

# White House directs agencies to come up with polar icebreaking plan

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President Donald Trump is directing the Defense Department, along with five other federal agencies, to spend the next two months sketching out how it would cover the world's polar regions using bases and ships by fiscal 2029, according to a memo sent Tuesday.

The heads of Homeland Security, State, DoD, Commerce and the Office of Management and Budget are directed to complete a review of requirements for a “polar security icebreaking fleet acquisition program to acquire and employ a suitable fleet of polar security icebreakers” to ensure a “persistent” U.S. presence in the Arctic and Antarctic regions.

The Coast Guard has just one heavy icebreaker, the 44-year-old Polar Star that spends much of the year in repairs. The service says it needs three new heavy icebreakers and three medium vessels, and the administration’s fiscal 2021 request [released in February](#) would fund a second new heavy icebreaker.

The administration floated the idea of leasing icebreakers from “partner nations” to fill the gap from fiscal years 2022-29 to maintain national defense while the new fleet is built. The partner nations must have “proven foreign shipbuilding capability and expertise in icebreaker construction.” The U.S. maintains one shipbuilding company that is already building a new heavy icebreaker: Mississippi’s VT Halter Marine, which was awarded a contract in April 2019 to build a 460-foot polar security cutter.

The program outlined in the memo will provide additional support that will “not adversely impact” the Coast Guard’s offshore patrol cutter acquisition program and directs the Coast Guard commandant to work with the Navy and Energy secretaries to study the cost benefits and risks of a new fleet that contains at least three heavy polar-class security cutters.

The officials in their report must include how the fleet will operate in the poles, the number and type of polar security icebreakers needed and estimated costs for heavy and medium icebreakers, as well as identify two new U.S. bases and two international bases. The report is due to the president in 60 days.