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## U.S. Arctic Policy: Threats, Actors, and Outcomes

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### Key Considerations

- U.S. Arctic policymaking on matters of defence and security demonstrates a rational process of identifying threats and challenges, and the selection of solutions in line with U.S. national interests.
- Critical junctures – significant turning points – in which security matters create urgency for U.S. response are demonstrated in significant shifts towards greater security and defence solutions in official policy and strategy documents.
- Key drivers in the strategic context are climate change resulting in diminishing sea ice allowing for greater international access to the region, Arctic states' militarization, and great power competition involving a revanchist Russia and a revisionist China.
- Uncertainty in an era of grey/hybrid warfare and intended to destabilize the Western liberal order and new capabilities that threaten North American security creates conditions that increasingly align Canada and U.S. defence interests.
- The trajectory of U.S. Arctic policy towards increasing security and defence developments in the Arctic, in conjunction with the evolution of the North American defence relationship between Canada and the U.S. will see a revisit to issues: the status of the Northwest Passage, Canada's participation in missile defence, modernizing/upgrading/replacing the North Warning System, involving NATO in the Arctic, and establishing an Arctic multilateral organization to address military-security matters involving the region.

## Purpose

This briefing note describes the causal processes involved in U.S. Arctic policymaking. It addresses the question of who and what are the key actors, issues, and processes involved in U.S. Arctic policymaking, focusing on the security and defence dimension. The purpose of this descriptive analysis is to isolate the causes of policy outcomes and strategies to achieve stated objectives, in processes that are complex, spanning various levels of analysis in which multiple variables interact. It seeks to identify the most influential variables in order to understand, explain, and forecast developments in Arctic defence and security for the United States and its close continental defence partner, Canada. The analytical framework assumes the promotion of U.S. national interests in its Arctic policy through a combination of unilateral, bilateral, and multilateral means, and identifies critical junctures of shifts in national interests more strongly towards defence and security in the region.

## Background

***Although the United States is an Arctic nation, the Arctic has seldom figured prominently in US policy<sup>1</sup>***

The Arctic region played an important role in continental defence during Cold War because it was shortest route for ICBMs and bombers to fly from USSR to North America, as well as sea ice covering submarine operations (SSBNs and SSNs) in the area. Alaska, northern Canada, and Greenland hosted early warning radar stations – from the Dew Line to the North Warning System – to inform on threatening Soviet strategic behaviour in the Arctic. Canada and the U.S. cooperated on defending the continent through NORAD providing warning and response to aerial threats. With the end of the Cold War and the Soviet threat, the U.S. and Canada continued its continental defence partnership, but allowed its Arctic assets to degrade, as traditional security threats took a backseat to new type of security concerns, involving human security, non-state and transnational actors, and emerging rogue state actors. U.S. Arctic policy during the 1990s reflects an interest in international cooperation through institutional frameworks, bilateral cooperation with Russia on resolving pollution in the region, resource and energy development, mitigating potential adverse environmental effects from development on local people and wildlife, and national security interests, which prioritize freedom of seas and airspace, control of borders and sovereign territory, and ability to carry out military operations in the region.

In the 2000s Canada and other Arctic states began addressing the challenges posed by increasingly warmer summers and less sea ice, bringing international interest to the region for economic and commercial shipping opportunities, and environmental concerns related to potential accidents due to increased activity, as well as the impact of changing conditions on indigenous populations in the High North. Sovereignty emerged as a significant issue, as Arctic states considered how to adapt their military forces and security services to provide a presence in their northern territory by land, sea, and air. The United States began to assess its national interests later than Canada and the other Arctic states – referred to as the “Reluctant Arctic Power” by Rob Huebert.<sup>2</sup> In 2014 Kraska and Baker describe the U.S. as the “most passive of the eight Arctic states.”<sup>3</sup> Lackenbauer and Huebert describe the U.S. shift from being a reluctant Arctic power to an “engaged Arctic nation in developing Arctic foreign and defence policies amidst “the transformations occurring in the Arctic

region in the mid-2000s.”<sup>4</sup> From that period to the current, the U.S. government released a series of Arctic policies and strategies to respond to the challenges of an opening Arctic due to climate change.

## Official Documents: U.S. Arctic Policy and Strategy

Official U.S. documents articulating national policy and strategy towards the Arctic region include official White House policy, Department of Defense (DoD), US Navy, and US Coast Guard strategies, among other documents, providing guidance for responding to threats and challenges in the Arctic. The priorities outlined in these documents coincide with shifts in the international security environment, in conjunction with growing concern and interest in the Arctic region and overall continental security. They outline U.S. national priorities ranging from national security interests, international cooperation, economic interests (particularly resource

exploration and development in a sustainable manner), environmental considerations (preventing the negative effects of oil and gas development, transportation, and the effects of mineral extraction on local populations, wildlife, and sealife), and scientific research. Since the first policy document of 1971<sup>5</sup> these priorities include involving indigenous peoples of the North in decisionmaking that affects them. From the earliest official Arctic policies of the 1970s and 80s the national interest of preserving “the principle of freedom of the seas and superjacent airspace,”<sup>6</sup> remains an enduring element throughout U.S. Arctic priorities in official documents to the current period. In the 1980s the US articulated priorities relating to the strategic dimension of the Arctic region, including “the critical role of the Arctic to national defense as it is the “Nation’s only common border with the Soviet Union,” and outlining the importance of developing icebreaking capabilities for security, economic, and environmental interests, in addition to catching up on technological developments as “most



**Arctic administrative areas**

**Figure 1. The Circumpolar North**

Source: Markku Heikkilä and Marjo Laukkanen, [Arctic Calls – Finland, the European Union and the Arctic Region](#), Arctic Centre of the University of Lapland in Rovaniemi, Finland (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Finland, 16 May 2013).

