70,000 situated twenty-five kilometers north of Murmansk on the eastern side of the Murmansk Fjord. Three nuclear-powered Kirov class battle cruisers are based in Severomorsk: Admiral Ushakov, Admiral Nakhimov and Peter the Great. However, no nuclear submarines are permanently stationed at Severomorsk. In Safonovo, a rural town in the Severomorsk area, nuclear submarines and surface vessels – including the largest Northern Fleet submarines, including the Typhoon class - are taken for repair.

The strategic importance of the Kola Peninsula became apparent to Russian military planners with the rise of German naval power in the Baltic Sea and with the outbreak of World War I. The planners realized the need for access to ice free harbors in the north and built a modern harbor in Aleksandrovsk (called Polyarny today) at the mouth of the Murmansk Fjord in 1899. A naval force dedicated especially to the northern region was established shortly after the outbreak of World War I. In 1917, a railway to Murmansk was built, thus connecting the rest of Russia to an ice-free port open year round. Not until Joseph Stalin's visit to Polyarny in the summer of 1933 was the Soviet Fleet of the Northern Seas actually established, however. Renamed the Northern Fleet in 1937, it consisted (before World War II) of just eight destroyers, 15 diesel-powered submarines, a formation

of patrol boats, mine sweepers and some smaller vessels. During World War II, supplies from the western allies were transported to Murmansk and then taken by railroad to military fronts in the south. A major naval buildup began after World War II in an effort to catch up with the United States. The first Soviet nuclear submarine (the K-3 Leninsky Komsomol) was commissioned to the Northern Fleet on July 1, 1958, just four years after the commissioning of the first American nuclear submarine, the USS Nautilus. In the period from 1950 to 1970, the Northern Fleet grew from having been the smallest to the largest and most important of the four Soviet fleets.

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