

ON THIN ICE?

Perspectives on Arctic Security

EDITED BY

DUNCAN DEPLEDGE AND P. WHITNEY LACKENBAUER

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North American and Arctic Defence and Security Network (NAADSN) /
Réseau sur la défense et la sécurité nord-américaines et arctiques (RDSNAA)
c/o School for the Study of Canada
Trent University
Peterborough, Ontario, Canada
K9J 7B8

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PUBLICATION

On Thin Ice? Perspectives on Arctic Security / Edited by Duncan Depledge and P.
Whitney Lackenbauer

(NAADSN Engage Series no. 5 / RDSNAA série d'engage no. 5)

Published in print and electronic formats.

ISBN: 978-1-989811-13-9 (e-book)

978-1-989811-14-6 (print)

1. Arctic regions—Strategic aspects. 2. Arctic regions—Defence and Security.
3. Arctic security. I. Depledge, Duncan, editor. II. Lackenbauer, P. Whitney,
editor. Title: *On Thin Ice? Perspectives on Arctic Security*. III. Series: NAADSN
Engage Series / RDSNAA série d'engage; no. 5

Designer and layout: P. Whitney Lackenbauer

Cover design: Jennifer Arthur-Lackenbauer

Cover image: Duncan Depledge

Copy editor: Corah Hodgson

Distributed by the North American and Arctic Defence and Security Network
(NAADSN)

Distribué par le Réseau sur la défense et la sécurité nord-américaines et arctiques
(RDSNAA)

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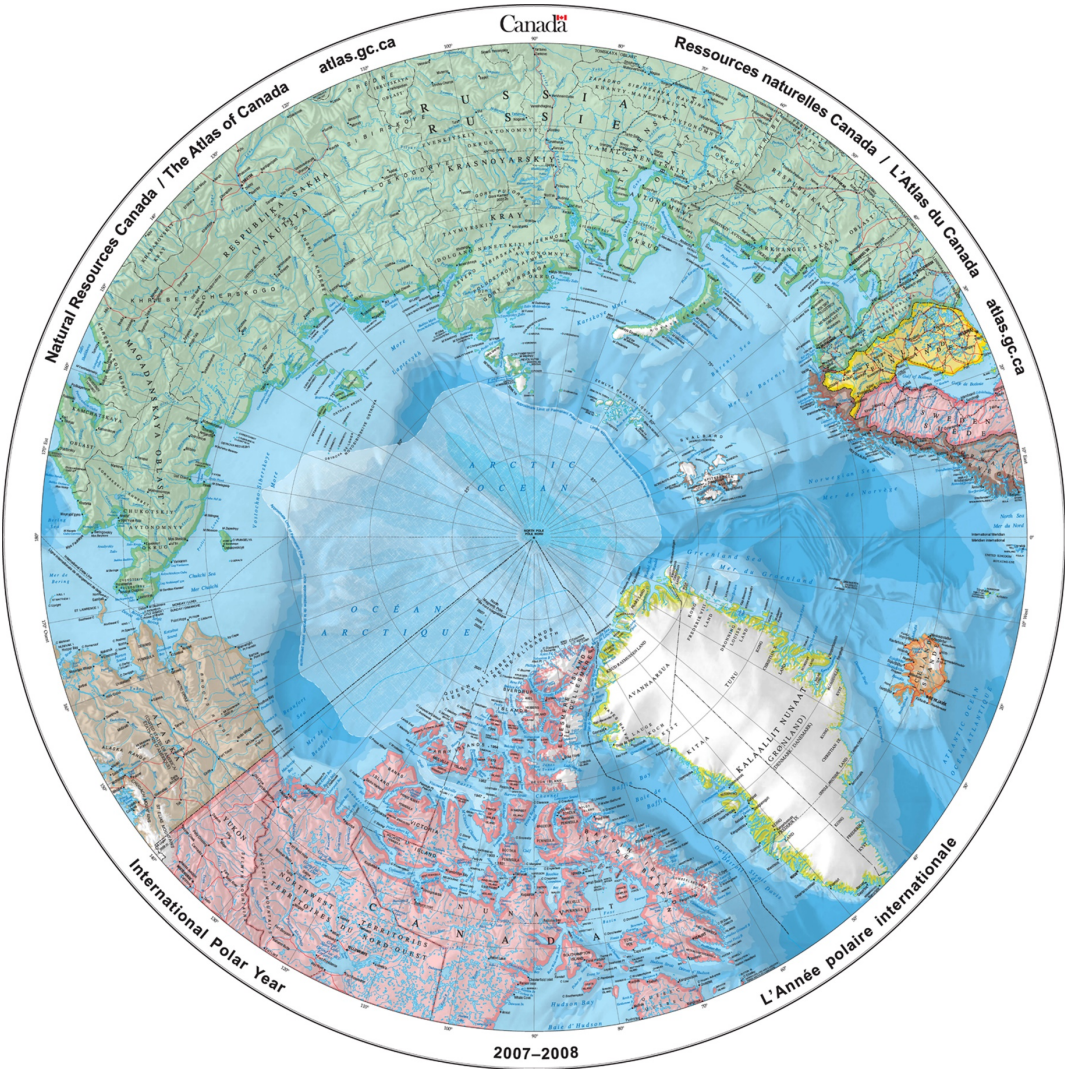
Foreword

As a tactical and strategic military practitioner with some 25 years of experience in operating in the Arctic, I can say confidently that much in the region has changed. Yet for many decision-makers, be they from a security or political perspective, the Arctic has only recently gained relevance. For much of the post-Cold War era, the region was a political and military dead end. However, with Russia resurgent, China rising, and the international rules-based order weakening, all set against the backdrop of climate-induced change, geopolitical uncertainty in the region now abounds. Yet, above all, the Arctic remains an environment into which forces cannot easily be pitched, a factor that is, on occasion, overlooked by not only politicians, but also the military. As a consequence, assessments in and of the Arctic, both in times of peace and of tension, must utilize foresight and inform decision-makers as coherently and concisely as possible.

I have had the pleasure of working with Duncan Depledge and Professor Whitney Lackenbauer over several years, and have always welcomed and enjoyed their counsel and exchange of clarity and wisdom on Arctic security. This volume perfectly illustrates the importance of giving both politicians and practitioners access to the latest research in a concise and consumable format. Since my initial deployment to the region in 1994, to serving as branch head of the Royal Marines Mountain Leaders specialization conducting regular Arctic deployments, through to writing futures reports on the Arctic as a strategic analyst for NATO, the importance of the speed of relevance, clarity of material (cutting through the sheer volume of information), and a concise methodology to ease decision-making has never diminished. In a world where information load and cadence are rapidly on the increase, narrowing the scope and range of perspectives affords decision-makers, at every level, the best opportunity to out-pace and out-think the competition.

Nowhere more than NATO is the synchronization of political and military decision-making more acute. Given the transformation taking place in the Arctic due to the impacts of climate change, and the significant bearing on the Alliance's freedom to operate over the coming decades, assistance in improving foresight and generating a concise but well-informed narrative, as this volume provides, is rarely seen, but always welcomed.

*Lt Col Adam Rutherford – Royal Marines
Strategic Foresight Branch, NATO
March 2021*



Preface

In December 2016, the United Kingdom's House of Commons Defence Committee decided to examine the security and defence implications of environmental and geopolitical transformation in the Arctic. The inquiry was led by a sub-committee chaired by James Gray, MP, a figure who has been, and continues to be, a major driving force of British parliamentary engagement with polar affairs. It was my great honour to be invited to serve as the specialist adviser to the sub-committee throughout the inquiry, which lasted until 2018. This was a period in which I learnt a great deal about how to speak plainly and help parliamentarians quickly get up to speed with the latest ideas and debates emerging from academic research.

During the inquiry, the sub-committee received 29 submissions of written evidence, which offered a range of perspectives from academics and other expert researchers. I was greatly impressed by the quality of what we received. So too was Professor Whitney Lackenbauer, who had been watching the inquiry unfold from Canada. Quite by chance, Whitney and I found ourselves discussing all this in the margins of a workshop in Oslo in 2019, at which point Whitney proposed an idea: why don't we use the Committee model of collecting written evidence to curate a new volume showcasing – in an accessible format – what a distinguished group of experts believe are the key issues, trends, and developments in the Arctic that need to be the focus of attention? We could then put this volume in the hands of any parliamentarians, ministers, civil servants, diplomats, and military personnel looking for a rapid introduction to some of the very latest thinking on security and defence in the Arctic, from a wide range of international perspectives. This idea has inspired us to bring together this volume and make it freely available. The title, *On Thin Ice? Perspectives on Arctic Security*, is our nod to the House of Commons Defence Committee's own report, *On Thin Ice: UK Defence in the Arctic*, for the role it played in setting us off on this endeavour.

We began approaching experts from our networks in September 2020, starting with those who had submitted evidence to the UK House of Commons Defence Committee inquiry and asking them if they would be willing to update their original papers. We then widened the net to be more inclusive of other perspectives and ideas, each time asking our authors to write about what they thought were the key security and defence dynamics emerging in the Arctic. Given the short turnaround for papers, we were unable to accommodate everyone. Indeed, if anything, we risked inviting too many submissions as we

came across more and more excellent research and scholarship. We accepted that we could not cover Arctic security and defence from every angle, which is why we opted to present the volume as a showcase of ideas, rather than a comprehensive account. We also recognized that constraints on the availability of other experts to write for a tight deadline meant that we would inevitably end up with silences around specific state and non-state perspectives, geopolitical controversies, and alternative ways of framing Arctic security and defence challenges. Nevertheless, we believe that the expert insights presented in this volume will be of considerable value to anyone looking to make a rapid assessment of the security and defence dynamics shaping the Arctic.

Duncan Depledge
February 2021

Introduction

Duncan Depledge and P. Whitney Lackenbauer

Around the world, politicians, civil servants, and military planners are waking up to the transformative effects that climate change will have on national and international security. The Arctic, which is warming at more than twice the average rate of the rest of the world, is at the epicentre of this challenge, with commentators frequently highlighting how the rapidly diminishing ice cover is transforming the geography and geopolitics of the region.

Many policymakers and publics still see Arctic climate change in deceptively simple terms, however. A popular narrative is that an increasingly ice-free Arctic Ocean (in summertime, at least) raises the prospect of shorter, faster shipping routes between the world's largest trading economies. At the same time, greater maritime access is expected to facilitate the exploitation of vast troves of mineral and energy resources, as well as create new opportunities for fishing, bioprospecting, and tourism. Owing in part to the appeal of this story, when two submersibles planted a Russian flag on the seabed at the North Pole in 2007, there was worldwide alarm that the starting gun had been fired on an armed dash by Arctic states to seize new territory and assert exclusive access rights.

While the Arctic states¹ correctly dismissed claims of impending armed conflict in the region (by both word and deed) and hyperbole alleging a new Arctic “gold rush,” the calm that has settled over the region is an uneasy one. Within and beyond the Arctic, questions remain about whether all is as well in the Circumpolar North as the Arctic states' foreign ministries like to suggest. The intensity of regional military activity has risen, especially in the European High North, as tensions between NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) allies and Russia have heightened in other parts of the world. Indeed, it did not take the Trump administration (2016-2020) long to expose the fragility of the so-called “Arctic exceptionalism”² by declaring the Arctic “an arena of great power competition” and adopting a more confrontational posture towards Russia and China.

While the Trump administration lacked subtlety, its approach did contain three kernels of truth:

- (1) that Russia's military posture in the Arctic is not easily disassociated from its attempts to divide, destabilize, and ultimately diminish the West;
- (2) that China's science- and commercially-led push for influence in the Arctic, most recognizably in Greenland and Iceland, raises important questions about the compatibility of Beijing's long-term aspirations with the regional *status quo*; and
- (3) that for decades, Western policymakers have under-invested in securing – in the broadest sense of the word – the Arctic and those who live there, leaving a void for potential competitors to exploit.

These kernels of truth have formed the basis of recent discussions about what a changing Arctic means for national defence and international security planning, and are readily apparent in the recent pronouncements and strategies of Western Arctic states, as well as public inquiries such as the one conducted by the United Kingdom's House of Commons Defence Committee between 2017 and 2018.³ Instead of worrying about an ungoverned race for resources and territory in the Arctic, the emerging narrative locates a more significant concern, for Western security and defence communities, in the intensifying competition for global influence, and its effects on the Arctic. As geographers Klaus Dodds and Mark Nuttall have argued, the real "scramble" underway in the Arctic is for the authority to determine the region's future, both in terms of who the principal actors are and what they are able to do there.⁴ The challenge for policymakers and other actors is to decide how best to monitor, respond, and intervene in this context.

The chapters in this volume echo other scholars in emphasizing that there is a robust array of rules, norms, and institutions that guide international interactions in the Circumpolar North. This rules-based order not only advances the Arctic states' national interests but their global ones as well, offering opportunities to shape international agendas on climate change, contaminants, and other global environmental threats that have a disproportionate impact on the Arctic. Furthermore, the Arctic states continue to leverage existing multilateral organizations – such as the Arctic Council, Arctic Economic Council, United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf, International Maritime Organization (IMO), North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Arctic Coast Guard Forum, and Arctic "5+5" dialogue on Central Arctic Ocean fisheries – to promote their interests in the circumpolar world.⁵ These multilateral tools have proven resilient even with the downturn in relations between the West and Russia since 2014, with complex interdependence sustaining regional cooperation on search and rescue,

transboundary fisheries, extended continental shelves, navigation, a mandatory polar code, and science.⁶ While these successes should be celebrated, this volume also reminds us that cooperative endeavours in the Arctic must be nurtured and sustained if the region is to remain peaceful.

Notably, defence cooperation is one area that has already felt the direct effects of resurgent major power competition internationally – perhaps predictably, given that five of the Arctic Council’s eight member states are also NATO members. Countries such as Norway have pushed for stronger NATO involvement to meet a heightened Russian military threat, stand up to Russian intimidation, and show strong deterrence. Even countries such as Canada, which until recently was reticent to have the alliance adopt an explicit “Arctic” defence and security role lest it unnecessarily antagonize Russia (or at least play into Putin’s hands by appearing to validate his suggestion of Western aggressive intentions against Russia’s Arctic), are now embracing a NATO role. This framing inherently places Moscow in a rival camp, which is justified by Western concerns about Russia’s robust military capabilities in the Arctic and its regional intentions in light of revisionist behaviour elsewhere on the international stage. Although some of these narratives continue to suggest that Arctic regional dynamics are likely to precipitate conflict between Arctic states, most now worry about the danger of “spill over” from competition elsewhere. Growing non-Arctic state and non-state interest in the Circumpolar North adds to the complexity and uncertainty.⁷

This volume further recognizes how the non-linearity of the physical changes in the Arctic region complicates efforts to project and plan for possible futures. For millennia, Indigenous peoples – whose cultures, societies, and economies have adapted to and become intimately entwined with homelands distant from major population centres – almost exclusively populated several parts of the Circumpolar Arctic.⁸ By contrast, modern states have grappled with the challenge of demonstrating and maintaining a permanent presence in the Arctic, with associated sovereignty and security practices often overlooking or harming Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous communities in the region. States have amplified discourses about the need for a more robust presence and greater control in the face of geophysical changes that evoke worries of increasing “outside” incursions into the region. Even with less ice, however, the Arctic will remain a remote, challenging, and expensive environment for non-Northern stakeholders to operate in. For all but the most dedicated actors, military and commercial activities in the Arctic Ocean are likely to be expeditionary and transitory in the near-term future. Beyond that lies the realm of speculation – and, for many commentators, acute anxiety.

Chapter Overviews

It is not the aim of this volume to settle the debate about whether the Arctic will still be peaceful in the years and decades ahead. Instead, we showcase a range of expert perspectives on Arctic security based on what the authors themselves identified as the key actors, dynamics, issues, and challenges to which politicians, civil servants, and military planners should be attentive as they make their own enquiries into Arctic defence and security affairs.

In the first chapter on “Comprehensive Security in the Arctic: Beyond ‘Arctic Exceptionalism,’” Gunhild Hoogensen Gjørsv and Kara K. Hodgson interrogate one of the dominant concepts used to characterize circumpolar relations, and make the case for why comprehensive security may represent a more useful analytical tool for understanding regional dynamics. Since Mikhail Gorbachev’s icebreaking Murmansk speech in 1987, many commentators have considered the Arctic an “exceptional” region of peace and cooperation. While acknowledging the relevance of this narrative, their contribution argues that the “Arctic exceptionalism” narrative is insufficient to capture a complex regional security situation, instead suggesting that a comprehensive security lens facilitates a more nuanced analysis of power to be able to identify which security narratives dominate, why, and based upon whose decision. After a brief description of the key elements associated with “Arctic exceptionalism” and “comprehensive security,” the authors offer four core arguments against the dominance of the Arctic exceptionalism narrative, concluding that the comprehensive security approach better captures dynamic cooperative and competitive Arctic security narratives.

In chapter two, Elana Wilson Rowe, Ulf Sverdrup, Karsten Friis, Geir Hønneland, and Mike Sfraga caution against viewing trends of conflict and cooperation in the Arctic in binary terms. While the US and Europe are determined to confront malign activity in the region, all sides continue to “demonstrate a commitment to cooperation and joint solutions to common challenges.” After reviewing the key factors and drivers supporting and challenging stability in the Arctic, the authors remind us that “cooperation in conflict” has long been the norm in the region, allowing cooperative governance to progress despite the enduring NATO-Russia military rivalry. Ongoing dialogue in the region – essential for addressing the regional and global implications of climate change – is poorly served by focusing on “narratives or practices of strategic competition alone.” To avoid “political tipping points” beyond which cooperation will become too difficult, the authors call on policymakers to be more proactive in how they address emerging governance challenges related to security and economic development.

In chapter three, Andreas Østhagen offers a framework to conceptualize the different, and at times contradictory, political dynamics at play in the Circumpolar North. Adopting a state-centred approach, he refracts interactions through three levels of analysis: the regional (Arctic) level, which he assesses as “good”; global power politics at the international systemic level, which he assesses as “bad”; and bilateral relations between Arctic states, which he characterizes as “ugly.” Turning to the question of how best to deal with Arctic-specific security concerns, Østhagen highlights that “the difficulties encountered in trying to establish an arena for security discussions indicate the high sensitivity to, and influences from, events and evolutions elsewhere.” Nevertheless, he explains why paradoxical dynamics at play in the region, featuring aspects of cooperation and competition, call for more nuance and sophistication than simple descriptions of Arctic geopolitics or “new Cold War” narratives encourage.

In chapter four, P. Whitney Lackenbauer echoes this call for greater complexity and nuance. Despite being the second largest Arctic country in geographical terms, Canada’s Arctic policies are often misunderstood or misconstrued – both domestically and internationally. After providing a sketch of four dominant Canadian schools of thought about Arctic security, and laying out the domestic political context, Lackenbauer promotes a model that deliberately parses threats *through*, *to*, and *in* the Arctic. In this construct, threats passing *through* the Arctic emanate from outside of the region and pass through or over it to strike targets also outside of the region. Threats *to* the Arctic are those that emanate from outside of the region and affect the region itself. Threats *in* the Arctic originate within the region and have primary implications for the region. While threats such as climate change straddle these categories, he suggests that “this conceptual exercise can help to determine appropriate scales for preparedness and response to different threats – by specific actors – rather than bundling them all together as a generic laundry list of ‘Arctic threats.’” He provides a succinct overview of how Canada approaches military threats *through* and *to* the Arctic with alliance partners, and how it approaches threats *to* and *in* the Arctic through a whole-of-society framework. Blending levels of analysis (akin to Østhagen’s approach) with specificity about the origins and targets of “Arctic” threats, Lackenbauer suggests that while “the evolving international balance of power may undermine global peace and security, this is not necessarily a zero-sum game in terms of *Arctic* regional stability.”

In chapter five, Rob Huebert offers a different assessment of the evolving Arctic security environment by highlighting the ongoing salience of conventional military competition in the region. He suggests four distinct

phases of recent security dynamics in the region. The first, from the end of the Cold War to 2000, featured demilitarization and multilateral cooperation. From 2000-2014, Huebert describes what he sees as the “re-emergence of national security Arctic imperatives,” offering specific examples from 2007 onward. The third phase, which ran from 2014-2017, saw “the re-emergence of the Strategic Arctic” and preparations for a “return to the Cold War,” marked by Russia’s transition “from a defensive posture to one that is more aggressive.” Huebert suggests that, since 2018, the Arctic has returned to the Cold War, with “rising great power competition as a major threat to regional security and cooperation.” He suggests that these changes are owed to the emergence of a “new ocean” in the Arctic, its central place in strategic deterrence, and Russia’s emergence “as a regional military hegemon.” This pits Russia against the West, and has provoked all the Arctic coastal states to invest in more robust military capabilities. “Thus, the real military challenge is not about a conflict over the Arctic and/or its resources,” Huebert insists, “but rather how the Arctic is being used by the predominant military powers.”