Arctic-rim countries, particularly the Soviet Union, possess Arctic technologies far more advanced than those currently available in the United States.”<sup>7</sup>

In the 1990s national security and defence interests continued to feature within U.S. official documents concerning the Arctic region, particularly the principle of meeting post-Cold War requirements, such as maintaining “the ability to protect against attack across the Arctic, to move ships and aircraft freely under the principles of customary law reflected in the 1982 Law of the Sea Convention, to control our borders and areas under our jurisdiction and to carry out military operations in the region.” However, a critical juncture occurred in 2009,<sup>8</sup> with the release of the first Arctic Policy since the 1990s emphasizing emerging security challenges as a result of climate change and international interests in the Arctic, requiring an assessment of defence capabilities to ensure “a stable and secure region where U.S. national interests are safeguarded and the U.S. homeland is protected.” From the release of this policy, in addition to Navy Arctic Roadmap (2009), the National Security Strategy (2010), and Quadrennial Defense Review (2010), the U.S. interest in preparing effective Arctic defence capabilities increasingly became a priority, as the U.S. describes itself as “an Arctic nation with broad and fundamental interests in the Arctic region.” Requirements outlined in these and subsequent official documents include icebreakers, infrastructure, and domain awareness, which includes enhancing “defense relationships and continue to work with Canada in the context of regional security, increased interaction in the Arctic.”<sup>9</sup> Alaska as an essential partner in the environmental, economic, and security dimension begins to be highlighted in 2011.<sup>10</sup>

With a new emphasis on the security and defence dimension, the shifting operational landscape becomes increasingly detailed in official documents, from the National Strategy for the Arctic Region (2013), the DoD Arctic Strategy (2013), the U.S. Coast Guard Strategy (2013), to the White House Enhancing Coordination of National Efforts (2015) and the DoD Strategy to Protect United States National Security Interests in the Arctic Region (2016). These documents address capability gaps by sea, air, land, space, and cyber. Gaps in intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR), particularly situational awareness in the maritime domain and early warning by radars and sensors are also discussed. The U.S. Arctic policy and strategy documents mention multiple times the unique strategic and defence relationship the U.S. has with Canada. In light of its interest in pursuing Arctic defence and security through bi- and multilateral means, recent U.S. policy indicates that it will pursue its interests unilaterally if necessary.<sup>11</sup> This reflects the U.S. rational pragmatic approach towards pursuing the most effective means through which to achieve its interests, explicitly stated as: defending the homeland, regional alliances and partnerships in the Western Hemisphere, and missile defence. In addition, accession to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea is reiterated to “protect U.S. rights, freedoms, and uses of the sea and airspace throughout the Arctic region, and strengthen our arguments for freedom of navigation and overflight through the Northwest Passage and the Northern Sea Route.”<sup>12</sup>

From 2016 to 2019 official documents on Arctic policy and strategy demonstrate a significant increase in the urgency of Arctic capabilities requirements, particularly in the context of emerging great power competition (a resurgent Russia and revisionist China), in a “complex global security environment.” The 2017 National Security Strategy<sup>13</sup> and 2018 National Defense Strategy<sup>14</sup> reflect this growing concern, reiterating the value of multinational arrangements and international institutions for governing how states behave in land, sea, space, cyber, and the Arctic,<sup>15</sup> but also reinforcing an America First approach reflecting new priorities of the Trump

Administration. The 2019 DoD Arctic Strategy, stated to supersede the 2016 Arctic Strategy, demonstrates a significant shift identifying the Arctic “as a potential corridor for strategic competition and aggression,” a “potential vector both for attacks on the homeland and for U.S. power projection.” The new Strategy proposes a Joint Force concept to deter and defeat great power aggression, focusing on Russia’s increasing military activity in the Arctic. Three core goals of the Strategy are outlined: building Arctic domain awareness, enhancing Arctic operations, and strengthening the rules-based order.<sup>16</sup> Issues and priorities of the 2019 Strategy are reflected in the maritime focus of the US Navy Strategic Outlook,<sup>17</sup> and the US Coast Guard Arctic Strategic Outlook.<sup>18</sup> Notably both documents affirm that there is a low risk of conflict in the Arctic region. The US Navy document outlines its “strategic approach to protect US national interests and promote stability in the Arctic,” but is quite brief on details. Stated to supersede the 2014 Arctic Roadmap, it identifies strategic drivers and its branch’s support to objectives as outlined in the 2019 DoD Arctic Strategy. However, it does reiterate interagency and international cooperation, particularly collaboration and combined efforts with the Coast Guard in the Arctic Ocean, in addition to interoperability with their respective international partners. The Bering Strait as a strategic chokepoint is identified as an increasingly important region – “a Pacific gateway for the Northern Sea Route and Trans-Polar Route ... may become more important for seaborne trade between Europe and Asia.” It also identifies the challenges of Russia’s Northern Fleet access to the U.S. East Coast and Mediterranean Sea through the Greenland, Iceland, United Kingdom-Norwegian (GIUK-N) gap. Deterrence, sea control, power projection, maritime security, logistics, search and rescue, support to civil authorities and humanitarian assistance/disaster relief are stated to be core function of the Navy that includes the Arctic region. The USCG document outlines an interest in continuing to “work with our allies and partners on the mutual goal of ensuring a safe, secure, and cooperative Arctic, even as our aspiring near-peer competitors maneuver for strategic advantage in the area.” It describes “three lines of effort crucial to achieving long-term success: 1) Enhance capability to operate effectively in a dynamic Arctic domain, 2) Strengthen the rules-based order, and 3) Innovate and adapt to promote resilience and prosperity.” These mirror the objectives of the 2019 DoD Arctic Strategy, in addition to outlining what has changed in the region since its previous 2013 Strategy, namely Chinese Arctic expeditions, Russia’s increasing number of icebreakers, and emerging capacities for cruise ships to transit the Northwest Passage, noting other dramatic changes in the physical environment of the Arctic.

