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US Coast Guard Spots Chinese Ship Inside Arctic Zone Near Alaska

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A Chinese icebreaker vessel was intercepted by a United States Coast Guard aircraft last week after entering the U.S. Extended Continental Shelf in the Arctic Ocean, raising fresh concerns in Washington over Beijing's growing presence in polar regions.

According to the U.S. Coast Guard, the Chinese research vessel *Xue Long 2* was detected roughly 333 miles north of Utqiagvik, Alaska. Canadian forces monitored the ship as it moved from East Asia into Arctic waters. The U.S. aircraft, a C-130J Hercules, was deployed as part of Operation Frontier Sentinel, a mission focused on countering potential

threats through persistent monitoring of foreign military and research activity near American waters.

The U.S. Extended Continental Shelf (ECS) is a maritime zone that stretches beyond the country's 200-nautical-mile Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and provides sovereign rights over seabed resources. The ECS is recognized under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which defines it as a continuation of a country's continental margin beyond its territorial waters. The Coast Guard confirmed that the Chinese vessel operated 149 miles inside the ECS boundary.

Rear Admiral Bob Little, commander of the U.S. Coast Guard Arctic District, said in a statement, "The U.S. Coast Guard, alongside partners and other agencies, vigilantly monitors and responds to foreign government vessel activity in and near U.S. waters to secure territorial integrity and defend sovereign interests against malign state activity."

While *Xue Long 2* is officially labeled a research vessel and serves as an icebreaker designed for polar exploration, U.S. officials remain skeptical of China's intent. Beijing has long claimed the status of a "near-Arctic state". It continues to press its involvement in Arctic affairs, which is strategically sensitive due to its proximity to key NATO nations and Russia. American defense and intelligence officials have voiced concern that some Chinese research missions may have underlying military purposes, particularly given their increased cooperation with Moscow in recent years.

The U.S. Department of State, which leads the ECS Project to chart and declare the country's sovereign claims in extended maritime zones, emphasized the strategic importance of defining and protecting those boundaries. "All coastal States with an ECS have an inherent interest in knowing, and declaring to others, the outer limits of their ECS and thus where they are entitled to exercise sovereign rights," the department said. "Defining the U.S. ECS outer limits in geographical terms provides the specificity and certainty necessary to manage the resources of the ECS."

Although China has not released a statement on the ship's mission, Newsweek has reported attempts to contact both the Chinese Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Foreign Affairs for comment. So far, Beijing has remained silent.

The *Xue Long 2*'s activity comes amid heightened U.S. interest in Arctic security. The Pentagon's updated Arctic strategy calls for increased military presence in the region,

stronger partnerships with allies like Canada, and expanded intelligence capabilities to address rising geopolitical competition in the far north.

The U.S. is expected to continue monitoring the vessel alongside Canadian authorities. A Coast Guard cutter was also recently dispatched to patrol the Bering Sea, signaling a broader effort to assert American presence and authority in its northern maritime domain.