In chapter six, Ernie Regehr observes that while most NATO members are concerned about the resurgence of Russian military activity in the Arctic, there is also widespread acknowledgement that the biggest threat to peace in the region is the potential for “geopolitical spill over” from global great power competition, resulting in heightened hard security operations. At the same time, regional demand for soft security capabilities is rising. As Regehr explains, the problem confronting the region is that “these dual militarizing trends ... are accompanied by significantly downgraded dialogue and diplomatic engagement on security matters.” Particularly problematic, Regehr suggests, were the exclusionary practices adopted post-Crimea, which unrealistically sought “to marginalize Russia in a region that it dominates.” Reality dictates that both hard and soft security operations in the Arctic will continue to expand, demanding renewed “dialogue and consultation on arms control and the conditions for strategic stability.”

In chapter seven, Andrea Charron looks at the implications of great power competition for the North American security environment. While the radar network strung along the Arctic coastlines of Alaska, Canada, and Greenland has represented “the main solution to deterring and defending North America via the Arctic,” she suggests that we must look “beyond the North Warning System” to understand emerging plans for continental defence modernization. Great power competition globally is driving the agenda to enhance the detection, deterrence, and defeat mandates of the binational Canada-US North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD), which includes myriad initiatives to improve infrastructure and communication systems in the Arctic,

implement joint all-domain command and control, fuse and interpret information from new and existing sensors, and devise new kinetic and non-kinetic defeat mechanisms to defend the North American homeland. Charron highlights the importance of industrial and Indigenous partners in NORAD transformation efforts, wherein “the defence of North America needs to be thought of as a global effort reimagined for the twenty-first century.”

The theme of resurgent major power competition, and its influence on Arctic relations, informs many of the chapters in this volume. While Russia has clear rights and interests as an Arctic state (including the right to defend its sovereign territory), its international behaviour (which challenges Western expectations about adherence to the global rules-based order) directly inspires vigorous debate about the implications for regional peace and security. What some commentators cast as a new or ongoing “cold war” between Russia and the West and a “return of geopolitics” to the region, others decry as outmoded or alarmist frames. Accordingly, debates persist about the pace and form of Russia’s expanding military and security footprint in the region, with some experts seeing it as a dramatic build-up portending Russian aggression, and others suggesting that Russia’s military modernization program represents reasonable defensive measures to protect legitimate economic and sovereign interests in its Arctic and to address security and safety threats (such as search and rescue, safe navigation, and responding to natural and humanitarian emergencies).⁹

In chapter eight, Mathieu Boulègue shines a spotlight on how Russia’s military posture in the European Arctic has shifted over the past decade. He argues that this shift has been driven by two developments: growing concern in the Kremlin about the threat it perceives from NATO to Russian national interests in the Arctic, and the need to secure Russia’s “new border” in the North as the effects of climate change take hold. After explaining Russia’s security priorities in the Arctic, the political scientist explains how Russia’s posture – and NATO’s response to it – has created several “flashpoints” and “hot spots.” Similar to Regehr in chapter six, Boulègue concludes that the only way to avoid a worsening of the security situation in the Arctic is to “create a proper military-security architecture for the region” with “dedicated military-security stakeholder consultations.”

In chapter nine, Elizabeth Buchanan provides a short overview of what she describes as “coercive cooperation” in the Arctic. She suggests that while narratives of Arctic conflict are overblown, so too are narratives trumpeting the prevalence of cooperation that underemphasize the efforts needed to maintain low tensions in the face of coercive statecraft. Highlighting the salience of the “grey-zone strategies” that Arctic states are enacting in the contemporary Arctic,

Buchanan illustrates how these actors are asserting positions of authority based on geographic, international legal, and “great power” pretexts. “The duality of Arctic cooperation is understudied in the field of Arctic studies,” she emphasizes, and “as long as the coercive undertones of cooperative Arctic agendas exist, the region faces the potential for rapid shifts.” This reinforces the importance of regional dialogue, particularly with Russia: the largest Arctic stakeholder, and one “well versed in coercive cooperation and grey-zone strategy.” Accordingly, Buchanan cautions, “if other stakeholders fail to recognize and grasp the coercive elements that Russia is likely to couple with these cooperative agenda items, they will find themselves increasingly vulnerable in the evolving Arctic ‘great game.’”

In chapter ten, Andrew Foxall reassesses the “prevailing belief in Western capitals that an alliance between Russian and China exists in the Arctic,” arguing that the relationship between these two countries is “ambiguous and full of contradictions.” Misleading narratives that emphasize a “strategic partnership” downplay a relationship marked by “historical suspicions, geopolitical rivalry, and competing priorities,” in which neither country shares “a long-term vision of the world, nor a common understanding of their respective places within it.” Foxall argues that these divergences are readily apparent in the Arctic, where China and Russia have distinct agendas and “do not operate as a coordinated force.” Shared opportunities with respect to energy and shipping through the Northern Sea Route are offset by challenges associated with control over resource development projects, circumpolar governance, and the actual management of activities in waters that Russia considers to fall within its sovereign jurisdiction. Accordingly, Foxall’s long-term prognosis for the Sino-Russian relationship in the Arctic is uncertain, and where others see “strategic partnership,” he sees “strategic tension” that limits the prospects for a close alliance.

In chapter eleven, Katarina Kertysova and Alexander Graef take us back to the issues created by the absence of a robust security dialogue in the Arctic involving NATO allies and Russia. To address this gap (and drawing on their expertise on arms control and confidence-/security-building measures), the authors propose turning to the 1992 Treaty on Open Skies, an agreement which until recently has received very little attention in post-Cold War Arctic security studies. The authors explain that “the Treaty allows members to conduct joint, short-notice, unarmed observation flights over each other’s territory to collect imagery on military forces and activities, as well as industrial sites.” They argue that, despite recent setbacks, the concept of “cooperative aerial observation” that lies at the heart of the Treaty has an “important and

useful role to play in mitigating military security risks and, potentially, addressing environmental challenges in the region.”

In chapter twelve, Troy Bouffard and Edward Soto look at US Arctic-related national security priorities through the case study of a key maritime infrastructure project: the prospect of a deepwater port at Nome. Framed within the context of major power competition and the need for forward presence and deterrence, they explain the role and importance of logistics to facilitate sustained security operations in austere Arctic environments. They highlight how sea basing support capabilities that promote freedom of navigation, enable force projection, and deter would-be adversaries. “The United States has significant gaps and seams involving Arctic-related national security,” Bouffard and Soto note, and “... logistics provides the key to sustainable operations.”

In chapter thirteen, “Reinvigorating Old Friendships: Why the US Should Pursue an Engagement Strategy in Greenland,” Jon Rahbek-Clemmensen highlights the importance of proper international engagement attuned to specific parts of the Arctic. “Former President Donald Trump’s 2019 offer to buy Greenland, a semi-autonomous territory within the Kingdom of Denmark, came as a bolt out of the blue, causing global astonishment and no small amount of ridicule,” he observes. To explain why this happened (and why the US should adopt a different approach), the political scientist carefully lays out Greenland’s geostrategic importance to the US vis-à-vis Russia and China, and explains how the Americans can continue to secure their military objectives “without the hassle and expenses involved in running a welfare state under Arctic conditions” (as would be the case if it actually bought Greenland). Rahbek-Clemmensen suggests that “the United States should pursue an engagement strategy that combines targeted concessions with clever diplomacy to get the Danes and Greenlanders to cooperate.” With both Nuuk and Copenhagen “very interested in supporting US security interests” when approached to do so appropriately, the countries can enjoy “a win-win-win situation” through dual-use infrastructure, new economic opportunities, and enhanced cooperation in “education, health care, science, and business development.”

In chapter fourteen, Rebecca Pincus looks eastward to the Greenland-Iceland-UK (GIUK) gap and the vital importance of securing those waters during the Cold War to protect NATO’s “Northern Flank” and transatlantic sea lines of communication (SLOCs). The recent renewal of strategic interest in the GIUK gap (driven by the NATO-Russian military rivalry), she argues, demands that analysts re-examine the problem of North Atlantic security from a “transpolar perspective.” Such a perspective recognizes the growing

significance of transpolar SLOCs, which are set to become important commercial and strategic corridors connecting the Atlantic and the Pacific through the Arctic. In conclusion, Pincus argues that the pressure for navies to expand their presences and use naval diplomacy in the Arctic is only going to increase in the future.

On the other side of the Atlantic, Duncan Depledge, Caroline Kennedy-Pipe, and James Rogers explore the revival of the UK's interest in the Arctic from the perspective of defence and security policy in chapter fifteen. Following a decade of near neglect, the UK is slowly increasing its military activity in the region, across all domains. A step change occurred in 2018, after the Ministry of Defence announced that it was writing a new Arctic defence strategy. Since then, the UK has repeatedly signalled its intent to support its allies in confronting and deterring malign Russian activity in the North Atlantic, High North, and Baltics (the authors use the term "Wider North" to capture the interconnections between these regions). More recently, Westminster has also expressed growing concerns about Chinese ambitions in the region. While the authors anticipate that the "High North, as part of an arc of concern throughout the Wider North," will feature more heavily in UK defence policy in the years ahead, questions remain about how much priority it will be afforded, especially when set against the UK's global defence ambitions.

In chapter sixteen, Andreas Raspotnik interrogates the European Union's "grand illusion" with respect to Arctic engagement. Noting the emergent EU momentum to recalibrate its Arctic strategy, he explores the geopolitical basis for a new Arctic policy and the distinct role that the European Parliament plays in this policymaking process. Raspotnik explains that, despite the EU's status as an important Arctic actor, the supranational body suffers from a "serious brand image problem, both internally and externally," that undermines its attentiveness to the region (on European and broader circumpolar scales). Although the EU "seems to be satisfied with its Arctic status quo," Raspotnik suggests that changing geostrategic conditions may prompt the Arctic actor "to leave its Arctic comfort zone" and frame a distinct "geopolitical strategy the EU-ropean way."

In chapter seventeen, Niklas Eklund drills into the detail of Sweden's latest Arctic strategy (published in 2020) to examine the recent changes in that country's security policy towards the region. Historically, the Arctic has "played a far less significant role" in Swedish security planning, which has typically been oriented towards the Baltic Sea Area. Nevertheless, Eklund detects a recent "Arctic turn" in security policy based on growing economic development in the North, increasingly close defence relations with the other Nordic states, and renewed concern about Russian military power. Eklund points to the inclusion

of a new section in Sweden's 2020 Arctic strategy devoted to hard security, including the need to develop and deepen Nordic and Euro-Atlantic security and defence cooperation in the European Arctic. He then explains how Sweden's armed forces are being restructured to meet Arctic security challenges. Nevertheless, Eklund suggests that the complete "arctification" of Swedish security policy is yet to be achieved, and that the country's strategic culture may yet resist a full turn to the North.

In chapter eighteen, Pia Elísabeth Hansson and Guðbjörg Ríkey Th. Hauksdóttir examine how recent changes in the Arctic security environment have affected Iceland, the only country in the region without a military. The authors begin by taking us back to Washington's decision to withdraw the US military from Iceland in 2006. This produced a sense of abandonment, which led Reykjavík to put a renewed focus on strengthening relations with other North Atlantic and High North allies, as well as carving out and embracing a distinct Arctic identity as a way to attract international interest, including from China. Hansson and Hauksdóttir explain, however, that these developments have been overshadowed recently by the growing competition for influence in the region between the US, Russia, and China. Having invited Chinese commercial interest, Iceland now finds itself in a "tricky position" with respect to its defence relations with the US and NATO. The authors warn that this conundrum threatens to distract from other pressing security challenges facing Reykjavík in the Arctic.

Climate change is reshaping the Circumpolar North, affecting all aspects of Arctic life, including security conditions. In chapter nineteen, Wilfrid Greaves argues that the intersection of human-caused climate change, particularly the warming of the Arctic Ocean, and renewed great power competition is causing the Arctic regional security complex (RSC) that emerged in the post-Cold War period to fragment into distinct sub-regions. This means the end of the Arctic as a holistic security region, characterized by common environmental and human security challenges, and the emergence of distinct security challenges in the North American, European, and Eurasian sub-regions. He predicts that this variation will erode the Circumpolar Arctic's status as a single, coherent region in the twenty-first century, and strain the regional governance architecture. This will render the Circumpolar North less distinctly "Arctic" than it has been in the recent past, with great power competition and differing geopolitical and ecological considerations at sub-regional levels "spilling over" and undermining the cooperative nature of recent regional politics.

Notes

¹ Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the United States of America.

² The idea that the Arctic is a naturally peaceful region of international relations, insulated from global geopolitical and strategic struggles. See, for example, Hoogensen Gjørøv and Hodgson's chapter in this volume, as well as Heather Exner-Pirot and Robert W. Murray, "Regional Order in the Arctic: Negotiated Exceptionalism," *Politik* 20, no. 3 (2017): 47-64; Lassi Heininen, "Special Features of Arctic Geopolitics — A Potential Asset for World Politics," in Matthias Finger and Lassi Heininen, eds., *The Global Arctic Handbook* (Cham: Springer, 2019), 15-21; and P. Whitney Lackenbauer and Ryan Dean, "Arctic Exceptionalisms," in Kristina Spohr and Daniel S. Hamilton, eds., *The Arctic and World Order: The Question of Future Regimes to Manage Change* (Washington: Johns Hopkins University for Brookings University Press, 2020), 327-355.

³ UK Parliament, "Defence in the Arctic Inquiry," <https://old.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/defence-committee/defencesubcommittee/inquiries/parliament-2017/defence-in-the-arctic-17-19/>.

⁴ Klaus Dodds and Mark Nuttall, *The Scramble for the Poles* (Cambridge: Polity, 2016).

⁵ A list of recent studies on these themes includes Kathrin Keil and Sebastian Knecht, eds., *Governing Arctic Change: Global Perspectives* (Cham: Springer, 2017); Elana Wilson Rowe, *Arctic Governance: Power in Cross-Border Cooperation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018); Mary Durfee and Rachael Lorna Johnstone, *Arctic Governance in a Changing World* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019); Mathieu Landriault, Andrew Chater, Elana Wilson Rowe, and P. Whitney Lackenbauer, *Governing Complexity in the Arctic Region* (London: Routledge, 2019); Kenneth Coates and Carin Holroyd, eds., *The Palgrave Handbook of Arctic Policy and Politics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020); and Lassi Heininen, Karen Everett, Barbora Padrtova, and Anni Reissell, *Arctic Policies and Strategies: Analysis, Synthesis, and Trends* (Laxenburg: International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis, 2020).

⁶ See, for example, Michael Byers, "Crises and international cooperation: an Arctic case study," *International Relations* 31, no. 4 (2017): 375-402; Valery Konyshev, Alexander Sergunin, and Sergei Subbotin, "Russia's Arctic strategies in the context of the Ukrainian crisis," *Polar Journal* 7, no. 1 (2017): 104-124; Wilson Rowe, *Arctic Governance*; Landriault, Chater, Wilson Rowe, and Lackenbauer, *Governing Complexity in the Arctic Region*.

⁷ For a recent study of NATO's Arctic activity, see Duncan Depledge, "NATO and the Arctic: The Need for a New Approach," *The RUSI Journal* 165, no. 5-6 (2021): 80-90. See also Ilayda Coruk, ed., "NATO, the EU and the Arctic Literature

Review” (Peterborough: North American and Arctic Defence and Security Network, 2020), https://www.naadsn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/165_Ilayda-Coruk-NAADSN-Summer-Research-Project-.pdf.

⁸ On Indigenous sovereignty and rights in the Arctic, see, for example, Inuit Circumpolar Council, *A Circumpolar Inuit Declaration on Sovereignty in the Arctic* (2015), <https://www.lawnow.org/circumpolar-inuit-declaration-sovereignty-arctic/>.

⁹ For recent literature on Russia’s Arctic interests, see P. Whitney Lackenbauer and Kari Roberts, “Suggested Readings: Russia and Arctic Security” (Peterborough: NAADSN, 2020), https://www.naadsn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/3NAADSN-Suggested_Readings-Russia-Arctic-PWL-KR.pdf; Alexander Sergunin and Gunhild Hoogensen Gjørsv, “The Politics of Russian Arctic shipping: evolving security and geopolitical factors,” *Polar Journal* 10, no. 2 (2020): 1-22; Jakub Godzimirski and Alexander Sergunin, “Russian Formal and Practical Geopolitics in the Arctic: Change and Continuity,” *Arctic Review* 11 (2020): 22-46; and Katarzyna Zysk, *Russia’s Military Build-Up in the Arctic: To What End?* (Washington: Center for Naval Analysis, 2020), https://www.cna.org/CNA_files/PDF/IOP-2020-U-027998-Final.pdf.

Acronyms

A5	Arctic Five	AZRF	Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation
A8	Arctic Eight		
ACIA	Arctic Climate Impact Assessment	Brexit	British exit
AE	Arctic exceptionalism	BRI	Belt and Road Initiative (China)
AEPS	Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy	CAF	Canadian Armed Forces
AFB	Air Force Base (US)	CARDA	Continental Air Reconnaissance for Damage Assessment
AI	artificial intelligence	CCP	Chinese Communist Party
AMAP	Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme	CDA	Canadian Defence Associations
AMCC	Arctic Military Code of Conduct	CFE	Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (1990)
AMEC	Arctic Military Environmental Cooperation	CIRNAC	Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada
ANPF	Arctic and Northern Policy Framework (Canada)	CLCS	United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf
APF	Arctic Policy Framework (UK)	cm	centimetre(s)
ASFR	Arctic Security Forces Roundtable		

CNODC	China National Oil and Gas Exploration and Development Company	DoD	Department of Defense (US)
		EEAS	European External Action Service
CNOOC	China National Offshore Oil Corporation	EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
		EP	European Parliament
CNPC	China National Petroleum Corporation	EU	European Union
		EUR	euro
COVID	coronavirus disease	EvoNAD	Evolution of North American Defence
CS	comprehensive security	FDI	foreign direct investment
CSBM	confidence- and security-building measure	FONOP	Freedom of Navigation Operation
CSIS	Center for Strategic and International Studies	FRUS	<i>Foreign Relations of the United States</i>
DC	District of Columbia	FTA	free trade agreement
DDIS	Danish Defence Intelligence Service	GDP	Gross Domestic Product
		GIN	Greenland-Iceland-Norway
DMA	Agreement on the Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities (1989)	GIUK	Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom
		GIUK-N	Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom-Norway
DND	Department of National Defence (Canada)		

GMD	Ground-based Midcourse Defense	JOA km	Joint Operations Area kilometre(s)
GPS	Global Positioning System	LNG	liquefied natural gas
HMS	His/Her Majesty's Ship	Lt. Col.	Lieutenant Colonel
HNoMS	His/Her Norwegian Majesty's Ship	MEP	Member of the European Parliament
ICC	Inuit Circumpolar Council	MFD	maximum flight distance
ICEX	Ice Exercise	MP	Member of Parliament (UK)
IMO	International Maritime Organization	NAADSN	North American and Arctic Defence and Security Network
INCSEA	Incidents at Sea Agreement (1972)	NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
INF	Intermediate- Range Nuclear Forces	NAVFAC	Naval Facility (US)
ISAB	International Security Advisory Board	NDAA	National Defense Authorization Act (US)
IUU	illegal, unregulated, and unreported	NEP	Northeast Passage
JEF	Joint Expeditionary Force	NG	Northern Group of Defence Ministers
JFCN	Joint Force Command Norfolk (NATO)	NGO	non-governmental organization

NORAD	North American Aerospace Defense Command	Prof.	and Development Office Professor
NORDEFECO	Nordic Defence Cooperation	RAF	Royal Air Force (UK)
NSR	Northern Sea Route	RCAF	Royal Canadian Air Force
NWP	Northwest Passage	RDSNAA	Réseau sur la défense et la sécurité nord- américaines et arctiques
NWS	North Warning System	RGB	red, green, and blue
OSCC	Open Skies Consultative Commission	RSC	regional security complex
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co- operation in Europe	SAR	search and rescue
OST	Treaty on Open Skies (1992)	SAR	synthetic aperture radar
PAME	Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment	SDSR	Strategic Defence and Security Review (UK)
POE	point of entry	SHIELD	Strategic Home and Integrated Ecosystem for Layered Defense
PPBE	Planning, Programming, Budget and Execution	SLOC	sea line of communication
PRD	Polar Regions Department of the UK Foreign and Common- wealth Office/ Foreign, Commonwealth	SOSUS	sound surveillance system
		SSBN	nuclear-missile- carrying submarine

SSN	nuclear-powered attack submarine		Disarmament Research
UAS	unmanned aircraft systems	US	United States
UK	United Kingdom	USA	United States of America
UN	United Nations	USCG	United States Coast Guard
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (1982)	USNORTH- COM	United States Northern Command
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme	USS	United States Ship
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007)	USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
		VD	Vienna Document (1990)
		WOTR	War on the Rocks
UNIDIR	United Nations Institute for		

1 Comprehensive Security in the Arctic: Beyond “Arctic Exceptionalism”

Gunhild Hoogensen Gjørsv and Kara K. Hodgson

The concept of *Arctic exceptionalism* has become a popular expression for describing Arctic security conditions since Mikhail Gorbachev’s 1987 “zone of peace” speech. Although many leading scholars have supported and promoted the narrative of Arctic exceptionalism (AE), others have been more skeptical. We acknowledge the relevance of this narrative, but argue that it is insufficient for understanding contemporary security in the Arctic because it reifies a static security perception that relies on a narrow, exclusive, and depoliticized approach to security, in the interest of perpetuating an exceptional image of regional cooperation. Instead, we propose that Arctic security conditions be approached from a comprehensive security (CS) perspective, because CS takes into consideration both processes of cooperation and areas of tension that foster increased perceptions of insecurity. CS is an analytical tool that exposes the ways in which security narratives in the region can be complementary, or in competition, at a given time. Rather than fronting a condition of constant and virtually perpetual cooperation that depoliticizes the power dynamics between differing security narratives, CS allows for an analysis of power that reveals which security narratives dominate, why, and upon whose decision. Whereas AE is a narrative that describes a selective condition of security, CS is an analytical approach to help better understand security perceptions in the Arctic, and how these perceptions are dynamic over time.