What is notably lacking in official documents are Arctic strategies produced by the Air Force and Army branches,<sup>19</sup> which leaves a gap in addressing specific branch capabilities by those services – with their operational experience and organizational interest – for the Arctic region. DoD Arctic strategies address capabilities requirements involving the multiple domains and interoperability requirements of Arctic land, sea, and air capabilities, however, only the maritime branches via the Navy and Coast Guard produce Arctic strategies.

## Key Drivers in the Current Strategic Context

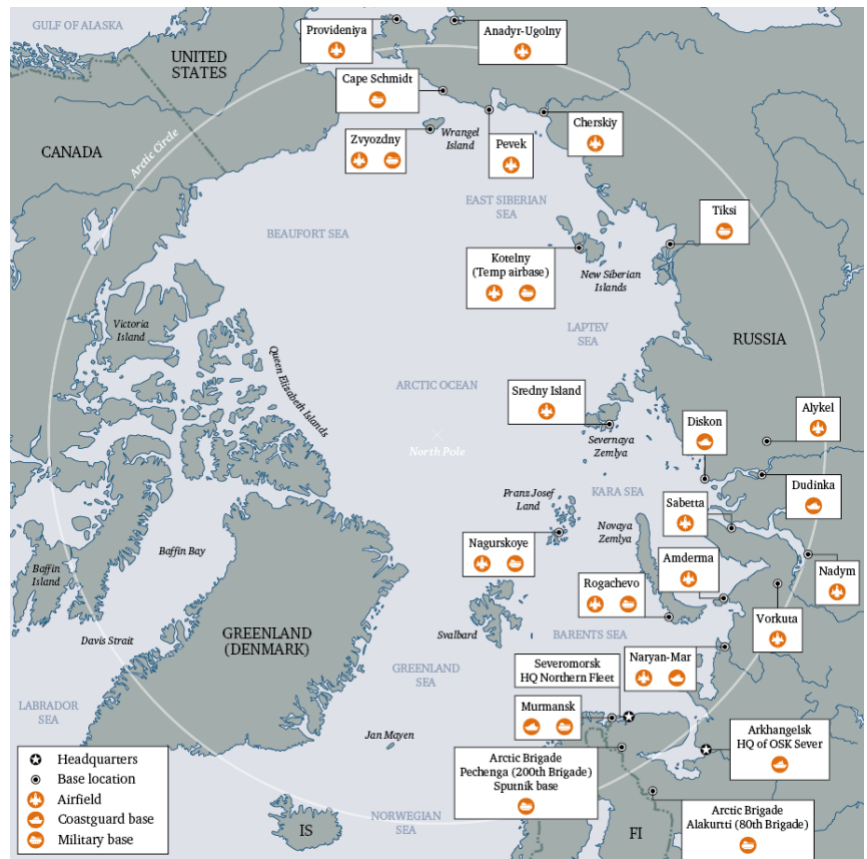
The strategic context in light of key trends and drivers that brings the Arctic to the U.S. policy agenda is reflected in official documents, particularly since 2009 which saw an increase in the security and defence dimensions. The overarching key driver is climate change, creating a rapidly warming Arctic with its impacts on permafrost and coastal erosion. With the diminishing of Arctic sea ice during the warm season, international access to the region increases with state and non-state actors’ interests in resource exploration and exploitation, new navigation

routes for commercial shipping and cruise tourism, concerns for the status of international/internal straits (such as the Northwest Passage and Northern Sea Route), and the delimitation of the continental shelf. Arctic states' militarization in the region relates to concerns that international activity in the region might result in negative impacts on the local environment, via pollution and accidents, in addition to violating national sovereignty. Militarization addresses the requirement for a defence presence and capability to respond to foreign activity, traditional, and non-traditional security threats in the region.

The other key strategic driver is the Arctic dimension of great power competition, namely the challenges posed by increasingly active Russia and China in the region. For more than a decade Russia has been developing its Arctic region military capabilities, conducting long-range bomber flights near the airspace of the other Arctic nations, and upgrading Soviet defence facilities and building infrastructure along the northern coastline to facilitate control of the Northern Sea Route. In addition, the Northern Fleet base in the Kola Peninsula has seen significant military activity. Russia is developing new long-range nuclear and conventional delivery systems to threaten North America from within Russia. New systems of concern to North American defence concern new ICBMs, hypersonic glide vehicles, and hypersonic cruise missiles, which can evade early warning detection and interception via their maneuverability.

China has been expanding its Arctic presence through economic and scientific activity. China's Belt and Road Initiative includes the Polar Silk Road,<sup>20</sup> providing access to Arctic shipping routes, ports and hubs, and resources (such as rare earth minerals) in specific Arctic states, such as Iceland, Greenland, Svalbard (Norway), and Russia. China's scientific activity in the Arctic involves voyages of its polar icebreaker *Xue Long*, which may also be engaging in other forms of information gathering activities.

