



NATO Foundation
Defense College

China May 2017

China to expand its presence in Antarctica

According to a white paper released by China's State Oceanic Administration during the 40th Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting held in Beijing from 22 to 30 May, China intends to "elevate Antarctic infrastructure and comprehensive support -capabilities" and enhance "scientific investigation and research capability".

This means that China is going to build its fifth research station in Antarctica, the location of which has already been chosen while a third ice-breaking vessel has been under construction since last October.

Top of Form

Bottom of Form

Officials in Beijing said the country was still lagging behind the US and Russia who have five and eight research stations respectively and has no ambition to exploit the vast resources underneath the frozen continent.

However, according to a report by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, "China has conducted undeclared military activities in Antarctica and is engaging in minerals exploration there."

The report warns China's expanding presence in Antarctica is aimed at angling for resources including minerals, hydrocarbons, fishing, tourism, transport routes, water and bioprospecting.

Exploration activities have stepped up since 2012 including preliminary surveys of coal reserves and investigations of undersea metal deposits, and in recent years China has failed to disclose the extent of its military's activities in Antarctica officially described as scientific projects. "China regards Antarctica as a useful laboratory for preparing for an advanced space program," the report says.

China is one of the few countries that does not have domestic legislation governing its activities in Antarctica, and some of its fishing practices in the region have caused environmental concerns.

Elenoire Laudieri di Biase - *Sinologist at Ca' Foscari University, Venice, and at Melbourne University. Senior Analyst on China at NATO Defense College Foundation*