Arctic Exceptionalism

The AE narrative maintains that the Arctic is an exceptionally peaceful region because it is “detached from global political dynamics and thus characterized primarily as ... an apolitical space of regional governance, functional co-operation, and peaceful co-existence.”¹ Although the states that make up the Arctic region have all been periodically engaged in violent conflict either within their own territories and in out-of-area operations, no direct conflict has touched this region since the Second World War. This condition of peace is considered striking because two of the Arctic states – the United States

and Russia (formerly the USSR) – were characterized as diametrically opposed global superpowers for almost half a century. Although the region played a strategic geopolitical role during the Cold War era “because of its position between the hostile superpowers and its potential wartime role as a corridor for a nuclear strategic exchange,”² the two adversaries managed to maintain a “negative peace” (an absence of violent conflict) in this buffer zone region.

This state of affairs was conducive to fostering cooperation in the region when the Cold War ended. It became important for Arctic states to ensure that this area remained conflict-free even if, as “global” states, they experienced conflict with each other in other regions of the world. The Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS) (1991) and the creation of the Arctic Council in 1996 reflected a growing commitment to institutionalizing intergovernmental Arctic cooperation. Arctic relations have, since then, been based on common interests in areas of low politics, such as environmental protection, the promotion of Indigenous governance and knowledge, increasing connectivity across the region, scientific research, and economic development.³ The region has garnered many peace-oriented monikers, including Gorbachev’s “zone of peace,” Russia’s promotion of a “territory of dialogue,”⁴ and Norway’s slogan, “High North, low tension.”

The notion that peaceful, cooperative relations in the Arctic are “exceptional” contrasts the security condition in the Arctic with that in other parts of the world, and further contrasts with what is assumed to be the normal state of international politics – violent conflict. *Exceptionality* might also imply a claim of superiority in that other countries or regions have something to learn from the Arctic.⁵ The framing of this state of affairs as “exceptional” also owes much to the timing and the context in which Arctic regional relations were institutionalized. During the 1990s, global optimism about peace was high in general and there was an overall political willingness to consider alternative conceptions of security that encouraged more cooperation. One example is the now-familiar concept of human security.⁶

Exner-Pirot and Murray contend that Arctic relations are exceptional because they were deliberately negotiated to be so, through the cooperative framework of institutions, through which states “have endeavored, implicitly, to compartmentalize relations there.”⁷ The term “compartmentalization” is significant here because it reveals a more literal understanding of the term *exceptionalism* – Arctic actors discuss only those issues of common interest at the regional level. Actors, especially state actors, can talk about everything *except* contentious issues, the most contentious of which being military issues. In fact, in its founding document, the Arctic Council explicitly committed to “not deal with matters related to military security.”⁸ Thus far, this commitment

continues, albeit not completely unchallenged, in the background of deliberations in the Arctic Council.⁹

Thus, AE attempts to define how one can speak about security in the region. Unlike AE, a comprehensive security approach brings the contentious back in, and allows the analyst to weigh the power of different security narratives in relation to each other within the regional context.

The term *Arctic exceptionalism* itself makes two assumptions. The first is that the “Arctic” can be considered a cohesive region about which general conclusions about security can be made. The second is that one such general conclusion to be made is that this entire region is exceptional compared to other regions. These assumptions make it necessary to unpack what we mean by “Arctic” and “security,” as well as how both might be understood in context.

Unpacking the “Arctic”

Comprehending the exceptional security status of a particular region necessitates understanding what this region is or is supposed to be. We utilize the definition of “Arctic” from the 2004 *Arctic Human Development Report* because of its political precision. The definition illustrates both the human as well as the geographical diversity across the region. It encompasses many of the important human and environmental challenges relevant to, and still shared by, the northernmost part of the globe. In it, the states themselves do not earn the status of “Arctic,” but only the northernmost sub-national administrative units of the eight sovereign states. Most importantly for our purposes, it illustrates how the “Arctic” region is not cohesive; it is divided by borders, languages, ethnicities, and political systems across eight states, all of which impact security perceptions.¹⁰

These divisions, then, make it difficult to distinguish “Arctic security” as the collective or combined security of a collection of parts of states. The centres of power (capital cities and/or centres of government) are located in the non-Arctic parts of these states. Furthermore, in many cases, the states’ “Arctic” identity is not dominant or a primary policy issue area. As such, it is difficult to distinguish “Arctic” security from the general national interests of the states in question. For example, the increasing deployment of military capabilities in the Russian North may have less to do with the Arctic than with a general interest in protecting national security as a whole. How do we then conceptualize “Arctic security,” exceptional or otherwise? A comprehensive security approach increases the analyst’s capacity to acknowledge, if not address, the competing and complementary security perceptions emanating from a very diverse region.

Unpacking security

As we conceptualize it, security consists of five elements: multiple *actors*, both state and non-state, who embody *values* (which are to be secured), ranging from the material (physical well-being) to the immaterial (identity), and who employ *practices* or methods through which security is created. In general, the values relevant to security are those values that are relevant to our *survival*, over *time*.¹¹ Together, these elements allow the security analyst to better understand the role of actors and what they are able to do or effect in a given context, while they pursue approaches and opportunities to ensure security.

As regards conceptions of state, environmental, energy, economic, societal (community/identity), and/or human security, the actors, values, and practices often differ, and the long-term survival of one may, at times, be perceived to contradict the survival of another (for example, state and human security, or environmental and economic security).¹² When seen as a combination of overlapping security processes, it is possible to understand security as a comprehensive and dynamic process in which security perceptions may build upon and strengthen each other, or expose competing priorities.

Comprehensive Security

Comprehensive security (CS) is a theoretical approach that takes into consideration the perspectives of multiple actors (state and non-state), at multiple levels (local, national, regional, and global), and across the spectrum of security topics including, among others, traditional state/military, economic, environmental, societal, and human security issues. By examining these multiple perspectives simultaneously, it is possible for the analyst to assess how security perspectives are articulated for the region, by whom, and why.

Discussions about CS commenced in the early 1990s, with the widening debates about the complexity of security.¹³ This approach included multiple levels of analysis (from the domestic and bilateral to the regional and global). Threats can be local as well as transnational, transcending the boundaries of traditional national security approaches and emphasizing the relevance of multiple actors (state and non-state alike). CS focuses not only on political stability, but also the factors of economic prosperity and social harmony. This widened perspective promoted a bottom-up approach to security that found its roots within society. Each “part” may operationalize and balance different factors (actors, values, practices, survival, time) relevant to security in different ways. Furthermore, the CS approach is simultaneously more than state-based, national security with a regional and global applicability, as it emanates from and/or is relevant to the local community.¹⁴ While recognizing the interlinkages

between different security perspectives, it does not claim the ability to reconcile multiple security perspectives.

In and of itself, comprehensive security is not particularly “Arctic.” Rather, the approach allows us to reveal the dynamic processes and tensions around security perceptions within our chosen context. The Arctic experience with negotiating multiple and, at times, competing security perspectives is useful for both regional and global security analyses.

Our understanding of an expressly Arctic CS concept is based on one articulated by Lassi Heininen, who advocates for a more holistic approach to Arctic security.¹⁵ He claims that the Arctic not only reflects traditional security discourses (including questions of military confrontation and resource races), but also critical security, where environmental challenges (pollution, climate change) and the engagement of multiple state and non-state actors (including Indigenous peoples, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), researchers) are significant for and within the discourses about the region. In his conceptualization of an Arctic CS approach, “military security is still very relevant, as is regional security due to impacts of climate change, energy security meaning both access to, and import and export of, oil and natural gas, and also environmental security due to oil transportation, nuclear accidents and impacts of climate change.” Most importantly for our purposes, such an approach is also designed “to include the perspectives of human beings, societies and regions, rather than just states.”¹⁶ This affords broader consideration of issue areas (e.g., environmental protection) and actors (e.g., Indigenous groups) vis-à-vis military structures and priorities, in regional institutions. He further emphasizes how the close linkages between environmental protection and Indigenous cultures and ways of living inform Arctic policies.

Our conceptualization expands on Heininen’s to include a more explicit emphasis on such issues of human security. Hoogensen Gjørsv notes that the tensions that follow the human security concept in the Arctic depend on who has the power to define human insecurity in a particular context. Despite the “bottom up” design behind the original notion, human security has primarily been operationalized through the lens of state security, focusing on perceived threats *by* individuals or communities *to* the state. State efforts to improve human security have been understood as “virtuous imperialism,” whereby the state dictates who is insecure and by which means this will be addressed, for the purposes of state security.¹⁷ However, Hoogensen Gjørsv et al. also note that a more inclusive, participatory approach to security has developed in the Arctic context, and can be understood as being “achieved when individuals and/or multiple actors have the freedom to identify risks and threats to their well-being and values, the opportunity to articulate these threats to other actors, and the

capacity to determine ways to end, mitigate or adapt to those risks and threats either individually or in concert with other actors.”¹⁸ Human security, in this sense, emphasizes a bottom-up approach that includes individual and community perspectives. This does not, however, always coalesce with other security perspectives.

The AE narrative masks potential tensions that could arise between differing security perceptions. CS, on the other hand, makes space for analyzing the interactions between various security perceptions in the Arctic.

Arctic Exceptionalism = Arctic security?

Here, we present four arguments contesting the dominance of the AE term:

1. *Not exceptional*: A CS approach allows for analytical comparison between regions, where each has its own distinct features but is not necessarily exceptional. Insofar as the Arctic can be claimed to be an “exceptional political space,” with qualities of peace and security that could potentially be exported to the rest of the world, it is necessary to have comparative tools that demonstrate how regions can be assessed as having inferior or superior approaches to security in relation to one another. Rather than claiming a static “exceptionality,” CS helps us understand how multiple security constellations (from state to human security) operate in relation to one another, exposing both processes of cooperation as well as potential conflict or tension. How does the Arctic therefore compare to other regions? As Heininen notes, there are other regions that share common interests and cooperation between major powers that, in other instances, behave more belligerently towards each other. In this light, the Arctic is just one of many political contexts in which such cooperation in common interests exists.¹⁹
2. *Narrow security perspective*: The highlighted feature of the AE narrative is the fact that strong cooperation has resulted from “common interests ... to decrease military tension and increase political stability.”²⁰ Claims to success and a cooperative spirit are easier to maintain when the parameters are as narrowly defined and vigorously compartmentalized as they are in the AE discourse. Only in this way can the AE narrative claim that the region is exceptional and insulated from conflicts elsewhere in the world. However, not discussing matters of “high politics” that affect these same states elsewhere does not make them disappear. Käpylä and Mikkola note the impacts of the post-2014 Ukraine crisis, which resulted in initial disruptions to political cooperation in the Arctic Council (the hold on European Union (EU)

observer status and the US/Canada boycott of the black carbon working group meeting in 2014); an increased distrust of Russia's rhetoric versus its actions, especially in regard to Russia's military; the suspension of regional military cooperation; the reaffirmation of Arctic NATO countries' commitment to the alliance; and the sanctions by the West imposed on Russia after its annexation of Crimea.²¹ These sanctions have resulted in the cessation of joint Western-Russian offshore hydrocarbon development in Arctic waters, and the stimulation of closer Sino-Russian political-economic ties, which can be seen, for example, in the addition of Chinese investment to the Yamal LNG (liquefied natural gas) project.²² Though the Ukrainian and Crimean crises were not rooted in Arctic issues, they nevertheless have affected defence posturing in the region.²³

3. *Not static*: AE provides a static understanding of security. The Arctic's "exceptional" (negative) peace is in part due to its inaccessibility and the difficulty of realistically engaging in violent conflict in the region itself. Greaves notes that, historically, "states were unwilling to risk destabilising the global strategic balance or their diplomatic relations over trivial Arctic issues. The inaccessibility of many Arctic resources made them geopolitically insignificant."²⁴ However, security in the region is dynamic and in flux, especially as it is becoming an increasingly viable pathway to other parts of the world and an expanded source of markets itself. Russia, in particular, has been actively pursuing the development of its vast Northern Sea Route as well as of its exploitable natural resources. More potential activity in the region would impact state, environmental, energy, economic, and human perceptions of security, which need to be weighed in relation to each other to identify which perspectives, by whom, ascend to the highest priorities in the region.
4. *AE disguises insecurity*: Issues of national interest have taken, and will continue to take, precedence in international relations and with regard to domestic issues. Despite much rhetoric, far too little has been done to protect the environmental and human security of the Arctic region. Indeed, the lack of initiatives from Arctic states to curtail their own contributions to carbon emissions, not least in the extraction of fossil fuels that are either burned within these states or sold outside, has in itself contributed to the detrimental effects of climate change occurring in the region, thereby exacerbating environmental insecurity. In particular, Norway and Russia continue to focus on their Arctic regions

(and Canada on its sub-Arctic) as a source of economic resources, including fossil fuels.²⁵

Within the region, the vulnerabilities of Arctic residents and communities to the consequences of state policies as well as larger global processes are well documented.²⁶ Arctic states have frequently prioritized “the national interest” at the expense of human and environmental security, both in and beyond the Arctic. Though much of the Arctic Council’s work is rooted in environmental concerns, it is also restricted by the Arctic states’ interests in continuing fossil fuel production. Environmental security perspectives take on a dominant state-centric orientation, whereby the environment is “protected” through energy security practices of extracting fossil fuels in an environmentally-friendly manner. Such practices further cater to narratives wherein economic security is dependent upon fossil fuels. These claims can be further strengthened when linked regionally, across states that share similar economic and energy security perspectives.²⁷

CS is a tool that can be used to expose these geopolitical and human security tensions and discuss them plainly as challenges to security in the Arctic, while at the same time acknowledging how other security perspectives, such as environmental security, potentially play a role in uniting the region. CS exposes this interplay of security perspectives, providing an overarching understanding of security perspectives across actors, values, and practices, revealing both synergies as well as tensions.

Conclusion

The AE narrative is insufficient for understanding contemporary Arctic security conditions because 1) it assumes exceptionality where it is not merited, 2) the parameters for exceptional status are too narrow to reflect the wider reality, 3) it falsely renders a dynamic situation as static, and 4) it does not allow for the acknowledgement of tensions between security perspectives, or for recognition of the conditions of insecurity experienced by Arctic populations.

A CS approach is useful for understanding the dynamic complexity of the Arctic security arena because it acknowledges both areas of cooperation as well as areas of tension and/or competition. Through CS, the tensions between, for example, state-level economic security via resource extraction and local-level environmental security are exposed. It also unmasks the political competition for control over who decides how security is understood and defined.

Security is a concept about power, and as such a very powerful concept.²⁸ Those who have defining power about what security means, have the power to determine what values we prioritize the most, and what we are willing to do to

protect those values (including employing the use of violence). States are but one actor, with state-oriented values and practices that they employ to ensure state survival over time. State values and practices do not always represent the values and senses of security held by other actors in the region. Comprehensive security gives power to other, non-state actors (sub-regions, communities, individuals) to articulate their own values and practices that contribute to their own security, which may or may not be consistent with state perspectives.

Arctic security perspectives are dynamic and politically contested. To view Arctic security from a CS perspective would afford Arctic actors and communities visibility and a voice in matters that have a direct impact on their lives. It would give greater legitimacy to their human, societal, environmental, and other security needs, beyond the state level, where they might become swallowed by national interests. Such an approach would still acknowledge and provide a place for military security concerns to be addressed. For all of these reasons, comprehensive security serves as a more inclusive but also realistic perspective for Arctic security.

Notes

This chapter is based on an article originally published in the *Arctic Yearbook 2019*, accessible at <https://arcticyearbook.com/arctic-yearbook/2019/2019-scholarly-papers/313-arctic-exceptionalism-or-comprehensive-security-understanding-security-in-the-arctic>. Used with permission.

¹ J. Käpylä & H. Mikkola, *On Arctic Exceptionalism: Critical reflections in the light of the Arctic Sunrise case and the crisis in Ukraine* (Working paper 85) (Helsinki: The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, 2015), 5.

² R. Tamnes & K. Offerdal (Eds.), *Geopolitics and Security in the Arctic: Regional Dynamics in a Global World* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2014), 13.

³ L. Heininen, "Special Features of Arctic Geopolitics—A Potential Asset for World Politics," in M. Finger & L. Heininen (Eds.), *The Global Arctic Handbook* (Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2019), 215-234, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-91995-9_13.

⁴ TASS, "Lavrov zayavil chto nye vidit nyeobkhodimosti prisutstviya NATO v Arktike" [in Russian], TASS, 20 October 2014, retrieved from <https://tass.ru>.

⁵ Heininen, "Special Features of Arctic Geopolitics," 221.

⁶ UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), *Human Development Report 1994* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); G. Hoogensen Gjørnv, "Tensions between Environmental, Economic, and Energy Security in the Arctic," in G. Fondahl & G. Wilson (Eds.), *Northern Sustainabilities: Understanding and*

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⁷ H. Exner-Pirot & R. W. Murray, "Regional Order in the Arctic: Negotiated Exceptionalism," *Politik* 20/3 (2017): 51.

⁸ Heininen, "Special Features of Arctic Geopolitics," 221.

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¹⁰ G. Hoogensen, "Bottom's up: A toast to regional security," *International Studies Review* 7/2 (2005): 269-274; B. Padrtová, "Securitization of the Arctic: The US Securitizing Actors and Their Strategies" (PhD Dissertation, Department of International Relations and European Studies, Masaryk University, Czech Republic, 2017).

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2 A Governance and Risk Inventory for a Changing Arctic

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A changing Arctic

Global politics today is marked by intensified rivalry between the United States and China, a strained and fractious relationship between Western states and Russia, and overall uncertainty about the robustness of regional and global order and alliances. Certainly, these elements of rivalry were at the forefront during then US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's speech in advance of the 2019 Arctic Council ministerial meeting. The speech highlighted, in the United States' perspective, the need for further cooperation in the region, but called for Chinese and Russian actions to be viewed in a broader context: specifically, their perceived nefarious motives and actions on the global stage. The speech problematized Chinese engagement in Arctic politics and criticized Russia's economic and concurrent military build-up, as well as its activities along the Northern Sea Route.¹

The decision to make such broad sweeping political statements prior to the Arctic Council meeting was out of the ordinary. The speech did serve to highlight the US administration's position on the need to keep China's further influence in the region in check. It should also be noted that the speech came at a time when the US and China's relations were acutely stressed. These tensions will likely endure, but the public rhetoric may be less inflammatory and more nuanced, as mechanisms for better managing these tensions are approached in a manner that may make it less costly for all parties. The Biden administration is expected to have a more multilateralism-friendly approach to global governance and be a more predictable and engaged partner for allied states than the Trump administration. This new approach will be most evident in regard to climate change, shared interests in the rule of law, and a reemphasis on the importance of institutionalized governance regimes throughout the Arctic. However, the concern for checking China's and Russia's influence in global economic and security politics – and in the Arctic specifically – is widely shared across both

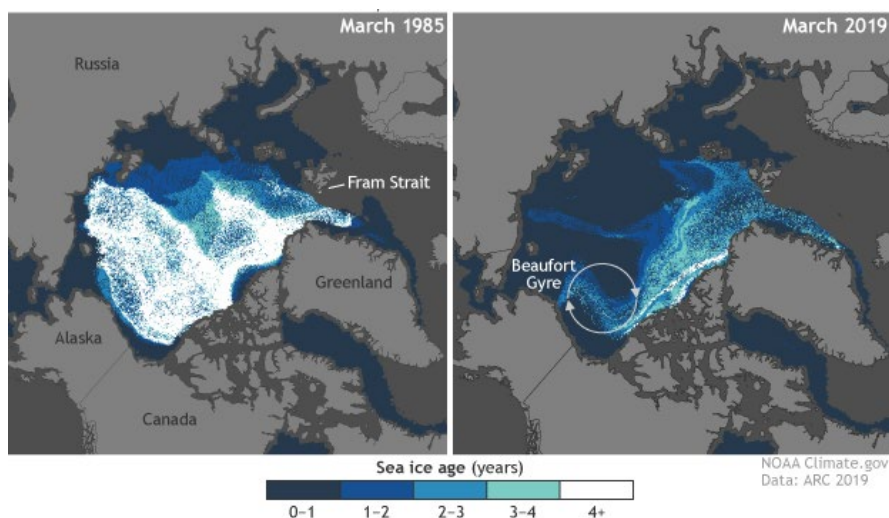
parties in the United States. Engaging an increasingly interested China in the Arctic, and managing relations of both cooperation and deterrence with Russia, are frequently-considered issues in European Arctic policy circles as well.