The current and near-future Arctic security context is increasingly uncertain due to the ambiguity of the emergence of Russian Arctic militarization, new standoff weapons, and Chinese economic interests



**Figure 2. Russia's Arctic Militarization**

Source: Mathieu Boulègue, "Russia's Military Posture in the Arctic: Managing Hard Power in a 'Low Tension' Environment," Russia and Eurasia Programme, Chatham House, the Royal Institute of International Affairs, June 2019, 15 (Map 1: Russia's Military Infrastructure in the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation).  
<https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/2019-06-28-Russia->

in the High North. The Arctic sea ice is rapidly changing the physical landscape and technological developments are changing the strategic landscape. From the Cold War to the current period, Canada's role as close defence partner in continental defence and strategic ally in NATO, also influences the formulation of U.S. Arctic policy. The release of the 2008 Canada First Defence Strategy, in line with Prime Minister Stephen Harper's interest in bolstering Canadian Arctic defence, created a context within which the U.S. would evaluate its Arctic interests in light of emerging challenges in the region. Canada released a number of Arctic foreign policies (2009, 2010, 2013, 2019),<sup>21</sup> and notably the 2017 *Strong, Secure, Engaged* defence policy which outlined new threats and challenges affecting security in the Arctic, among other domestic and international strategic challenges. Developments by Western adversaries have caused a revision of defence and deterrence concepts for the U.S., Canada, North America, and its Allies and partners in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. Within North American context emerged urgency for evolving North American defence – NORAD, and the Tri-Command Structure – and modernizing capabilities to close any gaps.

## Significant Turning Points

Turning points in U.S. Arctic policy reflect periods of changes in the international, continental, regional, and domestic security environments. The following periods<sup>22</sup> describe the shifting security environment, requiring rethinking how the U.S. views its national security interests, including North American defence and the Arctic.

- **1970s and 1980s:** Cold War: The Arctic region served as avenue for long-range bombers, submarine operations under the Arctic sea ice, and intercontinental range ballistic missiles to target North America. The Arctic, via Canada, Alaska, and Greenland hosted early warning systems – radars and sensors. CFS Alert on Ellesmere Island, Canada, serves as the northernmost SIGINT outpost.
- **1990s:** Post-Cold War: With the end of the bipolar international security environment, new relations are being forged with post-Soviet Russia. Non-traditional security challenges emerge globally and in the Arctic, including environmental and human security. The Clinton Administration focuses on the economic dimension of U.S. foreign policy.
- **2001-2006:** Post-9/11: North American defence and U.S. security is focused on the threat of terrorism. In this context, North America no longer safe from threats from abroad. Threats to the U.S. and its allies include WMD terrorism, and nuclear threats from rogue nations such as Iran and North Korea. In 2002, the U.S. withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty to pursue national missile defences (GMD). The evolution of American strategic defence includes nuclear modernization and a New Triad; in addition to NORAD renewal with the expansion of the maritime warning mission in 2006.
- **2007-2014:** Since 2007, Russian resurgent activity has been observed in the Arctic, including Tupolev-95 and Tupolev-160 long range bomber exercises that come close to the airspace of the other Arctic nations. The Canadian government of Stephen Harper prioritized Arctic defence with a series of procurement plans to make the Canadian Forces operable in the region. These activities influenced U.S. interest in security the Arctic, which saw the development of official policy and strategy documents demonstrating increasing emphasis on security and defence.

- **2014-2017:** Since 2014, strategic challenges include Russia's aggression in Ukraine involving the annexation of Crimean Peninsula and indirect support to Russian resistance in the Donbass region; in addition to the rapid expansion of Russian Arctic militarization. The other key great power Arctic challengers China's push for Arctic influence, being more active in the High North with voyages of the *Xue Long* icebreaking research vessel. The U.S. took up the Chairmanship of Arctic Council 2015-2017, following upon Canada's Chairmanship, reinforcing the Arctic as an important national policy item. U.S. policy and strategy produced by the White House and DoD identify Arctic capability gaps.
- **2017-Current:** The return to great power politics in an era of grey or hybrid warfare, deployed by Russia, China, and other nations to destabilize the Western Liberal Order (or the Rules-Based International Order). The rise of the Trump Jacksonian Administration<sup>23</sup> re-oriented U.S national interests in the Arctic with an economic focus on oil and gas development; and the 2019 Arctic Strategy features new defence concepts. China released a White Paper in 2018 describing itself as a near-Arctic state and its pursuit of a Polar Silk Road as part of its Belt and Road Initiative.

Critical junctures causing shifts in U.S. Arctic security and defence policy can be noted in 2007-2009, 2014-2016, and in 2018/2019. The official Arctic policy and strategy documents produced during these periods, demonstrate both path dependence in prioritizing issues stated in early policies, and significant shifts in the expansion of the military-strategic dimension. The latter resulted from increasing threats and challenges (and opportunities) emerging through Arctic as a result of climate change, international interest and activity in the region, the re-militarization of Russia (including new nuclear threats), and Chinese influence in the High North. Thus, the process of American Arctic policy formulation is rational, based on national interests in the region in response to enduring priorities and new threats and challenges that pose uncertainty and unpredictability to the defence of the U.S. homeland and the continent.

## Key Actors and Issues

There are multiple interacting variables at multiple levels of analysis that together influence the trajectory of U.S Arctic policy and strategy formulation. Notably, however, is the rationality and consistency observed in the chronological policies and strategies from 1971 to the present. With the increasing complexity and uncertainty in the security environment, in conjunction with sustainable economic, environmental, social, development, and scientific research interests in the Arctic, the U.S. developed solutions in response to emerging challenges with input from actors from the international, regional, continental, and domestic levels. These actors comprise stakeholders in Arctic outcomes. This section outlines the levels of analysis, actors and issues therein, that affect Arctic policy and strategy outputs.

