

Members of Parliament Push for Arctic-Ready Upgrades in Future Royal Navy Warships

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A cross-party group of Members of Parliament (MPs) has urged the Ministry of Defence (commonly referred to as the MoD) to ensure that future Royal Navy warships are capable of operating in the Arctic, citing mounting geopolitical threats and a pressing need to protect critical infrastructure. In their latest report, the House of Commons Defence

Committee warned that the United Kingdom (UK) must be better prepared for growing challenges in the High North.

The committee called for reinforced ship hulls capable of withstanding icy waters and improved cold-weather systems across the fleet. At present, only HMS *Protector*, the Royal Navy's dedicated ice patrol vessel, is equipped to function in polar conditions, and it is largely deployed in the Southern Hemisphere. The Royal Navy's other vessels, including the planned Multi-Role Support Ship (a future amphibious warship currently under design), lack ice-strengthening, limiting their deployment in northern latitudes.

Tanmanjeet Singh Dhesi, Chair of the Defence Committee, stated that "Arctic operations are no longer optional" and that the Royal Navy must be equipped for hostile environments as well as warm-water deployments. The report highlights the risk posed by so-called "grey-zone" activities, actions like the sabotage of undersea communication cables that fall below the threshold of armed conflict but still threaten national interests.

Currently, the UK's presence in the Arctic is largely sustained by its fleet of Astute-class nuclear-powered submarines, which are designed for stealth operations and anti-submarine warfare. The Royal Navy also regularly participates in Exercise Cold Response, a joint training initiative with members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which includes Norway, the United States of America, and other key allies.

Despite these efforts, MPs argue that surface vessels must also be made Arctic-capable. They have recommended significant investment in

shipbuilding, reinforced designs, and navigational systems suited to sub-zero environments.

With both Russia and China expanding their naval operations in the Arctic, the committee's warning underscores the strategic value of the region. Inaction, they say, risks Britain falling behind in a critical frontier of defence. Equipping future ships for the High North is not merely a precaution; it is a necessity for securing UK interests in an era of unpredictable global threats.