Meanwhile, scientists are increasingly worried about the speed and scale of the transformative impacts of climate change on the Arctic. A 2019 update assessment² issued by the AMAP (Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme) Arctic Council working group, which brings together scientists and governmental officials from Arctic and non-Arctic states, highlighted that the region:

- Continues to warm at a rate more than twice that of the global mean
- Has had annual surface air temperatures during the last five years that exceeded those of any year since 1900
- Experienced a decline of 75% since 1979 in the volume of Arctic sea ice present in the month of September

It is worth noting that the drivers of climate change are global greenhouse gas emissions, rather than regional activities. Likewise, the changes in the Arctic, and the melting of the ice caps, will have global implications far beyond the region.

One could assume that some states or actors are more likely to assertively protect their interests and expand their strategic influence in order to maximize gains and minimize losses against the backdrop of such a rapidly changing Arctic environment. Media headlines frequently proclaim the Arctic to be in the grips of a ‘New Cold War,’ or describe the region as cooking over with competition in a militarized ‘Hot Arctic.’ And, indeed, several states have been investing in new, or revitalizing existing, military assets and capacities that they



deem critical to ensuring their interests in the Arctic.

There are also numerous trends and events that demonstrate a commitment to cooperation and joint solutions to common challenges. For example, in 2018, the Arctic coastal states (Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark, Norway, Russia, and the USA) and key fishing nations (Iceland, South Korea, China, Japan, and the European Union (EU)) concluded the Agreement to Prevent Unregulated High Seas Fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean. This agreement establishes a precautionary and sustainable harvesting approach to Arctic Ocean fisheries, should they ever become commercially viable.

This short chapter reviews some key factors and drivers supporting and challenging stability in the Arctic region. It was initially published as background for discussion at the Arctic Security Roundtable at the Munich Security Conference 2020.

What supports Arctic stability?

Research on Arctic governance and cooperation highlights several different and important factors that undergird a cooperative approach to the region and regional stability. These include:

- Adherence to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and other related agreements supported by global maritime organizations
- Active participation by key Arctic actors in circumpolar/Northern political institutions and the development of regionally-specific agreements
- Growing and interconnected economic interests
- Regional ties and networks that challenge purely national approaches to Arctic issues

To a large degree, the Arctic is defined by the Arctic Ocean. International law, more specifically the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), provides a significant and comprehensive governance framework.

Although the United States is not a signatory to UNCLOS, it is important to note that the 2008 Ilulissat Declaration – issued by the Arctic coastal states together – underscored a commitment to using international law to ensure the peaceful governance of the region. Arctic and non-Arctic states have also utilized the International Maritime Organization (IMO) to find common ground and negotiate the Polar Code, which is an international code to ensure and enhance safety regimes for maritime and shipping operations in the polar regions.

There are several organizations that enable and enhance data-driven and policy-relevant efforts in and throughout the Arctic. The eight-country Arctic Council, established in 1997, is a consensus-driven forum for considering Arctic issues. Non-Arctic states, Indigenous communities, and non-governmental organizations are also involved as observers to the Council. A number of Arctic Council working groups engage in substantive research and analysis to develop a shared knowledge base for data-driven circumpolar policymaking.

It is of particular importance to note that the Arctic Council does not address Arctic security matters; these issues have been the topic of consideration at various international forums, including previous Munich Security Conference Arctic Security Roundtables.

While the Arctic Chiefs of Defence meetings were suspended in light of Russia's annexation of Crimea, the Arctic Coast Guard Forum was established in 2016 and has become a key venue for coordination on soft or 'civil' security concerns in the region.

In the European Arctic, there is a web of multilateral and bilateral arrangements for cooperation between Russia and the Nordic countries. The multilateral Euro-Arctic Barents Region was established in 1993, with Russia, Norway, Sweden, and Finland as core partners. There are also substantive bilateral ties, including the IMO-approved agreement between the US and Russia to more effectively manage maritime traffic in the Bering Strait.

Various cooperative efforts have resulted in a series of legally binding Arctic agreements that address regional challenges (see Table 2-1). The Central Arctic Ocean fisheries prevention agreement, concluded in 2018 and mentioned above, is especially noteworthy in that it brought together the Arctic coastal states and many non-Arctic states with substantial fishing interests, such as China and the EU, into a productive conversation about regional governance.

The Arctic region has a number of promising avenues for expanded economic development, including extending the more established sectors of mining, petroleum extraction, fishing, tourism, and shipping, as well as novel pursuits associated with the burgeoning blue economy (renewables, bioprospecting, and deep-sea mining). Most of the resource base for such expanded economic activities is found within clearly demarcated national boundaries. Still, many of these resources and opportunities have a transnational element, be it migrating fish stocks or managing shipping traffic and tourism through and out of the region. New economic opportunities with a joint or transboundary nature can cause tensions, as we explore below, but can also contribute to stability between Arctic states, if governed correctly.

The Joint Norwegian-Russian Fisheries Commission is one example of how joint economic interest contributes to stability between Arctic states. Established in the mid-1970s to oversee the management of the valuable fish stocks in the Barents Sea, among them the world's largest cod stock, the regime has proven its robustness throughout the Cold War and post-Crimea tensions. The two parties have persistently stood together in times of conflict with third states, and they have explicitly shielded this bilateral arena from other political complexities. It can be argued that experiences from fisheries management have had a 'positive spill-over' effect. The result is both healthy fish stock and fairly robust bilateral political relations.

Finally, circumpolar connections across the Arctic have been drivers in bringing about and stabilizing Arctic cooperation. Most notably, the activism and sustained efforts of the Indigenous peoples of the region – many of whom have traditional homelands that cut across Arctic state borders – have highlighted the interconnection of the Arctic region and the need for holistic regional governance approaches. Appreciation of the interconnectedness of Arctic ecosystems is a critical factor in motivating the scientific research that supports knowledge-based policymaking in the Arctic Council and in relevant states.

Key challenges for continued Arctic stability?

In the following, we identify key drivers that might challenge Arctic stability and security. These include:

- More demanding security dynamics between key actors in the Arctic
- Geopolitical dynamics between Arctic and non-Arctic states
- Differing approaches to Arctic economic development and the deployment and use of new technologies

Arctic security is to a large extent dependent on, or a by-product of, how various key states view the strategic significance of the Arctic in a larger geopolitical context and manage regional security dynamics. Several Arctic countries have recently increased, or planned to increase, their military activity and capabilities in the Arctic, and are engaged in active policy review on Arctic security issues.

Russia – the largest Arctic state – has long had a significant Arctic military presence. The protection of military assets placed in the Arctic is fundamental to Russia's security strategy, including maintaining second-strike capability and thus deterrence. Even as Russia faces constraints on its overall budget, and maintains a high-level political commitment to Arctic regional peace in keeping

with the 2008 Ilulissat Declaration, the country is increasing its military investment in the region. It has expanded its icebreaker fleet, renovated and expanded Soviet-era military bases, built new bases, and announced plans to deploy new weapons systems in the Far North. Importantly, Russia has also begun operating and exercising further west. For instance, in August 2019, Russia conducted its largest naval exercise since the Cold War, the *Ocean Shield*. A central purpose of the exercise, it seems, was to demonstrate Russian military might in the region, convey a position of strength and capability, and message the strong deterrent capabilities that NATO would encounter if it ventured into the Arctic through the Norwegian Sea north of Iceland.

NATO has sought to train and demonstrate capacity in ways that are firm but not escalatory. For example, NATO's high-visibility Exercise *Trident Juncture*, which was conducted in Norway in 2018, provided the Alliance with valuable experience in conducting an Article 5 operation on the northern flank. The exercise included some 50,000 troops from 31 nations, including Sweden and Finland. Importantly, the exercise took place in southern and central Norway, far away from the Russian border, to signal restraint to Russia. Nonetheless, if Russia keeps pushing its activities further west, increased NATO presence northeast of Iceland may be required as a counter-signalling measure.

In sum, we observe recent direct changes in military posturing in the Arctic. Increased military presence in the area does not necessarily mean increased risk or an escalation of threats; it is only natural that a changing Arctic requires the ability to police and monitor the regional activity, including fulfilling obligations for search and rescue.

From a security perspective, however, it is important that military developments are balanced, transparent, and predictable. Sufficient steps must be taken to ensure good communication, rules of engagement, and the avoidance of brinkmanship and accidents. In order to cope with increased military presence, the parties must be particularly sensitive to how new technologies, new generations of weapons systems, and military postures might trigger unwanted escalatory dynamics and accidents.

The security situation in the Arctic is also likely to be affected by dynamics between Arctic and non-Arctic states and actors. The Arctic region has, during the last decade, generated considerable attention from a range of actors, public and private. Increased awareness to the challenges and changes in the Arctic is in general good, and increases our ability to solve common problems. However, it also represents some new challenges. The Arctic countries have to be aware that when new actors enter the region, it has the potential to affect the various and complex webs of bilateral relations that exist in the area. This has the

potential to place additional pressure on the current international and regional governance system.

One of the non-Arctic actors that has most clearly stressed its Arctic ambitions is China. Recent Chinese actions include a self-proclaimed status as a 'near Arctic state,' enhancing its capabilities in Arctic maritime operations, shipping and research, and demonstrating its interest in expanding its investment in infrastructure throughout the region as part of its Belt and Road Initiative, known as the 'Polar Silk Road.' In 2018, China issued a white paper on Arctic policy.³ While the white paper highlighted a commitment to international law as the basis of Arctic governance, uncertainty has been created by China's position on international law and actions in the South China Sea, including its claiming of territory throughout the region and establishment of military bases on a string of islands (reinforced by military assets).

Washington has objected to China's proclaimed status as a 'near Arctic state,' and has suggested that China may use economic development to influence the region's future governance and as a possible precursor to military expansionism. Additionally, China's investment and economic development interests in Greenland have heightened these concerns for not only the US, but other Arctic states as well.

Finally, there could be tensions resulting from different expectations about the tempo, extent, and type of economic development in the region. While most parties today agree on the need for the sustainable development of the region and are committed to the precautionary principle, the extent and type of large-scale Arctic economic development are debated.

The tension between a conservation approach and a sustainable development approach in the Arctic has been long evident in regional governance, as well as in the domestic politics of Arctic states. For example, the Obama administration's joint ban with Canada on exploration and development in the Arctic Ocean and sovereign US Arctic waters was seen in a positive light by many audiences, but as a betrayal of regional and local economic expectations by others. The Trump administration viewed the American Arctic, Alaska, as an important component of the country's energy security equation, underscored by support for offshore oil drilling and the opening up for development of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge along Alaska's North Slope. This was a stark departure from the previous US administration, and the contentious set of decisions rippled through the US and indeed the international environmental community. The Biden administration has already brought about policy changes more in line with Obama-era policies in this regard.

In other sectors, like fisheries, a changing Arctic climate may stress existing governance structures. Living marine resources are abundant in (sub-) Arctic waters. There are indications that fish stocks are moving northwards as a result of increases in water temperature, and existing management regimes will be challenged to address this rapidly changing reality. This has, for instance, happened in the Norwegian Sea, where established management structures between Arctic states such as Norway, Denmark, and Iceland, as well as the EU, have broken down. Brexit further complicates the picture. It should be noted, however, that commercial fishing is not yet an issue in the Central Arctic Ocean, and hardly will be in the foreseeable future. None of the currently exploited fish stocks can live on the bottom floor of the deep sea, although not yet known resources in the water column might be exploited if new catch technologies are developed.

Against a changing physical landscape, new technologies for identifying, monitoring, and exploiting ocean resources – from bioprospecting to deep-sea mining – will surely bring both new opportunities and unforeseen consequences. In order to ensure the good governance of the Arctic, it is therefore important that leaders overcome coordination challenges, remain committed to knowledge-based decision-making, and maintain a governance regime that ensures high standards and compliance. These are essential steps in avoiding the so-called *tragedy of the commons* when managing transboundary or common resources.

Towards a proactive Arctic security discussion

Many government officials, military leaders, and political observers have proclaimed the rise of a new, post-Cold War global great power competition between the United States, Russia, and China, with myriad implications. We suggest that the increasingly open and globalized Arctic does indeed present some challenges, but considering these challenges and their potential solutions is not well served by relying on narratives or practices of strategic competition alone. Continued dialogue is needed about how to best meet emerging governance challenges and how to avoid unfortunate/unintended ‘tipping points’ in regional dynamics that may prove difficult and costly for regional actors. As a basis for such an ongoing dialogue, we suggest policymakers consider the following points:

Security dynamics in an interconnected region and beyond:

- The Arctic is more peaceful than many other regions in the world. There is a promising track record of governance cooperation in the

region that serves as a basis for pursuing sustainable management for and peace in this 'emerging' ocean. However, the region is not immune to future tension and conflict points, in part due to its vast, important, and rapidly changing environment.

- The Arctic environment is heating at more than twice the global average rate due to global climate change. This has global impacts. For context, the Arctic Ocean is 1.5 times the size of the United States and half the size of the African continent.
- There is a risk that the changing global order, the intensified geopolitical rivalry between the US and China, and more turbulent relations between Europe and the US can 'spill over' from these and other arenas to the Arctic region. Against a broader backdrop of distrust and diminished military contact and communication across the NATO-Russia divide, there exists a risk that smaller miscalculations, accidents, and incorrect interpretations regarding military motives and activities can escalate into broader conflict.
- The post-Cold War growth of Arctic cooperative governance occurred alongside an enduring NATO-Russia security rivalry. This 'cooperation in conflict' approach to achieving national and collective interests has been more attainable in the Arctic than elsewhere, in large part due to the inherent interconnectedness of the Arctic ecosystem; the transnational circumpolar connections of the region's Indigenous peoples, communities, and policy networks; and the limited (until recently) economic development opportunities and global/non-Arctic interest in the region.

Economic development and a more trafficked Arctic:

- A more trafficked and economically significant Arctic region in the decades to come is more than plausible. The prospect of a seasonally ice-free Arctic brings new strategic importance and economic possibilities to the region. Arctic states and other global actors are reconsidering the region in the development or refinement of their security, economic, and foreign policy strategies.
- The changing physical nature of the region has triggered Arctic leadership, in several binding regional agreements, to govern novel and increased activity. Much of the Arctic is also governed by existing international law and regimes. As the Arctic Ocean opens, it is important to build on current international legal regimes and

structures, and get the management and policy structure ‘right’ to meet new regional challenges and activities.

A need for the active maintenance of cooperative practices:

- Leaders must continue to address the challenges to regional stability in the Arctic and take steps to mitigate and manage risks. Awareness of political ‘tipping points’ – points beyond which cooperation in national and collective interest will be rendered too difficult – and active consideration of how regional stability can best be maintained and strengthened are essential.

Notes

This chapter is based on a report originally published by the Munich Security Conference in 2020, accessible at <https://www.nupi.no/en/Publications/CRISTin-Pub/A-Governance-and-Risk-Inventory-for-a-Changing-Arctic>. Used with permission.

¹ US State Department. Looking North: Sharpening America’s Arctic Focus. Speech delivered by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. May 6, 2019. Available online at: <https://www.state.gov/looking-north-sharpening-americas-arctic-focus/>, accessed 2 February 2020.

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3 The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly: Differentiating Between Different Security Dynamics in the Arctic

Andreas Østhagen

The notion of geopolitical conflict in the Arctic continues to make media headlines. A decade ago, as climate change was altering the geography of the region, the resource potential of the North grabbed attention, and states (and companies) saw the chance to turn a profit. Today, this focus has shifted to concerns about the strategic positioning of, and increased tension between, NATO countries and Russia, with a dash of Chinese interests on top.

Statements about the conflict surrounding the Arctic are quite common. Especially the USA, under President Donald Trump and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, was vocal about the threat from China and Russia in the Arctic.¹ In 2019, France's Minister of the Armed Forces even likened the Arctic to the Middle East.² Yet both the United States (as a member of the Arctic Council) and France (as an observer) are strong supporters of Arctic cooperative mechanisms, and repeatedly stress their desire to ensure that the circumpolar region remains insulated from troubles elsewhere.

This chapter unpacks the notion of Arctic geopolitics by exploring the different, and at times contradictory, political dynamics at play in the North. The focus is on *national* or state-centred notions of security. This chapter explores three levels of inter-state relations: the regional (Arctic) level, the international system, and the level of bilateral relations. Labelling these levels as “good,” “bad,” and “ugly” – an unabashed borrowing from Sergio Leone's epic 1966 film – helps shed light on the distinctiveness of each and on how they interact.

The Good (Regional Relations)

Let us start with the good in the Arctic – the regional relations among the Arctic states, namely Canada, Denmark (via Greenland), Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the United States.

As the Cold War's systemic overlay faded, regional interaction and cooperation in the North started to flourish. Several organizations, such as the Arctic Council, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, and the Northern Forum, emerged in the 1990s to tackle issues such as environmental degradation, regional and local development, and cultural and economic cross-border cooperation. Deliberately excluded were military security issues, a choice that enabled a plethora of cooperative arrangements to emerge between the countries in different constellations without getting bogged down in the security concerns at the time.

Whereas interaction among Arctic states increased during this period and included Arctic Indigenous peoples (as they gained more political visibility and an official voice), geopolitically, the region seemed to disappear from the radar of global power politics. This allowed the circumpolar countries to recognize the value of creating a political environment favourable to investments and economic development, giving rise to the idea of the Arctic's political dynamics as being exceptional.

The region was thrown back onto the international agenda in the early 2000s due to the increasingly apparent effects of climate change. Arctic ice sheets were disappearing at an accelerated pace, which coincided with new prospects for offshore oil and gas exploration, as well as the opening of shipping lanes such as the Northwest Passage.³

In the wake of this, environmental organizations and politicians outside the region led an outcry about the "lack of governance" in the Arctic.⁴ In response, top-level political representatives of the five Arctic coastal states (excluding Finland, Iceland, and Sweden) met in Ilulissat, Greenland, in 2008, where they publicly declared the Arctic to be a "region of cooperation."⁵ They also affirmed their intention to work within established international arrangements and agreements, in particular the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), an international agreement binding states in the shared pursuit of order, cooperation, and stability at sea.⁶

Since then, the Arctic states have repeated the mantra of cooperation, articulating the same sentiment in relatively streamlined Arctic policy and strategy documents. The deterioration in relations between Russia and its Arctic neighbours since 2014 – a result of Russian actions in eastern Ukraine and Ukraine's Crimean peninsula – did not change this,⁷ although security and military concerns now occupy more space in Arctic discussions than ever. Indeed, the foreign ministries of all Arctic Council members, including Russia, keep proactively emphasizing the "peaceful" and "cooperative" nature of regional politics.⁸

Some also argue that low-level forms of regional interaction help ensure low tension in the North, despite not dealing with security matters.⁹ The emergence of the Arctic Council as the primary forum for regional affairs in the Arctic plays into this setting.¹⁰ The council, founded in Ottawa in 1996, serves as a platform from which its member states can portray themselves as working harmoniously toward common goals.¹¹ Adding to its legitimacy, since the late 1990s an increasing number of actors have applied for and gained observer status on the council: initially France, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, and the United Kingdom; and, more recently, China, India, Italy, Japan, Singapore, South Korea, and Switzerland.¹²



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Figure 3-1: The maritime exclusive economic zones in the Arctic. Map: Malte Humpert, The Arctic Institute.

In essence, Arctic states have more or less divided the region among themselves based on the law of the sea (UNCLOS). There is little to argue about when it comes to resources and boundaries, although limited disputes exist, such as those over the tiny, uninhabited Hans Island/Ø between Canada and Denmark, the maritime boundary in the Beaufort Sea between Canada and the United States, and the possibility of overlap of extended continental shelves in the Arctic Basin between Canada, Denmark, and Russia.

Despite open territorial land grabs in other parts of the world, a race for Arctic resources or territory is therefore not likely to unfold in the foreseeable future. Geographically-based conflicts – geopolitics – where Arctic or non-Arctic states claim a limited number of out-of-bounds offshore resources, many of which are likely to remain unexplored for the next few decades at least, are neither economically nor politically viable, and thus not an immediate cause for concern.

The Bad (Global Power Politics)

What happens *in* the Arctic, however, is not the same as the international global politics *over* the Arctic. During the Cold War, the Arctic held a prominent place in the political and military standoffs between the two superpowers. It was important not because of interactions in the Arctic itself (although cat-and-mouse submarine games took place there), but because of its wider strategic role in the systemic competition between the United States and the USSR. The Arctic formed the buffer zone between these two superpower rivals, its airspace comprising the shortest distance for long-range bombers to reach one another's shores.