### Levels of Analysis:<sup>24</sup>

- **International Level:** Variables include strategic actors and events at the international level that have an impact on Arctic politics, security and defence, and other relevant dimensions. Multilateral institutions and conventions, such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the



Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf play a role in the Arctic regarding the status of coastal waters, the water column, and seabed of Arctic territorial states.

- **Regional (Arctic) Level:** Key regional actors include Arctic states (the Circumpolar-5 and the Arctic-8), non-Arctic states – interests, activity, and influence in the region, regional organizations and institutions, and other non-state actors. Regional variables include Arctic-specific events and issues that affect actors' interests and security in the region. Regional cooperation between agencies, such as the U.S., Canada, and other Arctic nations, on exercises and joint responses include coordination between Navies and Coast Guard services.<sup>25</sup>
- **Continental Level:** The continental relationship between the United States and Canada defines the variables at this level of analysis. The Canada-U.S. defence relationship through NORAD, the Permanent Joint Board on Defence (PJBD), and the Tri-Command Structure (NORAD, USNORTHCOM, and CJOC)<sup>26</sup> involves a strong Northern orientation. The PJBD has been an effective informal and advisory body comprised of Canadian and American officials since the Second World War, and continues to advise on continental defence issues.<sup>27</sup> The Commander of USNORTHCOM, as per the 2011 Unified Command Plan, is responsible for advocating for Arctic capabilities. Canadian influence on the formulation of U.S. Arctic security policy and strategies includes the release of defence policies (such as the Canada First Defence Strategy, 2008) that involve a strong Arctic security and sovereignty component addressing defence requirements for the region. Within this context Canadian and American priorities are often aligned.<sup>28</sup> Other relevant actors and events may also affect the North American continent (such as NATO).
- **Domestic Level:** Actors at the unit (state) level involves individuals, departments, organizations, and agencies. These include the White House, the Department of Defence (especially Navy and Coast Guard), US Northern Command, other relevant government departments (OGDs), the epistemic community (academics and think tank analysts), the Congressional Research Service (CRS), the State of Alaska, and indigenous Northern peoples. The influence of these actors involves interest-specific approaches to the Arctic as it pertains to security and defence. This is observed strongly in the Executive, namely the Administration occupying the White House that determines certain agenda items, which are then adopted by the relevant departments and agencies. The National Security Council has historically been a key player in Arctic policymaking in Executive Branch.<sup>29</sup> The CRS and the epistemic community provides specialist knowledge on Arctic-related issues and outlines Arctic definitions. The military services may influence the direction of policy and strategic guidance through advising, drawing upon operational experience in the region, including success in interoperability among the branches, identifying threats, operational gaps, and requirements.

Key issues that affect U.S. Arctic interests include freedom of navigation, which concerns the status of the Northwest Passage as an international strait versus constituting internal Canadian waters. Strategic considerations concern the emergence of new security threats, such as Russian developments in hypersonic glide vehicles, hypersonic cruise missiles, maritime unmanned torpedo that can deliver nuclear payloads, new stealth bombers; and North Korean threats involving development of intercontinental ballistic missiles with nuclear warheads. These threats involve the North American Arctic and necessitate revisiting deterrence

concepts, upgrades/replacement to early warning, and expanding missile defence. Strategic concerns, including the economic and environmental dimensions involve China's activity – icebreaker voyages in the Arctic, its presence in a number of Arctic states as resource development partner, and its drive for increasing influence in Arctic affairs through its observer status on the Arctic Council and description of itself as a near-Arctic nation. The Bering Sea maritime border with Russia is also becoming an issue of concern. Domain awareness is also a key interest in light of being able to detect and respond to traditional and non-traditional security threats, the latter involving accidents due to international shipping, cruise tourism, downed aircraft, oil and gas exploration that could result in pollution of the waters and coasts, emergency rescue, impact of human activity and machines on wildlife patterns and local peoples who rely on the environment.

