

Admiral Cool to Notion of Separate Arctic Fleet



The guided-missile destroyer USS Oscar Austin in the Arctic Circle. U.S. NAVY / Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Ryan U. Kledzik

ARLINGTON, Va. – The commander of the U.S. 2nd Fleet, whose ships have operated four times in the Arctic since the fleet was re-established two years ago, says that, on initial examination, there is no need for a numbered fleet in the region, but an Arctic naval component command might be worth consideration.

Vice Adm. Andrew Lewis was responding to a question about a July 17 [article posted on Seapower's website](#) concerning an idea proposed by an Arctic expert at the Naval War College.

Lewis was speaking at a press teleconference about the start of the upcoming Operation Nanook-Tuugaalik, a Canadian Arctic operation in which units of the 2nd Fleet also will be participating along with a cutter of the U.S. Coast Guard Atlantic Area and ships of the French and Danish navies.

Dr. Walter Berbrick, associate professor at the Naval War College and director of its Arctic Studies Group, speaking July 16 during a CNA webinar, Arctic East vs West: US Strategy in the Atlantic and Pacific Arctic, noted that the 2nd, 3rd and 6th Fleets all have responsibilities in the region, with the Navy “facing a time/space/force problem in the Arctic,” with too many other challenges around the world.

“Perhaps we should think outside the box and create a new fleet, an Arctic fleet,” Berbrick said, saying that a total Navy battle fleet sized more toward 400 ships rather than 355 would be needed, which would allow for a fleet “permanently spread out across the Arctic region.”

"It an interesting viewpoint," Lewis said of Berbrick's proposal. "I don't know that I would consider creating a numbered fleet for an Arctic fleet. In the U.S. system, it's another maneuver arm for the naval component. I don't really own battlespace per se, as I own mission. If I'm given a mission, in the Arctic, or the North Atlantic or Western Atlantic or Southern Atlantic, I address that mission.

"The naval component commander is fully responsible for that northern area – that might be something we need to look at, and that would be at the naval component command level. That's kind of my initial thoughts. I actually pondered that [Seapower] article for quite some time a couple of weeks back."

Also speaking at the Operation Nanook-Tuugaalik teleconference was Vice Adm. Steven Poulin, commander of the Coast Guard Atlantic Area.

"The question really goes to the heart of how can we ensure maneuverability in the Arctic," Poulin said. "I think it goes directly to the Coast Guard's desire and plan to recapitalize the icebreaking fleet. We're very pleased with the support from the administration and Congress that we're moving forward smartly to build icebreaking capability to ensure that maneuverability and that presence."