From the mid-2000s onwards, the Arctic regained strategic geopolitical importance. A repeat of Cold War dynamics saw Russia, under President Vladimir Putin, strengthening its military (and nuclear) prowess in order to reassert Russia's position at the top table of world politics. Given the country's geography and recent history, its focus would be its Arctic lands and seas. In this terrain, Russia could pursue its policy of rebuilding its forces and expanding its defence and deterrence capabilities in an unobstructed manner.¹³

The melting of the sea ice and increased resource extraction on the coast along the Northern Sea Route are only *some* elements that have spurred Russia's military emphasis in its Arctic development efforts: Russia's North also matters for the Kremlin's more general strategic plans and ambitions in world politics. This is where Russia's strategic submarines are based, which are essential to the country's status as a major global nuclear power.¹⁴

Within these shifting geo-economic and geostrategic dynamics, China has also emerged as a new Arctic actor, proclaiming itself as a “near-Arctic state.”¹⁵ With Beijing’s efforts to assert *global* influence, the Arctic has emerged as yet another arena where China’s presence and interaction are components of an expansion of power – be it through scientific research or investments in Russia’s fossil fuel industries.¹⁶ This has led to the Arctic becoming relevant in a global power competition between China and the United States.

The sudden realization by the US administration that Greenland occupies a strategically significant position, and that the United States has a military base there (Thule), links to strategic concerns and fears over Chinese investments in Greenland. Although these concerns have failed to materialize on any great scale, the tweet in 2019 by former President Trump about buying Greenland was not a coincidence. Although highly speculative and inaccurate, US Secretary of State Pompeo still warned in 2019 that Beijing’s Arctic activity risks creating a “new South China Sea.”¹⁷ The US government’s reopening of its consulate in Nuuk,¹⁸ Greenland’s capital, demonstrates how the US position on China as a strategic rival in the Arctic does indeed have an impact, and illustrates yet another arena where systemic competition between the two countries is increasing.

Therefore, while Arctic states continue to highlight cooperative traits in the region and positive regional affairs, politics between the great powers of China, Russia, the United States, and (to some extent) the European Union increasingly impacts Arctic affairs. On the one hand, tensions between NATO and Russia have an Arctic/North Atlantic component, as seen in the increasing number of military exercises in the area since 2014. On the other hand, the Trump administration’s decision to challenge China globally has also led to a tougher stance against China in the Arctic, at least rhetorically. This suggests the need to distinguish between intra-regional dynamics in the Arctic, and the spill-over effect of events and power struggles elsewhere on Arctic issues.

The Ugly (Bilateral Relations)

There is one further political dynamic that requires examination: bilateral interactions between Arctic states. These relations are naturally informed by the regional and global dynamics already addressed. However, to unpack the issue of national security in the circumpolar region, we must also focus on how the Arctic states interact on a regular basis with each other. This is where things get ugly, both because some relations are more fraught than others, and because it is difficult to draw general conclusions across the region.

Central here is the role the Arctic plays in considerations of national defence. This varies greatly amid the Arctic Eight, because each country prioritizes and deals with its northern areas differently.¹⁹ For Russia, with its vast Eurasian domain, the Arctic is integral to broader national defence considerations.²⁰ Even though these considerations are also linked to developments elsewhere, investments in military infrastructure in the Arctic have direct regional impacts, in particular for the much smaller countries in Russia's western neighbourhood – Finland, Norway, and Sweden.

Indeed, for these three Nordic countries, the Arctic is fundamental to national defence policy, precisely because this is where Russia – as a great power – invests considerably in its military capacity.²¹ Norway, a founding member of NATO and located on the alliance's "northern flank," is especially increasingly concerned with the expansive behaviour of the Russian military in the North Atlantic and Barents Sea.²²

The Arctic arguably does not play the same pivotal role in national security considerations in North America as in Northern Europe.²³ Even while pitted against the Soviet Union across the Arctic Ocean and Bering Sea during the Cold War, Alaska and Northern Canada were primarily locations for missile defence capabilities, surveillance infrastructure, and a limited number of strategic forces.²⁴

Commentators have even argued that the most immediate concerns facing the Canadian Arctic today are not defence capabilities, but rather social and health conditions in Northern communities, and their poor rates of economic development.²⁵ This does not discount the need for Canada to be active in its Arctic domain and to have Arctic capabilities. However, this perspective differs from the crucial role that the Russian land border has in Finnish and Norwegian (as well as NATO) security concerns.²⁶

The geographical dividing line falls between the European Arctic and the North American Arctic, in tandem with variations in climatic conditions. The north Norwegian and the northwest Russian coastlines are ice-free during winter. But ice – even though it is receding – remains a constant factor in the Alaskan, Canadian, and Greenlandic Arctics. Due to the sheer size and inaccessibility of the region, the impact of security issues on either side of the dividing line is relatively low.

In conclusion, security – and essentially defence – dynamics in the Arctic remain anchored at the sub-regional and bilateral levels. Of these arrangements, the Barents Sea/European Arctic stands out. Here, bilateral relations between Russia and Norway (and NATO) are especially challenging in terms of security

interactions and concerns. Despite rhetoric to the contrary, Russian investments in Arctic troops and infrastructure have had little impact on the North American security outlook. Approaches by Russian bombers and fighter planes may cause alarm, but the direct threat to North American states in the Arctic – compared to that facing their Nordic allies – is limited.²⁷ This is also why Canadian troops have been exercising in the Norwegian Arctic in recent years, and not vice versa.

However, bilateral dynamics like in the case of Norway and Russia are multifaceted, as the two states also engage in various types of cooperation, ranging from the co-management of fish stocks to search and rescue operations and a border crossing regime.²⁸ In 2010, Norway and Russia were able to resolve a longstanding maritime boundary dispute in the Barents Sea, partly in order to initiate joint petroleum ventures in the disputed area.²⁹ These cooperative arrangements and agreements have not been revoked following the events of 2014,³⁰ a clear indication of the complexity of bilateral relations in the Arctic.

Future Plot Twists

In terms of national security concerns, the central question in the Arctic is how much developments occurring at a regional level can be insulated from events and relations elsewhere. If the goal is to keep the Arctic as a separate, exceptional region of cooperation, the Arctic states have managed to do a relatively good job, despite setbacks due to the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014.

The most pressing regional challenge, however, is how to deal with, and talk about, Arctic-specific security concerns, which are often excluded from cooperative fora and venues. The debate on which mechanisms are best suited for further expanding security cooperation has been ongoing for a decade.³¹ Some hold that the Arctic Council should acquire a security component,³² whereas others look to the Arctic Coast Guard Forum or other more ad hoc venues.³³ The Northern Chiefs of Defence Conference and the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable were initiatives established to this end in 2011/2012,³⁴ but fell apart after 2014.

The difficulties encountered in trying to establish an arena for security discussions indicate the high sensitivity to, and influence of, events and evolutions elsewhere. Russia, by far the largest country in the circumpolar region and the most ambitious in terms of military investments and activity, sets the parameters for much of the Arctic security trajectory. This is not likely

to change, although exactly what the future Arctic security environment will look like depends on the West's response to Russian actions taking place predominantly in other regions of the world.

Any Arctic security dialogue is fragile, and risks being overshadowed by the increasingly tense NATO-Russian relationship in Europe at large. Precisely what such an arena for dialogue is intended to achieve (i.e., preventing the spill-over of tensions from other parts of the world into the Arctic) is the very reason why progress here is so difficult. A more pan-Arctic political role for NATO is, for the very same reason, difficult to imagine. One starting point, however, would be to focus on practical forms of cooperation, implemented through mechanisms such as a code of conduct,³⁵ or an expansion of the Incidents at Sea cooperation that was put in place between the United States and the USSR in 1972, and subsequently Canada/Norway and the USSR in 1989/1990.³⁶

Taking a wider look at global power politics and the Arctic, we can note that China's increasing global engagement and influence has – thus far – been rather subdued in the North. Beijing, for all its rhetoric about its interest in a Polar Silk Route, has used all the correct Arctic buzzwords about cooperation and restraint, in tune with the preferences of the Arctic states.³⁷ The question is whether Chinese actions in the region are meant to challenge this presence subtly, by engaging it predominantly through means of soft power rather than through military might.

At the same time, shifting power balances and Beijing's greater regional interest in new areas need not lead to tension and conflict. To the contrary, they might spur efforts to find ways of including China in regional fora, alleviating the (geo-economic) concerns of Arctic states.³⁸

With a new administration in the White House, perhaps a different approach will be taken to Arctic matters – at least rhetorically. The Arctic states have deliberately toned down their conflict rhetoric, while simultaneously investing in Arctic military capabilities and increasing military exercise activity, especially post-2014. The USA chose to break with this approach, which in turn has led to an outcry amongst media and politicians alike about the ongoing “great power competition” in the North.

Little has changed on the ground, however, and we can assume that a Biden administration might be more interested in a constructive but firm approach, instead of the Arctic hype we have seen in recent years. One simple, constructive, and cost-free solution is for the Biden administration to recognize the effects of the increased military activity and bellicose rhetoric in the region and actively tone these down, while also inviting all Arctic states to a circumpolar dialogue on Northern security concerns.

Conclusions

There are some paradoxical dynamics – explaining the mix of cooperation and tension, if not conflict – that are best understood through the threefold distinction presented here: international competition (why the United States is increasingly focusing on China in an Arctic context), regional interaction (why Arctic states still meet to sign new agreements hailing the cooperative spirit of the North), and bilateral relations (why some Arctic states, and not others, invest heavily in their Northern defence postures).

What these nuances imply is that simplistic descriptions of Arctic geopolitics or a new Cold War in the Arctic today must be taken with a pinch of salt.³⁹ Political dynamics in the North are far too complex for these reductive descriptions. Recognizing this complexity should therefore encourage further studies of security politics in a region that has become an international focal point of examination and discussion.⁴⁰

Notes

This chapter is a revised version of a chapter originally published in K. Spohr, D. S. Hamilton and J. Moyer (eds.), *The Arctic and World Order* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2020), accessible at <https://transatlanticrelations.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/The-Arctic-and-World-Order.pdf>. Used with permission.

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4 Threats Through, To, and In the Arctic: A Canadian Perspective

P. Whitney Lackenbauer

While the Canadian Arctic has historically been – and continues to be – a region of stability and peace, growing competition and increased access brings safety and security challenges to which Canada must be ready to respond.

– Canada’s Arctic and Northern Policy Framework (2019)

Canada’s 2017 defence policy, *Strong, Secure, Engaged*, confirms that the Arctic remains an area of particular interest and focus, highlighting its cultural and economic importance as well as the rapid environmental, economic, and social changes that present opportunities and generate or amplify security challenges. To meet those challenges and “succeed in an unpredictable and complex security environment,” the Government of Canada commits to an ambitious program of naval construction, capacity enhancements, and technological upgrades to improve situational awareness, communications, and the ability of the Canadian Armed Forces to operate across the Canadian Arctic. The justifications for these investments include a range of drivers and dynamics that are often compressed into a single narrative, with the Arctic region highlighted as “an important international crossroads where issues of climate change, international trade, and global security meet.”¹

The Canadian debate on Arctic security over the last two decades reveals four core schools of thought, offering divergent threat assessments. Proponents of the “sovereignty on thinning ice” school suggest that Arctic sovereignty, maritime disputes, and/or questions of resource ownership will serve as catalysts for regional Arctic conflict. They associate the need for military activities demonstrating effective control over Canadian territory and internal waters with the preservation or enhancement of the international legal basis for Canada’s Arctic sovereignty. This thinking underpinned the “use it or lose it” messaging that dominated during Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s first years in office in the mid-2000s. Although this idea no longer dominates academic discussions, it still lingers in news media and public perceptions.

Other commentators argue that there is no military threat to the Arctic, and that defence resources should instead be directed to dealing with human and environmental security issues associated with climate change and the region as an Indigenous peoples' homeland.

A third school of thought argues that, while strategic deterrence continues to have an Arctic dimension (and that this is best conceptualized at an international rather than a regional level of analysis), Canada is not likely to face conventional military threats in or to its Arctic region in the next decade. Instead, members of this school suggest that Canada should focus on building Arctic military capabilities within an integrated, "whole of government" framework, largely directed towards supporting domestic safety and "soft" security missions that represent the most likely incidents to occur in the Canadian Arctic. It should also invest in sensors and capabilities in the Arctic that can contribute to broader defence of North America missions, but these should not be misconstrued as capabilities needed because the Canadian Arctic itself is specifically threatened by foreign adversaries and vulnerable to attack.

More recent debates emphasize the risks of global great power competition "spilling over" into the Arctic. Political scientist Rob Huebert, previously the most strident proponent of the "sovereignty on thinning ice" school, recently argued that "a New Arctic Strategic Triangle Environment ... is forming, in which the core strategic interests of Russia, China and United States are now converging at the top of the world." He suggests that this new "great game" is not about conflict *over* the Arctic, but rather occurring *through* the Arctic. "This does not make the threat any less dangerous," he suggests, "but it does make it more complicated." With tensions growing between Russia and the West, and China's relationships evolving with both the West and Russia, Huebert asserts that "the primary security requirements of the three most powerful states are now overlapping in the Arctic region, producing new challenges and threats."² While this lens is compatible with the basic tenets of the third school, it places more weight on military threats than on "soft" or human security ones.

Current North American defence modernization discussions are likely to amplify the debate about the nature of Arctic security in Canada and its implications for policy and investment. In early 2020, NORAD commander General Terrence O'Shaughnessy argued that "geographic barriers that kept our homeland beyond the reach of most conventional threats" no longer guarantee North America as a "sanctuary," and that "the Arctic is no longer a fortress wall ... [but an avenue] of approach for advanced conventional weapons and the platforms that carry them."³ He insisted that "Russia has left us with no choice but to improve our homeland defense capability and capacity. In the meantime,

China has taken a number of incremental steps toward expanding its own Arctic presence.”⁴ With climate change “opening new access” to the region, Canada’s defence policy observes that “Arctic and non-Arctic states alike are looking to benefit from the potential economic opportunities associated with new resource development and transportation routes.” What does this mean for a country with Arctic policies predicated on the idea of the region as a *place* – with particular salience as an Indigenous homeland – rather than a threat vector? How do measures to address strategic threats to North America passing *through* the Canadian Arctic relate to threats *to* the region or *in* the region?

The Canadian context

As an Arctic state with 40% of its landmass north of 60° latitude and 162,000 km of Arctic coastline, Canada’s interest in the region is obvious. Its emphasis on the human dimensions of the Arctic, and particularly those related to the Northern Indigenous peoples who make up a high proportion of the population, also reflects national realities. Social indicators in Canada’s Indigenous North remain abysmal, reflecting the challenges of providing social services and infrastructure to small, isolated settlements spread out over a vast area. Northern Indigenous peoples also face many challenges associated with rapid changes to their homelands, including threats to language and culture, the erosion of traditional support networks, poorer health than the rest of Canadians, and changes to traditional diet and communal food practices. These challenges represent Canada’s most acute Arctic human security imperative.

Canadian governments have recognized and grappled with the challenge of balancing the needs of Northern Canadians with economic development and environmental protection for fifty years. Under Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper (2006-2015), the balance seemed to tip in favour of resource development and hard-line messaging about defending sovereignty. A more careful reading reveals that the Harper government’s sovereignty-security rhetoric became more nuanced over time, reflecting an attempt to balance messaging that promised to “defend” Canada’s Arctic sovereignty with a growing awareness that the most probable regional challenges were “soft” security- and safety-related issues that required “whole of government” responses.⁵

Although the election of Justin Trudeau’s Liberal Party in October 2015 brought a significant change in political tone, the main substantive elements of Canada’s Arctic policy have not changed. A domestic focus on Indigenous rights, environmental protection, and the health and resiliency of Northern communities has been complemented by a renewed commitment to global

climate change mitigation and the benefits of co-developing policy with Northern stakeholders and rightsholders. Through bilateral statements with President Barack Obama in 2016, Prime Minister Trudeau offered a model for Arctic leadership that placed a clear priority on Indigenous and “soft security” issues over classic defence-of-sovereignty-focused messaging.⁶ Similarly, the federal government’s Arctic and Northern Policy Framework (ANPF), released in September 2019, indicates a concerted emphasis on environmental conservation and improving the sociocultural health of Northern Indigenous peoples. The decision to link the domestic and international dimensions of Canada’s Arctic strategy in a single policy framework reaffirms the interconnectivity between national, regional, and global dynamics.⁷

The safety, security, and defence chapter of the ANPF lays out the Government of Canada’s objectives to ensure a safe, secure, and well-defended Arctic and North through to 2030. “While Canada sees no immediate threat in the Arctic and the North, as the region’s physical environment changes, the circumpolar North is becoming an area of strategic international importance, with both Arctic and non-Arctic states expressing a variety of economic and military interests in the region,” the policy framework emphasizes. “As the Arctic becomes more accessible, these states are poised to conduct research, transit through, and engage in more trade in the region. Given the growing international interest and competition in the Arctic, continued security and defence of Canada’s Arctic requires effective safety and security frameworks, national defence, and deterrence.”⁸

Given the evolving balance of power, changing nature of conflict, and rapid evolution of technology globally over the last decade, official Canadian statements recognize the need for new approaches to anticipate and confront threats and challenges. To remain effective in a highly dynamic, complex global and regional environment, policymakers and planners must develop mechanisms to continuously test their assessments, ideas, and assumptions to ensure that they do not become limiting or outdated. Accordingly, contemplating strategic futures in Canada’s Arctic requires attentiveness to global, circumpolar regional, continental, and domestic drivers – with an emphasis on levels or scales – that could affect the Canadian Armed Forces’ mission to keep Canada strong at home, secure in North America, and engaged in the world to promote peace and stability.

As a basic framework, this chapter also proposes the value of a model that deliberately parses whether analysts are discussing threats *through*, *to*, or *in* the Canadian Arctic. In this construct, threats passing *through* the Canadian Arctic emanate from outside of the region and pass through or over it to strike targets

also outside of the region. For example, a ballistic missile with conventional warheads launched from Russia would likely pass over the Canadian Arctic before striking at a target in the northern continental United States. Sensors systems that detect the launch and track the missile might be based in the Arctic, but it would be misconstrued as an *Arctic* threat in a defence of North America context. Threats *to* the Canadian Arctic are those that emanate from outside of the region and affect the region itself. Examples could include a below-the-threshold attack on critical Arctic infrastructure, a foreign vessel running aground in Canadian waters with deleterious environmental effects, the introduction of a pandemic, or the acquisition of a port or airfield at a strategic location by a company owned and controlled by a non-like-minded state. Threats *in* the Arctic originate within the region and have primary implications for the region. Examples include permafrost degradation threatening critical infrastructure, the failure of a diesel-electric generator powering an isolated community, or the heightened polarization of public debate leading to economic or political disruption. Some threats, such as climate change (which is caused by activities outside the region and thus represents a threat *to* it, while regional and local climate dynamics *in* the Arctic, such as extreme weather, threaten local residents), will straddle these categories, but this conceptual exercise can help to determine appropriate scales for preparedness and response – by specific actors – to different threats, rather than bundling them all together as a generic laundry list of “Arctic threats.”

Threats *through* the Canadian Arctic: Situating the Arctic in a global context

For nearly a century, Canada has invested in building and sustaining an international system that reflects its values and interests. A shifting balance of power and the re-emergence of major power competition now threaten to undermine or strain the established international order and rules-based system. China, as an emerging economic superpower, aspires to a global role proportionate to its economic weight, population, and self-perception as the Middle Kingdom. Russian President Vladimir Putin’s recent declaration that liberalism is “obsolete”⁹ affirms that his country has deviated from its early post-Cold War path, and its revisionist behaviour in Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria exemplify Russia’s willingness to test the international security environment. Consequently, Canada’s role is less obvious in the emerging multipolar world, which challenges the Western-designed security system, than it was in the bipolar Cold War order or the unipolar moment that followed.

This creates more space for emerging state and non-state actors to exercise influence, including in the Arctic.

Within this broader context, *Strong, Secure, Engaged* highlights three key security trends that will continue to shape events: the evolving balance of power, the changing nature of conflict, and the rapid evolution of technology. All of these trends have direct and indirect applications when contemplating and imagining future Arctic security environments, vulnerabilities, and requirements. Furthermore, Canada's ANPF emphasizes that:

The international order is not static; it evolves over time to address new opportunities and challenges. The Arctic and the North is in a period of rapid change that is the product of both climate change and changing geopolitical trends. As such, international rules and institutions will need to evolve to address the new challenges and opportunities facing the region. As it has done in the past, Canada will bolster its international leadership at this critical time, in partnership with Northerners and Indigenous peoples, to ensure that the evolving international order is shaped in a manner that protects and promotes Canadian interests and values.¹⁰

In a complex security environment characterized by trans-regional, multi-domain, and multi-functional threats, Canada must continue to work with its allies to understand the broader effects of the return of major power competition to the international system and to regions like the Arctic, and what this means for Canadian defence relationships and partnerships. Emerging threats to North America, across all domains, must be situated in the context of continental defence and the longstanding Canada-US defence partnership exemplified by the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD). This binational command has proven effective in deterring, detecting, and defending North America's approaches since the 1950s, and it remains "the cornerstone of Canada's defence relationship with the US, and provides both countries with greater continental security than could be achieved individually."¹¹ Resurgent major power competition and advances in weapons technology pose new threats to continental security, however, which require NORAD to modernize and evolve to meet current and future threats.