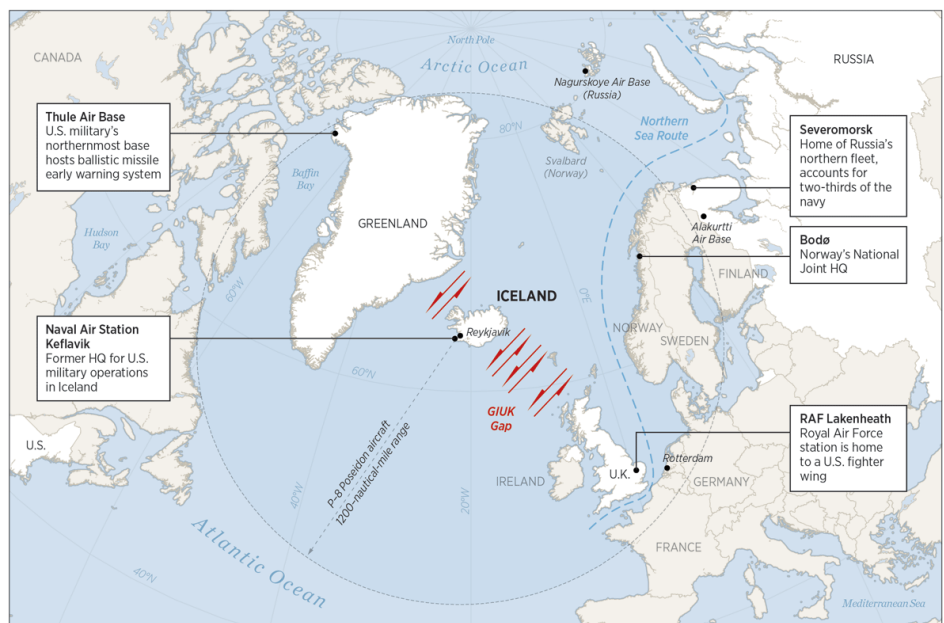
## Forecasting<sup>30</sup>

Within the current context of continental defence, homeland defence, and Canada-U.S. defence partnership considerations, what does the trajectory of U.S. Arctic interests suggest for the future? Within the uncertainty of the changing global security context and new threats to continental security, the U.S. is likely to increase its emphasis on modernizing military systems to reinforce continental defence. The extent to which Arctic capabilities factor into these developments remains to be seen. U.S. Arctic policy and strategy demonstrate increasing interest in initiative to defend U.S. security in the High North, however an evaluation of the implementation of plans and acquisitions may demonstrate a less than rational approach<sup>31</sup> to carrying the means for achieving the policy and strategic ends and ways. Nevertheless, the emphasis on continental defence involving the Arctic, includes the evolution and modernization of current binational North American defence arrangements. Within this context and into the future, this work forecasts the increasing alignment of Canadian defence interests with those of the United States. This alignment is likely to cause a revisit to issues that previously divided both nations, with the potential for collaborative and cooperative approaches:

- **NORAD modernization:** This includes the evolution of North American Defence with new concepts for deterring adversaries with new capabilities to target the continent and how Canada and the U.S. view their roles in the continental defence partnership.<sup>32</sup> Part of this evolution and modernization includes requirements for enhancing situational awareness in Arctic, particularly in upgrading, filling gaps in, and replacing the North Warning System, to reinforce detection and early warning of incoming threats to the continent. It also includes rethinking current C2 (command and control) to provide the NORAD Commander with more strategic space in which to operate and coordinate with other combatant commanders.<sup>33</sup>
- **Ballistic Missile Defence:** Although previous politically unfeasible, under new threats and uncertainty, Canada might begin participation in BMD, as part of the evolution of North American defence. New capabilities deployed in response to hypersonic vehicles, long-range delivery systems, and stealth aircraft might encourage Canada to host U.S. interceptors, acquire cruise missile interceptors, permit U.S. personnel, and/or fighter aircraft to operate from northern Canadian airfields,<sup>34</sup> or other methods that increase Canada's role in the Missile Defence mission.

- Northwest Passage:** The disputed status of the Northwest Passage may be re-addressed in light of increasing international shipping and other navigation on the Canadian side of the Arctic. Addressing the challenges posed by international traffic in the Archipelago could see the emergence of a joint Canada-U.S. management of the waterway (similar to U.S.-Russia joint management of the Bering Strait). On the other hand, Canada’s claim to the internal status of the waterway could be reinforced by Russia’s claim to Northern Sea Route. It is difficult to predict how the latter outcome would play out in Canada-U.S. relations, as the two nations cooperate on other initiatives. Canada and the U.S. have effectively agreed to disagree for the past 60 years.

- NATO involvement in the Arctic:** Canada has actively kept NATO out of North American Arctic affairs, focusing on the cooperative framework provided by the Arctic Council, Ilullisat Declaration, UNCLOS, and other institutions. However, Canadian participation in joint exercises with NATO allies in the North European theatre (such as Trident Juncture) may increasingly complicate Canada’s interests in keeping NATO out of North American Arctic. The U.S. may see a preference for involving more NATO exercises on the Western Hemispheric Arctic as part of broader initiatives



**Figure 3. The Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom (GIUK-N) Gap.**

Source: Luke Coffey, Daniel Kochis, and James Di Pane, “Arctic Security is Not About Preparing for War, But About Preparing for the Future,” The Heritage Foundation, 22 January 2020, <https://www.heritage.org/defense/report/arctic-security-not-about-preparing-war-about-preparing-the-future>.

to deter an increasingly aggressive Russia, and potentially China. A second-order forecast to such activity is the provocation of Russia and a deterioration of the cooperative Arctic regime currently in place. A strategic area of concern for NATO nations in Europe and North America is the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom (GIUK) gap – a chokepoint through which Russian submarines may access the Atlantic Ocean. This was the case during the Cold War, and recently sonar and SOSUS sensors are picking up such activity again. In this region both NATO and Russian air and undersea assets engage in anti-submarine warfare operations.<sup>35</sup>

- Multilateral Level Arctic Security Organization:** There may emerge a multilateral organization comprised of the Arctic-5 or Arctic-8 dedicated to managing Arctic military-strategic issues beyond Search and Rescue to fill the gap left by the Arctic Council and other regional institutions that do not

address the military dimension beyond Search and Rescue. The current gap is problematic as it is increasingly important to manage competition and potential crisis escalation in the Arctic. As noted in NORAD modernization and evolution, organization could address new concepts of defence and deterrence beyond continental context, which may potentially involve NATO in the North. However, the role of Russia as a player in such an organization might either mitigate the provocative challenges posed by NATO in the Arctic; or play a constraining role in managing the military-strategic dimension, similar to deadlocks observed in the UNSC, in which Russia and China are permanent members.