Both *Strong, Secure, Engaged* and the Arctic and Northern Policy Framework underscore the importance of NORAD modernization efforts, the integration of layered sensor and defeat systems, and improving the Canadian Armed Forces' (CAF's) reach and mobility in the Arctic within this alliance construct. New commitments, however, will require creative thinking about infrastructure, surveillance and detection, interception capabilities, and

command and control relationships. As Charron discusses in chapter 7, NORAD's "crest includes a broad sword facing due north, suggesting that the avenue of potential attack against North America is through the Arctic." In light of advanced technologies and capabilities that adversaries can use to strike from multiple directions, the binational command has turned its focus to "all-domain" awareness, improved command and control, and enhancing targeting capabilities that can allow decision-makers to respond "at the speed of relevance."¹² US Northern Command and NORAD highlight the importance of advanced sensors that can detect, track, and discriminate advanced cruise missiles, ballistic missiles, hypersonic weapons, and small unmanned aerial systems at full ranges (as well as the platforms that carry these weapons). They also promote new mechanisms to defeat advanced threat systems (including advanced cruise missiles capable of striking North America "from launch boxes in the Arctic").¹³ Accordingly, talk of the need to "harden the shield" to project a credible deterrent against conventional and below-the-threshold attacks on North America anticipates new Canada-US solutions that will incorporate Arctic sensors and systems in a layered "ecosystem" of sensors, fusion functions, and defeat mechanisms.¹⁴

Furthermore, Canada is working with its NATO allies to re-examine conventional deterrence and how to counter adversarial activities "below the threshold" of armed conflict in the Arctic. The statement in *Strong, Secure, Engaged* that "NATO has also increased its attention to Russia's ability to project force from its Arctic territory into the North Atlantic, and its potential to challenge NATO's collective defence posture," marks a measured shift in Canada's official position. Despite Canada's reticence to have the alliance adopt an explicit Arctic role over the past decade, the inclusion of this reference – as well as the commitment to "support the strengthening of situational awareness and information sharing in the Arctic, including with NATO" – indicates a newfound openness to multilateral engagement on "hard security" in the Arctic with its European allies. NATO is the cornerstone of both the Danish and Norwegian defence and security policies, which also opens opportunities for enhanced bilateral relationships. How this newfound interest in NATO's Arctic posture interacts with Canada's longstanding preference to partner bilaterally with the US on North American continental defence remains to be clarified in the next decade.

Threats *to* and *in* the Canadian Arctic: Towards a whole-of-society approach

The growing realization of the disproportionate impact of anthropogenic climate change on the circumpolar region, and the concomitant social, economic, and environmental consequences for the rest of the world, also commands global attention. Canada's Arctic and Northern Policy Framework highlights that "the Canadian North is warming at about 3 times the global average rate, which is affecting the land, biodiversity, cultures and traditions." This rapid change is "having far-reaching effects on the lives and well-being of northerners, threatening food security and the transportation of essential goods and endangering the stability and functioning of delicate ecosystems and critical infrastructure." There is extensive Canadian interest in how these changes affect Northern peoples and the environment that sustains them at local and domestic scales, as well as the implications of rising international interest in the region. Although non-Arctic observers have traditionally confined their polar interest to scientific research and environmental issues, over the past decade, significant international interest and attention has turned to oil, gas and minerals, fisheries, shipping, and Arctic governance. In turn, this has generated debates in the Arctic states about non-Arctic states' intentions and the roles that the latter should play in regional governance.¹⁵

Thus, while most Canadian analysts now downplay the probability of military and security threats to or in the Canadian Arctic directly related to resources or sovereignty, globalization and growing interest in the large-scale development of natural resources mean more activity in the Arctic. This increasing activity means a growing need to understand, monitor, and react to activities affecting security. NATO's 2017 *Strategic Foresight Analysis* notes that "the growing number of stakeholders combined with the interconnected nature of the international system, the exponential rate of change and the confluence of trends has continued to increase the potential for disorder and uncertainty in every aspect of world affairs."¹⁶ Accordingly, Canadians must look to more comprehensive approaches that accept and incorporate complexity and uncertainty (a theme developed by Hoogensen Gjørsv and Hodgson in chapter 1). The ANPF observes that "the qualities that make the Canadian Arctic and North such a special place, its size, climate, and small but vibrant and resilient populations, also pose unique security challenges, making it difficult to maintain situational awareness and respond to emergencies or military threats when and where they occur." Climate change compounds these challenges, reshaping the regional environment and, in some contexts and seasons, facilitating greater access to an increasingly "broad range of actors and interests"

(both Canadian and international). Accordingly, the 2019 policy framework emphasizes that to protect the safety and security of people in the region, and safeguard the ability to defend the Canadian Arctic and North – as well as North America – now and into the future, a multi-faceted and holistic approach is required. The complexity of the regional security environment places a premium on collaboration amongst all levels of government, Indigenous peoples, and local communities, as well as with trusted international partners.

Given the high proportion of Indigenous people (Inuit, First Nations, and Métis) in Canada's Arctic population, as well as Ottawa's political focus on improving Indigenous-Crown relations and promoting reconciliation, the Canadian Arctic and North has a much higher political profile than simple population statistics and parliamentary representation numbers might suggest. As the *Arctic Human Development Report* notes, Indigenous peoples' "efforts to secure self-determination and self-government are influencing Arctic governance in ways that will have a profound impact on the region and its inhabitants in the years to come."¹⁷ Canadian reports highlight longstanding inequalities in transportation, energy, communications, employment, community infrastructure, health services, and education that continue to disadvantage Northerners compared to other Canadians. Furthermore, poor socioeconomic and health indicators also point to significant gaps between Northern Canadian jurisdictions and their southern counterparts, elucidating higher rates of human insecurity *in* the Canadian Arctic. Accordingly, Canada's defence and security policies and practices align with its broader national strategy for the Canadian Arctic and the Circumpolar North, which promotes "a shared vision of the future where northern and Arctic people are thriving, strong and safe."¹⁸

Conclusions

Changing power dynamics in the Arctic are unlikely to derive from regional disputes over boundaries, resources, or regional governance in the next fifteen years, and instead will be a reflection of broader international forces and dynamics. Accordingly, Canada's Arctic faces no near-term conventional military threats – although resurgent strategic competition globally may have "spill over" effects on circumpolar security. In the case of the North American Arctic, observations or drivers associated with geostrategic competition at the *international* systemic level should not be misapplied to objective and subjective geographical assessments of the *regional* Arctic security environment.¹⁹ Although the evolving international balance of power may undermine global

peace and security, this is not necessarily a zero-sum game in terms of *Arctic* regional stability.

Rather than promoting a narrative of inherent competition or impending conflict, *Strong, Secure, Engaged* emphasizes that “Arctic states have long cooperated on economic, environmental, and safety issues, particularly through the Arctic Council, the premier body for cooperation in the region. All Arctic states have an enduring interest in continuing this productive collaboration.” This last sentence suggests that Russia (described elsewhere in the policy document as a state “willing to test the international security environment,” and which had reintroduced “a degree of major power competition”) has vested national interests in a stable circumpolar region. Accordingly, the drivers of Arctic change in Canada’s defence policy emphasize the rise of security and safety challenges *in* the Arctic, rather than conventional defence threats *to* the Arctic, thus confirming the line of reasoning that has become well entrenched in defence planning over the last decade.²⁰ *Strong, Secure, Engaged* also highlights how international threats may pass *through* the Arctic to reach targets outside of the region.

The Arctic is inextricably tied to the rest of Canada, to North America, and to the international system as a whole. This interconnectedness brings opportunities for communities, governance, and economic development, and also poses complex, multifaceted challenges. Accordingly, strategic forecasters must situate the Canadian Arctic in global, regional, and domestic contexts in order to anticipate new challenges, promote effective adaptations to changing circumstances, and identify how the military should be trained and equipped to act decisively in concert with its allies. Current discussions about the future of the North American defence and security architecture, including new “ecosystem” approaches to integrating layered defences, anticipate a future where NORAD might achieve all-domain awareness from the seabed to outer space, and have the ability to fuse the data from these sensors into a common operating picture that decision-makers can use to achieve “information dominance” and “decision superiority.”²¹ As Charron discusses in her chapter, the full extent of Canada’s contribution to continental defence modernization remains to be determined, but its Arctic will inevitably factor heavily given that the polar region still represents the fastest avenue of approach to North America for various delivery systems emanating from major power competitors.

Anticipating and addressing twenty-first century challenges requires clear, coordinated action in order to leverage the broad and deep expertise of the modern state and civil society. In the defence and security realm, Canada’s Arctic policy emphasizes that meeting “enormous collective challenges requires coordinated action across the whole-of-government – military capabilities

working hand in hand with diplomacy and development.” Taken together, the opportunities, challenges, increased competition, and risks associated with a more accessible (and unpredictable) Arctic require a greater presence of security organizations, strengthened emergency management, and improved situational awareness. They also require more fidelity in anticipating and preparing to address different threats through, to, and in Arctic regions.

Notes

¹ Department of National Defence (DND), *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy* (2017), 79, <http://dgpapp.forces.gc.ca/en/canada-defence-policy/docs/canada-defence-policy-report.pdf>.

² Rob Huebert, “The New Arctic Strategic Triangle Environment (NASTE),” in *Breaking the Ice Curtain? Russia, Canada, and Arctic Security in a Changing Circumpolar World*, eds. P. Whitney Lackenbauer and Suzanne Lalonde (Calgary: Canadian Global Affairs Institute, 2019), 75-92.

³ 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, https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/OShaughnessy_02-13-20.pdf.

⁴ Statement of General Terrence J. O’Shaughnessy before the Senate Armed Services Committee Subcommittee on Readiness and Management Support, 3 March 2020, https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/O'Shaughnessy_03-03-20.pdf.

⁵ See P. Whitney Lackenbauer, “From ‘Defending Sovereignty’ to Comprehensive Security in a Whole of Government Framework: Government Narratives of Arctic Sovereignty and Security in the Harper Era,” in *Understanding Sovereignty and Security in the Circumpolar Arctic*, eds. Wilfrid Greaves and Lackenbauer (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021), 137-167.

⁶ P. Whitney Lackenbauer, “Canada’s Emerging Arctic and Northern Policy Framework: Confirming a Longstanding Northern Strategy,” in *Breaking the Ice Curtain? Russia, Canada, and Arctic Security in a Changing Circumpolar World*, eds. Lackenbauer and Suzanne Lalonde (Calgary: Canadian Global Affairs Institute, 2019), 13-42.

⁷ Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada (CIRNAC), *Arctic and Northern Policy Framework*, Government of Canada, 10 September 2019, <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1560523306861/1560523330587>; Peter Kikkert and P. Whitney Lackenbauer, “Canada’s Arctic and Northern Policy Framework: A Roadmap for the Future?” *Arctic Yearbook 2019*, eds. Lassi

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⁸ CIRNAC, *Arctic and Northern Policy Framework: Safety, Security, and Defence Chapter*, <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1562939617400/1562939658000>.

⁹ Lionel Barber, "Vladimir Putin says liberalism has 'become obsolete,'" *Financial Times*, 27 June 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/670039ec-98f3-11e9-9573-ee5cbb98ed36>.

¹⁰ CIRNAC, *Arctic and Northern Policy Framework*.

¹¹ Department of National Defence, "North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD)," modified 3 April 2010, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/reports-publications/transition-materials/caf-operations-activities/2020/03/caf-ops-activities/norad.html>.

¹² Andrea Charron, "Beyond the North Warning System," *War on the Rocks*, 7 September 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/09/beyond-the-north-warning-system/>.

¹³ O'Shaughnessy to Senate Armed Services Committee Subcommittee on Readiness and Management Support, 3 March 2020. See also Nancy Teeple and Ryan Dean, eds., *Shielding North America: Canada's Role in All-Domain Continental Defence* (Peterborough: NAADSN Engage Series, forthcoming 2021).

¹⁴ Terrence J. O'Shaughnessy and Peter M. Fesler, "Hardening the Shield: A Credible Deterrent & Capable Defense for North America" (Washington: Canada Institute, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, September 2020), https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/uploads/documents/Hardeni%20ng%20the%20Shield_A%20Credible%20Deterrent%20%26%20Capable%20Def%20ense%20for%20North%20America_EN.pdf.

¹⁵ See, for example, P.E. Solli, E. Wilson Rowe, and W. Yennie Lindgren, "Coming into the Cold: Asia's Arctic Interests," *Polar Geography* 36/4 (2013): 253-270; Kimie Hara and Ken Coates, eds., *East Asia-Arctic Relations: Boundary, Security and International Politics* (Waterloo: Centre for International Governance Innovation, 2014); and P. Whitney Lackenbauer, Adam Lajeunesse, James Manicom, and Frédéric Lasserre, *China's Arctic ambitions and what they mean for Canada* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2018).

¹⁶ NATO, *Strategic Foresight Analysis Report 2017* (Brussels: NATO, 2017), https://www.act.nato.int/application/files/1016/0565/9725/171004_sfa_2017_rep_ort_hr.pdf.

¹⁷ Joan Nymand Larsen and Gail Fondahl, *Arctic Human Development Report (AHDR-II)* (Copenhagen: Nordisk Ministerråd, 2015), <http://norden.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:788965/FULLTEXT03.pdf>.

¹⁸ CIRNAC, *Arctic and Northern Policy Framework*. As non-state actors and non-Arctic state actors seek greater influence on Arctic affairs, the Government of

Canada may also face challenges to its legitimacy and credibility. Furthermore, the increasing polarization, regionalization, and fragmentation within North American society could deepen distrust in conventional politics and politicians, exposing vulnerabilities that are susceptible to outside influence and that can be exploited to disrupt the social fabric and sow seeds of disunity. A declining sense of fate control, lingering anxieties about sovereignty, and concerns about an increasingly complex future could also prove sources of greater uncertainty and social and political division. In an increasingly globalized information and social media environment, adversaries are likely to use disinformation and misinformation strategies to influence Canadian opinion, undermine sources of strength, and complicate decision-making in the Arctic and elsewhere. For a recent discussion, see Troy Bouffard and P. Whitney Lackenbauer, "Russian Arctic Strategies: Ambitions and Near-Term Expectations," NAADSN Ideas Talk (by Zoom), 4 December 2020, <https://www.naadsn.ca/events/naadsn-ideas-series-russian-arctic-strategies-ambitions-and-near-term-expectations/>.

¹⁹ Ryan Dean and P. Whitney Lackenbauer, "Geostrategy and Canadian Defence: From C.P. Stacey to Twenty-First Century Arctic Threat Assessment," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 20/1 (November 2019): 1-64, <https://jmss.org/article/view/69488/53633>.

²⁰ See, for example, Franklyn Griffiths, Rob Huebert, and P. Whitney Lackenbauer, *Canada and the Changing Arctic: Sovereignty, Security and Stewardship* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2011); Adam Lajeunesse and P. Whitney Lackenbauer, "The Canadian Armed Forces in the Arctic: Building Appropriate Capabilities," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 16/4 (2016): 7-66; and P. Whitney Lackenbauer and Heather Nicol, eds., *Whole of Government through an Arctic Lens* (Antigonish: Mulroney Institute on Government, 2017).

²¹ See, for example, O'Shaughnessy and Fesler, "Hardening the Shield," and the series of reports by Ryan Dean and Nancy Teeple: "NORAD Modernization: Report One: Awareness & Sensors," Canadian Defence Associations (CDA) Institute, 16 September 2020; "NORAD Modernization: Report Two: Defeat Capabilities," CDA Institute, 29 September 2020; "NORAD Modernization: Report Three: JADC2/JADO," CDA Institute, 28 October 2020. For the language of "information dominance" and "decision superiority," see *USNORTHCOM/NORAD Strategy: Executive Summary* (March 2021), 3, [https://www.northcom.mil/Portals/28/\(U\)%20NORAD-USNORTHCOM%20Strategy%20EXSUM%20-%20Signed.pdf](https://www.northcom.mil/Portals/28/(U)%20NORAD-USNORTHCOM%20Strategy%20EXSUM%20-%20Signed.pdf).

5 The Evolving Arctic Security Environment

Rob Huebert

The Arctic security environment is changing, with far-reaching consequences. The end of the Cold War fuelled a mistaken belief that with the collapse of the USSR all security requirements of the region had ended. This was simply false and wishful thinking. This chapter identifies how, since 1989, there have been four distinct security phases in the region:

- 1) 1989-2000 – the period of Arctic demilitarization;
- 2) 2000-2014 – the re-emergence of national security Arctic imperatives;
- 3) 2014-2017 – preparing for the re-emergence of the strategic Arctic;
and
- 4) 2018-2021 – the return of the Arctic Cold War.

Phase 1: Demilitarization and the Rise of Multilateralism 1989-2000

The first phase of the Arctic security environment took place from 1989 to approximately 2000. It was in this time period that the USSR imploded and economically was unable to maintain its Arctic-based military capabilities. The Soviet/Russian forces were severely downsized to the point of near elimination. As a result, the other Arctic coastal states – Canada, Norway, Denmark, and the United States – also downsized much of their Arctic capabilities. Even the United States Navy moved to build a cheaper and less Arctic-capable class of attack submarines.

As the United States moved to reduce its costs of operating in the Arctic, it did not abandon its Arctic security role. While it was willing to allow the creation of new multilateral Arctic-focused bodies such as the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS) and the subsequent Arctic Council, it insisted that none of these new entities could address hard security issues. While it also stopped production of the very Arctic-capable *Seawolf*-class attack submarines, their replacements – of the *Virginia* class – were given under-ice capabilities and continued to operate in the Arctic as they came on-line. The United States was also the only Arctic state that continued to hold large-scale

operations in its Arctic region, albeit in the summer months and at a smaller scale than what had been done during the Cold War.

The Soviet/Russian deterioration was so severe that much of its nuclear-powered submarine force was left to literally rot in harbours in and around Murmansk. This created a potential environmental nuclear threat for the entire region. Fears developed that some of these submarines could experience either a nuclear spill or even a meltdown. As a result, the United States, Norway, Russia, and the UK formed the Arctic Military Environmental Cooperation (AMEC). The three Western states provided substantial economic and technical assistance to Russia to assist in the safe and proper decommissioning of the former Soviet submarines. In turn, the G-8 nations also made the decision in 2002 to join in the process, and provided substantial funds for this clean-up.

As these efforts were being taken to safely dispose of the former Soviet nuclear fleet, the Russian government became willing to engage in multilateral diplomacy, forming a series of new Arctic governance agreements. The Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS) (1991), which then evolved into the Arctic Council (1996), have been very successful in bringing the former Arctic enemies together to deal with international environmental security issues. Several non-Arctic countries, such as the United Kingdom, very early recognized the importance of these bodies, and joined as observer states in 1998.

Phase 2: Re-emergence of Arctic National Security 2000-2014

In around 2000, the larger international community began to realize that the Arctic was entering a period of physical transformation. Some scientists had begun to suspect, as early as in the 1980s, that climate change was beginning to melt the polar ice caps. By the turn of the new millennium, however, greater international awareness had been aroused. As such, most of the coastal Arctic states began to rebuild their Arctic capabilities, with Norway, Canada, Denmark, and Russia procuring new equipment and launching new and expanded exercises and operations in the region. During this time period, China, Japan, South Korea, and India became interested in the region in anticipation of its growing accessibility.

Of the Arctic states, Russia initiated the most serious efforts to rebuild its Arctic forces. At this time, however, most Western observers were largely dismissive of the Russian efforts, and tended to view them as posturing for domestic purposes. This new Russian focus overlapped with the rise to power of Vladimir Putin, and, as events demonstrated, this was not mere rhetoric.

President Putin publicly announced at the Munich Security Conference in 2007 that Russia was pursuing great power status. While many dismissed this speech act, the Russian government began rebuilding its military capability, and has continued to consistently since that time.

The Russians placed the greatest emphasis on the rebuilding of their submarine fleet, and particularly their nuclear-missile-carrying submarines (SSBNs) that formed the backbone of their nuclear deterrent. While they have faced significant problems in restarting much of their ship-building capability, they have persevered. The Russians also began to use military force to prevent former Soviet republics from joining NATO. This first occurred in 2008 against Georgia. In 2014, Russia seized the Crimean peninsula, and instigated a series of military actions against Ukraine when its government was changed and started to consider membership in both NATO and the EU. In both instances, the Russian actions prevented those two states from pursuing NATO membership.

Toward the latter part of the 2000s, Russia also began to reinstate Arctic military operations for both power projection and the protection of its deterrent forces. In 2007, it resumed long-range bomber patrols up to the airspaces of Canada, the United States, Norway, Iceland, and the UK, and has intensified these flights in both number and complexity since that time. It also resumed SSBN Arctic patrols in 2008.

At the same time, the United States has taken measures to demonstrate that it also continues to engage its nuclear-powered attack submarines (SSNs) in the Arctic. It does so by allowing its submarines to participate in a bi-annual scientific exercise that publicly showcases its most advanced submarines (including the newest *Virginia* class) operating in Arctic waters. British submarines also continue to operate in the Arctic, as demonstrated when HMS *Tireless* suffered a major accident while operating off the coast of Alaska in 2007. The British resumed engaging with the Americans in 2018, when the HMS *Trenchant* participated in ICEX 2018 along with the USS *Connecticut* and USS *Hartford*.