## Conclusion

The Arctic has been a region of national security interest since the Second World War and Cold War, as a geographical feature in the defence against adversaries in the region. The end of the Cold War saw a shift in national interests away from the Arctic allowing its role and assets in the region degrade. In 2009 Rob Huebert described the U.S. as a Reluctant Arctic Actor<sup>36</sup> as the nation's strategic focus was in other geopolitical regions, while the Arctic re-emerged as an important geo-strategic region requiring a U.S. response. The recent 2019 official documents outlining U.S. Arctic policy and strategy demonstrate an increasing urgency in ensuring a capable Arctic military presence by sea, air, and land. In addition, a serious discussion of evolving North American defence and deterrence concepts to manage new challenges to the continent has emerged. Whether the Trump Administration will follow through on implementation of means to achieve policy ends remains to be seen, but regional commanders have been vocal about security challenges and requirements in the High North. At a recent testimony to the U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee, the Commander of NORAD and USNORTHCOM General Terrence O'Shaughnessy described the Arctic as "the new frontline to our homeland defense" requiring domain awareness and the ability to defend and deter in that region. Notably, he stated that "the Arctic is no longer a fortress wall."<sup>37</sup> The end of this fortress wall protecting North America may encourage Canada-U.S. alignment in developing solutions to issues that once divided them, in addition to the U.S. taking greater ownership of its Arctic identity via Alaska.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Rob Huebert, "The United States Arctic Policy: The Reluctant Arctic Power," *SPP Briefing Papers* 2:2 (May 2009), University of Calgary.

<sup>2</sup> Huebert, "Reluctant Arctic Power."

<sup>3</sup> James Kraska and Betsy Barker, "Emerging Arctic security challenges." Policy Brief (Washington, DC: Center for a New American Security, March 2014), 1.

<sup>4</sup> P. Whitney Lackenbauer and Rob Huebert. "Premier Partners: Canada, the United States and Arctic Security." *Canadian Foreign Policy* 20:3 (2014): 327.

<sup>5</sup> National Security Council, National Security Decision Memorandum NSDM-144, United States Arctic Policy and Arctic Policy Group, Washington, DC, 20506, 22 December 1971, <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsdm-nixon/nsdm-144.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> 1971 NSDM-144.

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<sup>7</sup> U.S. Arctic Research and Policy Act, 1984, Public Law 98-373, 31 July 1984. (Amended 1990, Public Law 101-609, 16 November 1990),

[https://www.nsf.gov/geo/opp/arctic/iarpc/arc\\_res\\_pol\\_act.js](https://www.nsf.gov/geo/opp/arctic/iarpc/arc_res_pol_act.js)

<sup>8</sup> White House, National Security Presidential Directive-66 / Homeland Security Presidential Directive-25, "Arctic Region Policy," Office of the Press Secretary, 9 January 2009, <https://www.hsdl.org/?abstract&did=750476>.

<sup>9</sup> Department of Defense, Quadrennial Defense Review, February 2010, <https://archive.defense.gov/qdr/QDR%20as%20of%2029JAN10%201600.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> DoD, Report to Congress on Arctic Operations in the Northwest Passage, OUSD Policy, May 2011, [https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/Tab\\_A\\_Arctic\\_Report\\_Public.pdf](https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/Tab_A_Arctic_Report_Public.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> 2011 Report to Congress on Arctic Operations in the Northwest Passage.

<sup>12</sup> White House, National Security Strategy for the Arctic Region, 10 May 2013, [https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/nat\\_arctic\\_strategy.pdf](https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/nat_arctic_strategy.pdf).

<sup>13</sup> US White House, "National Security Strategy of the United States of America, December 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> DoD, "Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge," 5 February 2018, <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> 2017 NSS, 40.

<sup>16</sup> Department of Defense. *Arctic Strategy*. Report to Congress. Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, June 2019, 1-5.

<sup>17</sup> US Navy, Strategic Outlook for the Arctic, Office of Naval Operations, January 2019, [https://www.navy.mil/strategic/Navy\\_Strategic\\_Outlook\\_Arctic\\_Jan2019.pdf](https://www.navy.mil/strategic/Navy_Strategic_Outlook_Arctic_Jan2019.pdf).

<sup>18</sup> US Coast Guard, *Arctic Strategic Outlook: The United States Coast Guard's Vision for the Arctic Region*, April 2019, [https://www.uscg.mil/Portals/0/Images/arctic/Arctic\\_Strategy\\_Book\\_APR\\_2019.pdf](https://www.uscg.mil/Portals/0/Images/arctic/Arctic_Strategy_Book_APR_2019.pdf).

<sup>19</sup> See Colonel (Retired, USAF) John L. Conway, "Towards a US Air Force Arctic Strategy," *Air and Space Power Journal*, 31:2 (Summer 2017).

<sup>20</sup> The State Council of the People's Republic of China, White Paper: China's Arctic Policy, 26 January 2018,

[http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white\\_paper/2018/01/26/content\\_281476026660336.htm](http://english.www.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2018/01/26/content_281476026660336.htm).

<sup>21</sup> Canada's Northern Strategy: Our North, Our Heritage, Our Future (July 2009); Statement on Canada's Arctic Foreign Policy: Exercising Sovereignty and Promoting Canada's Northern Strategy Abroad (August 2010); News Release: Canada's Northern Strategy (2013); Global Affairs Canada, Canada's Arctic and Northern Policy Framework (2019), <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1560523306861/1560523330587>.

<sup>22</sup> Some of these correspond with Rob Huebert's geopolitical eras. Huebert, Rob, "The Arctic and the Strategic Defence of North America: Resumption of the 'Long Polar Watch,'" in *North American Strategic Defense in the 21st Century: Security and Sovereignty in an Uncertain World*, eds. Christian Leuprecht, Joel J. Sokolsky, and Thomas Hughes (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 174-186.

<sup>23</sup> Momani and MacInnes state that the Jacksonian Trump Administration is less likely to intervene in areas unless U.S. interests are at stake. Bessma Momani and Morgan MacInnes, "NORAD in an Age of Jacksonianism," in *North American Strategic Defense in the 21st Century: Security and Sovereignty in an Uncertain World*, eds. Christian Leuprecht, Joel J. Sokolsky, and Thomas Hughes. (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 82-96. This is reflected in emphasis on security and resources via Alaska in Arctic policy.

<sup>24</sup> The levels of analysis for this section draws upon and adapts Whitney Lackenbauer's framework to assessing trends and themes in the Arctic for the U.S. focus of the current study. P. Whitney Lackenbauer, "Understanding the Future Arctic Security Environment: Applying NATO Strategic Foresight Analysis to Canadian Arctic Defence and Security Considerations," *North American and Arctic Defence and Security Network (NAADSN)*, January 2020, 4.

<sup>25</sup> Huebert, "Reluctant Arctic Power."

<sup>26</sup> Department of National Defence, North American Aerospace Defence Command (NORAD), 14 March 2018, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/operations/allies-partners/norad.html>.

<sup>27</sup> Andrea Charron, "The Permanent Joint Board on Defence (PJBD): How Permanent and Joint? Celebrating 80 Years of Cooperation," A report by the Centre for Defence and Security Studies, University of Manitoba, 25 February 2020.

<sup>28</sup> Lackenbauer and Huebert, "Premier Partners," provide a historical background of the Canada-U.S. partnership in the Arctic.

<sup>29</sup> Although Orttung and Weingartner indicate that this role has been significantly lacking under Bolton's leadership.

Robert Orttung and Katherine Weingartner, "U.S. Arctic Policymaking Under Trump and Obama: Implications for Russia and China," Policy Memo, PONARS Eurasia, April 2019, <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/us-arctic-policymaking-under-trump-and-obama-implications>.

<sup>30</sup> In light of the "rapidly changing complex security environment" which will "continue to be the main driver of NATO's adaptation efforts," NATO conducts a series of Strategic Foresight Analyses to identify trends in a multi-dimensional international security environment in order to adapt and plan for future challenges. This analysis includes evaluating developments involving the Arctic region within in the environmental, economic, commercial, and military-strategic dimensions. NATO, Strategic Foresight Analysis, Allied Command Transformation, 2017 Report, [https://www.act.nato.int/images/stories/media/doclibrary/171004\\_sfa\\_2017\\_report\\_hr.pdf](https://www.act.nato.int/images/stories/media/doclibrary/171004_sfa_2017_report_hr.pdf). The Strategic Foresight Analysis is conducted under NATO's Allied Command Transformation Long-Term Military Transformation Programme, headquartered in Norfolk, Virginia. NATO, "Futures Work: NATO Long-Term Military Transformation, <https://www.act.nato.int/futures-work>.

<sup>31</sup> The implementation stage of policy is more likely to reflect a non-rational, incrementalism process, characterized by conflicting interests, actors, and issues, including politics, budgets, and delays involving planned procurements.

<sup>32</sup> Explored at length in the works of Andrea Charron and James Fergusson, discussing the modernization and evolution of North American Defence, via NORAD, including requirements for replacement of the aging North Warning System. Andrea Charron and James Fergusson, "Beyond Modernization," in *North American Strategic Defense in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Security and Sovereignty in an Uncertain World*, eds. Christian Leuprecht, Joel J. Sokolsky, and Thomas Hughes (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing), 141-148. Anessa Kimball also addresses the rationality of

modernizing North American Defence through institutions already in existence and functioning effectively for Canada-U.S. cooperation. Anessa Kimball, "Future Uncertainty, Strategic Defense, and North American Defense Cooperation: Rational Institutionalist Arguments Pragmatically Suggest NORAD's Adaptation Over Replacement," in *North American Strategic Defense in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Security and Sovereignty in an Uncertain World*, eds. Christian Leuprecht, Joel J. Sokolsky, and Thomas Hughes (Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing), 122-137.

<sup>33</sup> Andrea Charron, 2 April 2020.

<sup>34</sup> Charron and Fergusson, "Beyond Modernization," 145-146.

<sup>35</sup> As part of its Bastion Defence concept to defend its ballistic missile submarines in the Barents Sea and Arctic Ocean, Russia can send its Northern Fleet assets through the gap in a potential conflict – this was observed in Russia's large scale naval exercise Ocean Shield, August 2019. In October-December 2019 an Akula and Yasen class attack submarines sailed south in the GIUK to the North Atlantic. Thomas Nilsen, "Russian Anti-Submarine Aircraft on Combat Training Further South in the GIUK Gap than Normal," Barents Observer, 29 February 2020,

<https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2020/02/russian-anti-sub-aircraft-combat-training-further-south-normal-over-norwegian-sea>.

<sup>36</sup> The U.S. "has been unwilling to take the initiative in the arena of international Arctic policy." Huebert, "Reluctant Arctic Power," 2009.

<sup>37</sup> Statement of General Terrence J. O'Shaughnessy, United States Air Force Commander United States Northern Command and North American Aerospace Defense Command, Before the Senate Armed Services Committee, 13 February 2020, 2, 16. [https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/OShaughnessy\\_02-13-20.pdf](https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/OShaughnessy_02-13-20.pdf).