The Americans also began a process of advancing their nuclear missile defence systems by deploying their Ground-based Midcourse Defense (GMD) in Fort Greely, Alaska. They subsequently added more interceptors as they became more concerned about the North Korean nuclear threat. The location of the missile base has implications for Arctic security, and as their F-22 and F-35 fighters have come on-line, an increasing number have been deployed to air bases in Alaska.

A similar process began in and around the Russian northern bases. As the Russians have modernized and increased their northern fleet, they have rebuilt

and strengthened their northern military infrastructure. While they officially stated that these were for search and rescue purposes in a melting Arctic, new and rebuilt runways also are able to accommodate their most advanced fighters and bombers. Most recently, the Russians have deployed MiG-31s, armed with Kh-47M2 Kinzhal ballistic missiles, to the Rogachevo air base in the Russian central Arctic region.

In effect, the period of 2000-2014 saw a renewed effort on the part of the Arctic coastal states to rebuild their Arctic military capabilities. What confounded many observers at the time was the difficulty of determining the motivation for this renewal. In part, it was driven by the perceived need to prepare for a melting Arctic, but there was also a motivation to rebuild and strengthen military capabilities for usage in other areas. The placement and use of the Arctic region for strategic forces reflected geography and technology rather than any specific concern about a possible conflict in the Arctic. Nevertheless, this geopolitical reality means that both the United States and Russia have continued to see the Arctic in an increasingly important strategic light.

Phase 3: Preparing to Return to the Cold War 2014-2017

The Russian military intervention in Ukraine has had a profound impact on the relationship between Russia and the other Arctic states. Following the intervention in eastern Ukraine and the military seizure of Crimea, Canada, the United States, Norway, and the UK (among others) enacted sanctions on the Putin administration and specifically targeted the Russian oil and gas industry in the Russian North. The US, UK, and Canada also sent both military aid and trainers to Ukraine, which increased tensions with Russia. While some states such as Canada and the US attempted to argue that the overall deterioration of the relationship did not affect Arctic cooperation in the Arctic Council and other fora, there has been a significant reduction in overall cooperation in the Arctic region (and particularly in the military sphere).

As mentioned earlier, the roots of this break can more accurately be traced back to 2008, when the Russians used military force in Georgia partly as a response to the American efforts to draw that country into NATO. Although a wide number of factors influenced the Russian use of force, this was the first instance where a link may be made between the Russian use of its military and its ability to stop NATO expansion. The Ukrainian action in 2014, however, had the most significant effect on the relationship between Russia and the other Arctic states.

The Russians have also used their military as an instrument of intimidation with their Baltic and Arctic neighbours. Finland and Sweden have both reported an increase in Russian military violations of their air and maritime spaces. Norway and the UK have also seen an increased number of Russian aircraft coming close to and sometimes violating their respective national airspaces. The increased Russian air activity has also led to the resumption of US bomber patrols in the Arctic region.

The Russians also publicly showcased elements of the Northern Fleet in their military mission in Syria in 2016. When the leading element of this force (including Russia's only aircraft carrier) left Murmansk, it sailed through the English Channel – thus attracting considerable attention in the UK. Since 2017, Russia has steadily increased its military activities in the Russian North, to the point where many observers have begun to suggest that the country has moved from securitizing its Arctic space to militarizing it. The difference is understood as moving from a defensive posture to one that is more aggressive.

At the same time, China has also begun to deploy elements of its naval forces into the Arctic. A five-ship task force sailed through the Aleutian Island chain in 2015. While it was careful to respect all elements of international maritime law, it did sail as close to Alaskan waters as was possible. Around the same time, a Chinese naval vessel paid the first port visit ever to Finland, Sweden, and Denmark. This illustrates the growing importance that China is now giving to the region.

Phase 4: Returning to the Cold War 2018-2021

Increased Russian activities and heightened Chinese interest in the region have provoked renewed American attention to the strategic importance of the Arctic. At the May 2019 Arctic Council ministerial meeting in Helsinki, US Secretary of State Michael Pompeo accused both Russia and China of militarizing the Arctic. This speech surprised many observers. At the same time, the United States began to change its Arctic policies and actions, including the re-establishment of the Second Fleet. USS *Eisenhower* deployed along with its escorts above the Arctic Circle in 2018 – the first time an American aircraft carrier had done this since the end of the Cold War. The US Coast Guard, Navy, and Air Force have all issued their own Arctic strategies, which cite rising great power competition as a major threat to regional security and cooperation. This has corresponded with the rise of NATO-based exercises in Northern locations, including both land-based operations in Norway (Trident Junction and Trident Jackal) as well as anti-submarine exercises in northern European waters (Dynamic Mongoose).

The period of 2014-2018 did not see an immediate increase in tensions about the Arctic. Indeed, in some instances, the ability of all the Arctic states to cooperate shows that the region itself seemed to avoid strategic tensions playing out elsewhere in the world. This time period also indicates that, despite the best efforts to keep the Arctic separate from conflicts elsewhere, the region is being drawn into the larger international strategic environment and regaining the importance that it held as a strategic location during the Cold War. Since 2018, this consensus has broken down. This may partly reflect the changing policies introduced by the Trump administration, and its more aggressive foreign policy rhetoric. The Trump administration also indicated a growing displeasure with its traditional European allies and, conversely, its respect for the Russian administration. It is difficult to determine why its articulation of a more aggressive Arctic policy seemed to better embrace its European allies while clearly identifying the Russians as the threat in the region. The identification of China as a threat is more consistent with the overall tenor of the administration's concerns with Chinese foreign and defence policy overall.

Why is this Happening?

Understanding the Arctic region in security terms is difficult, owing to three core strategic frameworks that can be complimentary, but are now increasingly contradictory. On the one hand, the Arctic Ocean is emerging as a "new ocean." The Arctic Ocean has always existed, but the existence of a permanent ice cover has meant that there has been little opportunity for its use, except by Northern Indigenous peoples such as the Inuit. With the melting of the permanent ice cover owing to climate change, coupled with significant advancements in transportation technology, the Arctic Ocean is now opening to a wide range of new uses. Consequently, many of the coastal states in the Arctic, and specifically Russia, have begun a process of rebuilding their military and security forces to protect this opening region.

At the same time, the Arctic Ocean, since the end of the Second World War, has been one of the most important strategic locations for the maintenance of the nuclear deterrence system that developed with the advent of missile technology, nuclear-powered submarines, jet bombers, and nuclear weapons. While the end of the Cold War diminished the Arctic Ocean's role in this system, it was not eliminated. Both the Americans and the Russians continued to build and maintain their weapon systems necessary for the protection of their deterrence systems in the Arctic. Much of this activity has remained hidden from public observation, however, and therefore has either been discounted or ignored.

The third strategic framework is emerging because of the first two. As Russia moves to build up its military forces to protect its interests in the Arctic, and as it moves to rebuild its nuclear deterrent in the region, it has also discovered that these forces have allowed it to emerge as a regional military hegemon. This has become more important as Russia has increasingly moved to utilize military force to achieve political objectives in areas such as Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria.

The net effect of these three strategic frameworks is that most observers have focused on the efforts of the Arctic states to reassert military security capabilities in the region. For the most part, these actions have been characterized as constabulary in nature, and most observers have suggested that the coastal states are justified in taking these actions. Efforts are now being taken by Arctic coastal states such as Russia, the United States, Norway, Canada, and Denmark to improve their military capabilities in the region, as a means to respond to environmental accidents, fulfill search and rescue needs, and meet other requirements that will be associated with the increasing use of the region.

More problematic is the re-emergence of great power politics as Russia moves to consolidate and reassert itself as a major power increasingly at odds with the West. Both the United States and Russia are increasingly relying on the Arctic to revisit the protection of their nuclear deterrents. At the same time, Russia is also increasingly using its growing regional hegemony to assert itself elsewhere. Thus, the real military challenge is not about a conflict over the Arctic and/or its resources, but rather how the Arctic is being used by the predominant military powers. What further confound observers are the Russian actions, based on several different imperatives, that will require a layered response to their increasingly assertive worldwide actions. At the same time, it is necessary to wait to see if the more assertive American position since 2018 was specific to the Trump administration, or if it represented a more permanent change in policy. While the new Biden administration has strongly signalled that it wishes to “undo” much of Trump’s agenda, it has also stated its intention to hold Russia to account for its actions against the United States. This leaves mixed indications about what will happen in the Arctic.

6 Soft Security Responses to Hard Power Competition

Ernie Regehr

The NATO world has by now settled into a broadly shared understanding of current Arctic militarization as regards its erstwhile Cold War nemesis. There is the clear Russian commitment to re-establishing a prominent conventional military footprint throughout its Arctic zone, in addition to its always prominent nuclear/strategic footprint on the Kola Peninsula and neighbouring waters. While Russia's conventional military posture in the Arctic is widely acknowledged as being primarily defensive, there are nevertheless growing concerns about its current and potential power projection capabilities. The other Arctic states (all NATO members or partners) still consider it unlikely that they will face state-based military threats in the foreseeable future, but they do worry that competition among the major powers inevitably spills into the region, leading them to expand their own northern military footprints.

Hard and Soft Security Operations¹

This post-Crimea consensus drives heightened hard security military operations in the region, as the two sides stake out Arctic postures against potential state-to-state military threats in the context of globally resurgent great power competition. At the same time, national armed forces, including Russia's, are also scaling up their domestic military operations to support northern civilian authorities in their soft security mandates to reinforce sovereignty, monitor and control increasingly accessible frontiers, and serve public safety. These dual militarizing trends in the Arctic are accompanied by significantly downgraded dialogue and diplomatic engagement on security matters.

The relative impact of these two related but still distinct lines of hard and soft military operations on Arctic security recalls what Harvard international relations scholar Stephen Walt has called his heretical thought:

What if foreign policy isn't as important as foreign-policy mavens like me maintain? What if developments and policies inside the

country are far more consequential—at least most of the time—than what its leaders do on the global stage?²

With apologies to Prof. Walt, what if Arctic military postures oriented to East/West strategic competition are not nearly as consequential for national security and regional stability as domestic military missions in support of peace, order, and good governance?

That question is explored in three contexts: the inability of expanding hard security operations in the Arctic to avoid the security dilemma of escalatory and destabilizing push back; the failure to recognize soft security operations for their contributions to regional stability; and the need to mitigate the risks inherent in up-tempo security operations through military-to-military consultations, arms control talks, and broader diplomatic engagement to stabilize great power competition.

Hard Security Operations and Arctic Instability

The dynamic that pits Russia's Arctic military footprint and its capacity to project power southward into the North Atlantic and beyond, against NATO's northward reach into Russia's Barents Sea bastion and the home waters of its Kola Peninsula-based Northern Fleet, is the primary context for the great power competition spilling into the Arctic. Add to that the expanded air patrols on both sides of the East/West frontier in Northern Europe and along the North American Arctic and Kamchatka coasts, as well as the emergence of new warhead delivery systems (conventional or nuclear), including hypersonic glide missiles and long-range air- and sea-launched cruise missiles, and the region's links to great power competition become undeniable.

All those operations and systems emerge out of globalized competition; literally none are in response to Arctic-generated conflicts or tensions. Russia's interests in pressing southwards are to potentially disrupt transatlantic shipping and communications links that could support NATO operations in a European-centred conflict with Russia, and to maintain assured access to the wider Atlantic for its Northern Fleet, including attack submarines armed with long-range cruise missiles. NATO's interests in pressing northward are to hold Russia's sea-based deterrent at risk, and to potentially disrupt Kola-based reinforcements and deny Northern Fleet access to the North Atlantic, both in the context of a European-centred conflict.

None of these operations or systems can escape the classic "security dilemma" – the dynamic whereby one side's efforts to gain military advantage over a peer adversary are matched or exceeded by the other, leading to an escalating competition that inevitably leaves both sides less secure.³ A notable

case in point is the Pentagon's North American plan for the Strategic Home and Integrated Ecosystem for Layered Defense (SHIELD). With particular worries about Russian and Chinese long-range cruise and hypersonic missiles capable of striking North American military targets with conventional warheads (threats considered not amenable to nuclear deterrence), the SHIELD is described as "a layered" system of systems, with the "ability to detect any threat approaching the continent," that will "alert decision-makers" and "guide defeat mechanisms" to incoming targets.⁴

A frank security dilemma prognosis by the Pentagon would anticipate its adversaries responding by expanding their inventories of attacking missiles. Indeed, the SHIELD's designers expect exactly that. Because the SHIELD could be overwhelmed by mass cruise missile attacks, its designers have made pre-emptive attacks against cruise missile platforms (archers), before they can launch their missiles (arrows), a "key component" of their plan.⁵ So, in addition to incentivizing adversaries to expand their inventories of both missiles and launch platforms, the SHIELD's pre-emption strategy could drive both sides in a crisis or conflict to conclude that the advantage would go to the side shooting first – that there would be advantages to starting or escalating a great power war. Canada, having committed to modernizing the Arctic-based North Warning System as part of the SHIELD infrastructure, will, to its credit, find it a challenge to muster either the funds or the policy needed to embrace a system that so prominently "blur[s] the lines between offensive and defensive missions."⁶

In a similar dynamic, US/NATO Barents Sea patrols to hold Russian submarines carrying strategic-range nuclear-armed missiles (SSBNs) at risk, while gaining no military advantage from threatening second-strike deterrent forces, prompt Russia to intensify its defence of the Barents Sea bastion. That in turn leads the US and NATO to interpret those bolstered defences as adding to Russia's capacity to project power into the North Atlantic, generating the inevitable push back – an arms race.

Soft Security Operations and Regional Stability

With those dynamics at the fore, Arctic security discourse tilts readily towards the geostrategic, but significant military operations in the region are in fact prominently oriented to supporting civilian authorities focused on soft security objectives. Reinforcing sovereignty, enhancing local domain awareness, protecting the integrity and sustainability of the environment and critical economic infrastructure, ensuring safe and secure transportation systems, monitoring air and maritime frontiers, and supporting the safety and prosperity

of Northern peoples and communities through search and rescue and other emergency responses⁷ – these civilian-led missions are supported throughout the Arctic by military and paramilitary forces. Not only are they essential to domestic peace, order, and good governance, but they also make key, albeit underappreciated, contributions to regional stability and conflict prevention.

American polar analyst Joshua Tallis, of the Center for Naval Analyses and the Newport Arctic Scholars Initiative, argues in *Foreign Policy* that the great power competition framework is too narrow and confrontational to guide US Arctic policy. He calls instead on the Biden administration to address Arctic challenges “under the rubric ... of positively reinforcing regional governance and rules.”⁸ The recent Chatham House Arctic Hard Security Taskforce report also concluded that “softer forms of cooperation among the Arctic states can help manage the risks created by the growing emphasis on hard security in the region.”⁹ National military forces that support the domestic soft security missions of civilian authorities contribute to regional stability in addition to the stability of their own states. A region of domestically stable states, open to cross-border engagements on a range of issues, notably public safety operations such as search and rescue and environmental clean-up, promotes the opposite of a security dilemma.

It also happens to be the case that states and regions where good governance prevails, in which the institutions that mediate political and social differences hold the confidence of their populations, are at very low risk of having their sovereignty and territorial integrity militarily challenged. Post-Cold War interventions or attacks on sovereign states have occurred almost exclusively in contexts of chronic political instability (Ukraine and Georgia among them).¹⁰ President Barack Obama’s 2016 farewell address¹¹ made a similar point when he reminded Americans that how their democracy is practiced impacts not only politics and the economy, but also America’s ability to protect its homeland.

Stable states are secure states, and Arctic states wary of Russia are confidently governed spaces that enjoy deeply rooted political stability, which means that they are in possession of one of the more effective defences against attack. Of course, not Arctic stability, nor Ilulissat principles, nor soft security assistance to civilian authorities can prevent major powers from going to war elsewhere – or prevent such a war from spilling into the Arctic. But political stability and soft security pursuits are central to ensuring that the Arctic does not become the spark that ignites a major power cataclysm. Tallis notes that “while strategic competition among rival powers will not disappear, in the Arctic, the Biden administration’s most effective approach will be a United States committed to a positive rules-based regional agenda.”¹²

Dialogue and Diplomacy

Arctic military operations in thrall to geopolitical competition are attended by risks of accidental close encounters, misinterpretations of intentions, and miscalculations in responses to perceived provocations. These dangers pile onto already existing tensions and mistrust, risking skirmishes and even direct combat engagements. And in recognition of these dangers, there has been a crescendo of calls for renewed dialogue and diplomacy to manage Arctic security arrangements in ways that reduce the region's risk of being inadvertently drawn into crises.

The Arctic Security Forces Roundtable (ASFR) is a dialogue forum, intended to engage "senior military officers, military and governmental Arctic experts, and academics specializing in defence and the Arctic, to promote greater regional understanding, dialogue, and cooperation in the Arctic region."¹³ It includes non-Arctic states like France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. Since 2014, Russia has not participated. This exclusion is lamented in a 2020 experts' report on "The Future of Arctic Security" by the Netherlands Institute of International Relations (Clingendael). That report also suggests that the ASFR address a broadened agenda that would include conflict prevention and de-escalation.¹⁴

The Arctic Chiefs of Defence Staff meetings had similar functions and included Russia, but it has not met since 2013. In a 2020 report, the Newport Arctic Scholars Initiative at the US Naval War College, a gathering of national security practitioners and scholars, calls for a resumption of such meetings, to help "prevent misunderstandings and unintended security escalation," and to promote "information sharing, transparency measures, and other cooperative mechanisms."¹⁵ The Arctic Hard Security Taskforce also recommends bringing Russia back into consultative processes, with the caution that its inclusion should not be interpreted as accepting past unacceptable behaviour.¹⁶ Similarly, some 145 security experts convened by the European Leadership Network called in 2020 for NATO/Russian military-to-military dialogue, perceiving it as being "necessary to increase predictability and reduce the risk of military incidents at sea, in the air and on land escalating to the level of military conflict."¹⁷ The context was Europe, but the principle holds for the Arctic.

The exclusionary policies that sought to marginalize Russia in a region that it dominates were always unrealistic, inasmuch as the refusal to engage Russia on security matters in the Arctic was not about to alter the realities in Ukraine, Crimea, or Georgia. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), of which all Arctic states are members, has a lot to say, through the Vienna Document,¹⁸ about military-to-military consultation and

information exchanges in the interests of stability and risk reduction – a key feature being that engagement is not suspended in moments of crisis, when needed most. While Arctic states are currently disinclined to take Arctic issues to the OSCE, the Clingendael Report nevertheless argues that “the experience of the OSCE regarding risk reduction, incident prevention, confidence-building measures and promoting military transparency in other regions could be made use of in the Arctic.”¹⁹ The 2014 *Arctic Yearbook* also includes an exploration of OSCE security- and confidence-building measures in the context of the Arctic.²⁰

The Newport Scholars group also recommends the creation of “a new high-level political-military forum for the Arctic,” arguing that “the past success of the Arctic Five – the five coastal states – in developing the 2008 Ilulissat Declaration illustrates the potential of creating a new security forum for the Arctic.”²¹ The idea of an Arctic Military Code of Conduct is also gaining currency. It would require buy-in from all states with armed forces capable of operating in the Arctic, and proponents see it as defining acceptable military practices and promoting transparency, “with a view to reducing irresponsible military activity and brinkmanship, whilst preserving a ‘low tension’ Arctic environment.”²²

While the Arctic is accurately described as peaceful, the Inuit Circumpolar Council’s (ICC’s) Utqiagvik Declaration of 2018 insists that keeping it so will require re-energized diplomacy toward entrenching the Arctic as a peaceful zone.²³ Earlier resolutions, in 1977 and 1983, similarly sought to advance the Arctic as a zone of peace. In a submission to a Canadian Senate Special Committee on the Arctic, the ICC pointed to its own record of “positive international circumpolar relations,”²⁴ including its close ties to the Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, to call for “an enhanced Inuit role in Arctic diplomacy.”

The cooperation that has long been recognized as an essential component of routine Arctic life is now a requirement for stabilizing the region’s security environment. Canadian policy puts the case for Arctic cooperation about as clearly as any in its pledge to “continue to support the co-operative, rules-based international order that has served national and global interests by fostering peace, security and stability for the circumpolar Arctic.”²⁵

Summary

Just as the Arctic cannot avoid spill-over from the currently intensifying competition among the major powers, it also cannot exempt its regional hard power military operations from the security dilemma of escalating military

assertions and counter-assertions that ultimately diminishes the security of the entire region. But Arctic states are not wanting for means of mitigating some of those destabilizing effects. Domestic soft security operations contribute to regional stability through providing aid to civilian authorities in support of good governance, and serve as a stabilizing influence in state-to-state and day-to-day relations among regional neighbours. Cross-border military cooperation that includes Russia, notably in search and rescue and the Arctic Coast Guard Forum, as well as an impressive record of producing regional agreements, reinforces expectations that regional cooperation can be sustained, even in the face of challenging geostrategic trends. The disruptive implications for the Arctic of heightened great power competition have awakened a sense of urgency toward reinstating and expanding inclusive regional military-to-military dialogue. There is also a growing recognition that a more institutionalized process for dialogue and consultation on arms control and the conditions for strategic stability is essential for the major powers to step back from the destabilizing path on which they are now embarked.

Notes

¹ The February 2021 report of the Chatham House/Loughborough University “Arctic Hard Security Taskforce” defines “hard” security as relating to military affairs, and “soft” security as relating to safety and constabulary issues. With military forces involved in both hard and soft security operations, the terms are used here as “hard security” having to do with military responses to state-based military threats, and “soft security” having to do with military support to domestic constabulary and public safety missions.

² Stephen M. Walt, “All Great-Power Politics is Local,” *Foreign Policy*, 24 August 2020. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/08/24/all-great-power-politics-is-local/>

³ Agne Cepinskyte and Michael Paul, “Arctic Security Environment in Flux: Mitigating Geopolitical Competition through a Military-Security Dialogue,” The Arctic Institute, 11 February 2021. <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org>; and Anders Wivel, “Security dilemma: international relations,” <https://www.britannica.com/topic/security-dilemma>

⁴ Terrence J. O’Shaughnessy and Peter M. Fesler, “Hardening the Shield: A Credible Deterrent & Capable Defense for North America,” The Canada Institute, Wilson Center, 2020. www.wilsoncenter.org/canada

⁵ O’Shaughnessy and Fesler, 2020.

⁶ Troy Bouffard, Wilfrid Greaves, P. Whitney Lackenbauer, and Nancy Teeple, “North American Arctic Security Expectations in a New U.S. Administration,” North American and Arctic Defence and Security Network, *Strategic Perspectives*,

23 November 2020. <https://www.naadsn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/North-American-Arctic-Security-Expectations-in-a-New-U.S.-Administration-Final.pdf>

⁷ Government of Canada, 2019. <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1562782976772/1562783551358>

⁸ Joshua Tallis, “For a Biden Arctic Agenda, Look to Governance,” *Foreign Policy*, 16 February 2021. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/02/16/biden-arctic-agenda-china-climate-governance/#>

⁹ “Arctic Hard Security Taskforce: Summary of the 10 December expert workshop,” Co-organized by Loughborough University and Chatham House. Report released February 2021.

¹⁰ Ernie Regehr, *Disarming Conflict: Why peace cannot be won on the battlefield* (Between the Lines: Toronto, and Zed Books: London, 2015).

¹¹ Barack Obama, Farewell Address, 10 January 2017. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/farewell>

¹² Tallis, 16 February 2021.

¹³ Lucy Ellis, “Partners in the north: Canada hosts the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable in Halifax,” Government of Canada, *The Maple Leaf*, n.d. <https://mlfd.caf-fac.ca/en/2018/05/13032>

¹⁴ Dick Zandee, Kimberley Kruijver, and Adája Stoetman, “The future of Arctic security: The geopolitical pressure cooker and the consequences for the Netherlands,” Clingendael Report, April 2020. https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/Report_The_Future_of_Arctic_Security_April_2020.pdf

¹⁵ Walter Berbrick and Lars Saunes (Project Directors), “Conflict Prevention and Security Cooperation in the Arctic Region,” Newport Arctic Scholars Initiative 2020, September 2020. <https://usnwc.edu/Portals/0/News%20and%20Events/Arctic/Conflict%20Prevention%20and%20Security%20Cooperation%20in%20the%20Arctic%20Region-Frameworks%20of%20the%20Future%20C%20A0Report.pdf?ver=2020-10-30-143846-670>

¹⁶ Arctic Hard Security Taskforce, February 2021.

¹⁷ Recommendations from an experts’ dialogue: “De-escalating NATO-Russia military risks,” European Leadership Network, December 2020. <https://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/group-statement/nato-russia-military-risk-reduction-in-europe/>

¹⁸ The Vienna Document on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures of the OSCE “promotes predictability and military stability among participating states.” <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/a/4/86597.pdf>

¹⁹ Zandee, Kruijver, and Stoetman, April 2020.

²⁰ Benjamin Schaller, “Confidence- & Security-Building Measures in the Arctic: The Organization for Security & Cooperation in Europe as a Role Model for the Area?” *Arctic Yearbook 2014*. www.arcticyearbook.com

²¹ Berbrick and Saunes, September 2020.

²² Duncan Depledge, Mathieu Boulègue, Andrew Foxall, and Dmitriy Tulupov, “Why we need to talk about military activity in the Arctic: Towards an Arctic military Code of Conduct,” *Arctic Yearbook 2019*.

<https://arcticyearbook.com/arctic-yearbook/2019/2019-briefing-notes/328-why-we-need-to-talk-about-military-activity-in-the-arctic-towards-an-arctic-military-code-of-conduct>

²³ “The Arctic We Want,” Declaration passed at the 13th General Assembly Inuit Circumpolar Council, 16-19 July 2018, Utqiagvik, Alaska.

<https://www.inuitcircumpolar.com/general-assemblies/13th-general-assembly-inuit-the-arctic-we-want/>

²⁴ Submission of the Inuit Circumpolar Council Canada to the Special Senate Committee on the Arctic Regarding the Arctic Policy Framework and International Priorities, March 2019.

https://sencanada.ca/content/sen/committee/421/arct/briefs/Inuitcircumpolarcouncilcanada_e.pdf

²⁵ Government of Canada, 2019.

7

Beyond the North Warning System

Andrea Charron

The main solution to deterring and defending North America via the Arctic has been a series of radar lines strung across Alaska, the Canadian Arctic, and Greenland. They have been upgraded and relocated over the decades. Throughout the Cold War, the North American Arctic was a vector of attack; after all, the Soviet Union, Canada, and the United States are polar neighbours. The North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) has always been closely associated with defending the Arctic. Its crest includes a broad sword facing due north, suggesting that the avenue of potential attack against North America is through the Arctic. Surveilling the massive Canadian Arctic, therefore, has always been an important link in the chain of measures to deter, detect, and defeat threats facing North America via the Arctic approaches. Now that great power politics has re-emerged, the United States is making homeland defence a key priority, which means that the main radars in the Arctic are fore in the minds of North American defence planners. The renewal of the North Warning System (NWS), however, is not sufficient. Indeed, NORAD needs “modernizing,” and the defence of North America writ large requires evolutionary changes.

The NWS is a major source of information for NORAD – a binational command charged with the missions of aerospace warning and aerospace control for North America, and, more recently, maritime warning. Aerospace warning includes the detection and validation of attack against North America, whether by aircraft, missiles, or space vehicles, through mutual support arrangements with other commands and select allies. The NWS is made up of a series of unmanned long- and short-range radars dotting the North American Arctic and Greenland in support of air defence and frontier control. It was completed between 1986 and 1992, using 1970s technology, and was designed to detect air bomber threats from the Soviet Union travelling in a north-south direction at an assumed speed and altitude. The radars are reaching the end of their serviceable life, however. The American and Canadian defence industries are racing for a chance to provide both militaries with the latest technology to replace the old radars. But to what ends? More sensors are neither the magic

nor only solution to “modernizing” NORAD, which encompasses many initiatives, including improving infrastructure and communication systems in the Arctic, new command and control arrangements and positions, and using artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning to glean more information from existing sensors. New radars are but one, very small part of a wider effort to reconsider what it means to defend North America – beyond technology and the North Warning System.

The United States is engaged in a recent and hurried pivot to the Arctic because of increased competition with Russia and China, climate change, and increased commercial interests in the region. NORAD and the United States Northern Command (USNORTHCOM) are responsible for defending North America, but they can no longer do so independently of the other US combatant commands and NATO allies. The US pivot to the Arctic has implications for Canada and for other partners, including Arctic NATO allies, such as Denmark (Greenland) and Norway, who must contribute to air, surface, and subsurface situational awareness beyond what the NWS provides. The defence of North America needs to be thought of as a global effort reimagined for the twenty-first century.

Changing geopolitics

Russia’s growing military capabilities and assertiveness mean that NORAD’s detection, deterrence, and defeat mandate has never been so important. The Arctic is still the fastest avenue of approach to North America. Its defence is indivisible from the defence efforts of NATO and the other US combatant commands, especially USNORTHCOM, US European Command, US Indo-Pacific Command, and US Space Command – all of which have a role in the Arctic. The area of responsibility seams created by the US Unified Command Plan and the national jurisdictions of key NATO Arctic allies mean that NORAD’s missions are part and parcel of global efforts to compete with China and Russia. Current NORAD systems can warn of attacks – for example, a ballistic missile attack – but this information is not available to other systems that are responsible for a target’s defeat. Precious time and information can be lost in the translation to other systems, and allies may be left out of the loop, including from important intelligence that may aid in decision-making. This stove-piped approach to defence represents a vulnerability to exploit. Nevertheless, the NWS is the main set of “eyes” for NORAD. At a minimum, its serviceable life needs to be extended while wider, strategic discussions take place.

The United States, however, may be rushing into the Arctic too quickly¹ and with too many strategies devised by the military services (which, as argued by Tallis, should come from the US government, not the armed forces²), whereas Canada has not provided enough direction for its military. In the meantime, the prominence of Russia especially, and China obtusely, in the Arctic has risen quickly in the past few years, catching both governments off guard.

The Obama and Trump White Houses produced five major Arctic strategies, in addition to strategies for the various armed forces, including the first-ever US Department of the Air Forces' Arctic Strategy under President Donald Trump. The document anticipates a larger role for the space domain and, eventually, for the newly established Space Force in defending the Arctic and contributing to homeland defence. Given the harsh operating conditions, geography, and curvature of the earth, which limit the usefulness of ground-based radars in the extreme North, space-based satellites are essential for providing a better picture of what is happening on the ground, at sea, and in the air.

Canada has an overarching Arctic and Northern Policy Framework, but it really is not equivalent to strategic guidance that the Canadian armed services can translate into operational direction. Canada's 2017 defence policy, which references NORAD 46 times, has no description as to what constitutes NORAD modernization and no funds earmarked. In fact, it is often referenced as the "missing chapter" in *Strong, Secure, Engaged*.

From the NWS to modernization to evolution

Today, Canada and the world are facing new air threats, including drones and hypersonic glide vehicles, which travel at very different speeds and altitudes. What is more, the NWS is no longer aligned with Canada's air defence identification zone which means that the NWS cannot "see" as far as a critical (albeit hypothetical) line of defence. Add to this the fact that Canada's coastline is the largest in the world thanks to the size of its Arctic – representing 40% of Canada's landmass – coupled with a steady and significant increase in the number of civilian aircraft flying over it, and the need for persistent, sustained, reliable, and distinguishable air data to augment the NWS becomes clear.

The impetus for the creation of NORAD and for the North Warning System was the recognition that the Canadian and continental US airspaces were functionally indivisible. They still are, but so too are the other domains. NORAD, however, operates in the aerospace domain and only warns in the

maritime domain. New systems need to provide information and data that can be analyzed through what the new NORAD and USNORTHCOM Commander Gen. Van Herck calls “information dominance.”³

Governments and industry should be careful not to focus too narrowly on technology and a North Warning System 2.0 as the only solutions to modernizing NORAD. What is more, the dependence on technical fixes from the defence industry may contribute to confining modernization efforts to the NWS only, at the expense of a more strategic overview of what it means to defend North America globally.

Washington and Ottawa are rethinking how to defend North America beyond a NORAD context. NORAD, USNORTHCOM, and Canadian Joint Operations Command – the tricommand of North American defence – deter key threats to the region. An ongoing study launched nearly five years ago, called the Evolution of North American Defence (or EvoNAD), persists in the background and aims to study all of the domains (the air, land, sea, space, cyber, and even the cognitive domain) to better understand North America’s vulnerabilities. Adversaries, especially Russia and China, have access to advanced technologies and capabilities, and can strike from multiple directions. The United States and Canada need to focus on increasing “all-domain” awareness, improving command and control, and enhancing targeting capabilities reflective of a new security environment, including two peer competitors. Upgrading the NWS to collect data exclusively for NORAD’s use is neither sufficient nor what planners wish for. Canada and the United States need new sensors capable of dual-use data and information collection in multiple domains including land, space, maritime, and sub-maritime zones, in addition to the aerospace domain. These sensors – which will be subject to probing, denial of service, and cyber attacks – are but one layer in an ecosystem (beyond even a system of systems) that will inform (and be informed by) a reconsideration of what it means to defend North America. Canada and the United States should embrace a posture that includes the active and direct defence (i.e., anticipating attacks by pooling and analyzing multiple sources of data and systems at much longer ranges vs. responding to attacks via system-specific information) of North America. This will enable the simultaneous deterrence of attack on and defence of North America, rather than simply the latter.

Enter Industry

Replacing the NWS will be a very different challenge from when it was devised during the Cold War with one purpose and one adversary in mind. In

addition to the numerous competitors and multiple air and sea threats, the effort will be hamstrung by cumbersome procurement systems, an overreliance on the defence industry for solutions, and new actors and rightsholders with a say in military activity, especially in the North American Arctic.

The first challenge is the complicated procurement processes in both Canada and the United States. While resources are often pooled to fund joint solutions such as the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter Project, there are few examples of truly binationally conceived and built projects. Trying to plan and deliver major capital projects tied to politically charged, lengthy, and cumbersome procurement systems is bound to be a Sisyphean task. Per the exchange of notes in 1985 for the current North Warning System, the costing split between the United States and Canada was 60-40. This split is likely to be revisited, especially in light of the worldwide recession from COVID-19. Both countries use big capital projects to benefit domestic firms, and US and Canadian interests may not always overlap.

During the Cold War, militaries could depend on governments to fund much of the research and development and infrastructure associated with a project like the North Warning System. The reliance on industries to come up with solutions can release militaries from the burden of their internal bureaucracy, but it may also make militaries too dependent on how industry interprets a problem and conceives of the solution, as well as on their supply chains. For example, current requirements for a new NWS are that it contributes vital information to feed the “kill chain.” This elegant but linear thinking leads to one ultimate solution: a system that ends with defeating a target. As necessary as that capability is, what if NORAD wants to exploit, track, or gather intelligence on the target? If defence firms are not intimately involved in understanding requirements, including those of other actors, combatant commands, and allies, the technology could limit NORAD’s options. In other words, more is at stake than just new equipment. New technology designs can introduce single points of failure or limit redundancy and backups. When billions of dollars are at stake, simplicity is often favoured and safety add-ons the first to be jettisoned.

Finally, Canadian and US policymakers need to be cognizant of their obligations toward Indigenous peoples in the Arctic. New sensors, infrastructure, training, or other military activity in the region will likely be on Indigenous land in Alaska, Canada, Greenland (Denmark), and potentially other NATO Arctic states. Not only does Article 30 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) enshrine obligations for militaries to consult with Indigenous peoples, but it is the right thing to do and makes good business sense. Even if a new NWS does not

include land-based radar sites, the old equipment needs to be decommissioned safely, requiring an extensive, meaningful consultation and a plan for local involvement. The environment should also be considered. No one will tolerate abandoning old equipment to leach chemicals, as was done in the past. It is far cheaper to clean up sites sooner rather than later.

The good news is that some of these challenges are being addressed. A new initiative – the NORAD Pathfinder Initiative – is currently serving as a technology leap for continental defence command and control systems. In partnership with US industry, the US military, and Defence Research and Development Canada, Pathfinder is breathing new life into the data resident within Canada's NWS. Pathfinder's ability to apply advanced machine learning technologies to the NWS' existing sensors is providing mission insights and patterns of activity not seen before. This effort is at the centre of transformation efforts that will provide the NORAD team with information dominance – a key output for NORAD modernization efforts.

Looking Ahead

The United States' renewed emphasis on the Arctic has placed new attention on homeland defence, and with it, NORAD's role and assets. NORAD modernization is far more complex and wider in scope than solely a North Warning System renewal. Moreover, Canada and the United States are beginning to think in terms of an evolution in North American defence writ large, which will require dual-use technology that contributes to all-domain awareness and action and that promotes all allies working in tandem, rather than in parallel. Given the economic impact of COVID-19, there will be pressure to spend money judiciously to benefit national economies, which could make defence cooperation between Canada and the United States more difficult.

For the foreseeable future, the key threats to North America will be associated with great power competition. In response, Ottawa and Washington need to invest in all-domain awareness, embrace the notion of deterrence and defence in conjunction with allies, and focus on the delivery and implementation of workable solutions, perhaps with a view to redundancy and backups – not technological perfection. The United States, Canada, NATO allies, and their respective defence industries should work together to achieve situational awareness across the entire Arctic and consider homeland defence anew. The situational awareness will benefit not only allied militaries, but also civilian safety and security agencies.

Notes

This chapter was originally published by War on the Rocks (WOTR) on 7 September 2020, accessible at <https://warontherocks.com/2020/09/beyond-the-north-warning-system/>. The author is grateful to the editors of WOTR for the permission to reprint the article with updates.

¹ The US Departments of the Navy and Army have recently released their Arctic strategies. <https://api.army.mil/e2/c/downloads/2021/03/15/9944046e/regaining-arctic-dominance-us-army-in-the-arctic-19-january-2021-unclassified.pdf> and <https://media.defense.gov/2021/Jan/05/2002560338/-1/-1/0/ARCTIC%20BLUEPRINT%202021%20FINAL.PDF/ARCTIC%20BLUEPRINT%202021%20FINAL.PDF>. The Navy strategy, in particular, was rushed, did not consult with fellow services let alone allies, and was released in a tweet with a gaffe suggesting that China was an Arctic state. The Department of Homeland Security's Arctic Strategy (<https://www.dhs.gov/taxonomy/term/2818/all/feed>), penned under Trump's administration, also includes the unfathomable ideology of refusing to acknowledge climate change.

² "Focusing the Military Services' Arctic Strategies," *War on the Rocks* (20 January 2021). <https://warontherocks.com/2021/01/focusing-the-military-services-arctic-strategies/>

³ *NORAD and USNORTHCOM Strategy: Executive Summary* (March 2021). [https://www.northcom.mil/Portals/28/\(U\)%20NORAD-USNORTHCOM%20Strategy%20EXSUM%20-%20Signed.pdf](https://www.northcom.mil/Portals/28/(U)%20NORAD-USNORTHCOM%20Strategy%20EXSUM%20-%20Signed.pdf).

8 Mitigating Russia's Military Posture in the European Arctic: Towards a High North Hard Security Architecture

Mathieu Boulègue

For over a decade, military security and defence-related issues have started to crowd discussions about the European High North. Indeed, if the Arctic is not the theatre of strategic competition that it once was during the Cold War, the region no longer operates in a geopolitical vacuum. Wider tension is now affecting the whole Arctic. This trend is fuelled by the impact of climate change: human activity is increasing within the Arctic Circle, which makes the region more susceptible to environmental and ecological disasters. Further to this, there is now a worrying pattern of military activity mainly affecting the Barents Sea and Norwegian Sea regions, as well as the North Atlantic.

In this equation, Russia is equally responsible for and worried about the increased military activity in the European High North. Russia likes to present itself as an 'Arctic civilization'¹: its national interest in the Arctic is wide-ranging, from turning the region into an energy 'resource base' to exploiting the Northern Sea Route (NSR). This, in turn, calls for greater securitization and sovereignty enforcement through military means.

The Arctic is therefore changing, and the absence of wider geopolitical tensions that used to make the European High North 'exceptional' is no longer a given. It is becoming harder to uphold 'low tension' in the Arctic as a defining mantra, especially considering the presence of flashpoints of tension and conflict potential.

A pressing issue for the region is the need to commonly define an innovative and dedicated defence-related and military security architecture. This is particularly relevant since Russia has, so far, been defining the 'rules of the road' for military activity and behaviour in the region.

Russia's military posture in the European Arctic

Since the late 2000s, Russia has been steadily strengthening its military posture and capabilities along the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation (AZRF), with direct security implications for NATO and its allies, Sweden and

Finland. Moscow says that it is responding to perceived internal and external challenges in the Arctic, as recently defined in the policy document *Basic Principles of Russian Federation State Policy in the Arctic to 2035*.²

Russia's military posture in the Arctic is greatly informed by its perception of NATO and its allies as a threat to Russian national interests in the AZRF and beyond. The Kremlin is looking at recent developments with worry: the reopening of US Air Force facilities in Keflavík, the publication of Arctic strategies by the US Navy and Air Force, and the reactivation of the US Second Fleet, among other events.

Russia's posture is further informed by the impact of climate change and the changing operational environment – namely, the creation of a 'new border' in the North and the subsequent increase in human activity. This, in turn, calls for greater awareness and perimeter control.

Russia broadly defines two key security priorities in the European Arctic.³ The first priority relates to its ambition for control around the Kola Peninsula to protect its sea-based nuclear deterrent. Perimeter defence is achieved with the *Strategic Bastion* concept, a multi-layered sea- and air-denial protective dome in and around the Kola Peninsula.

The second priority is the ambition to deny foreign military activities close to the AZRF. Russian armed forces, and more importantly the *Sever* (Northern) Military District, need comprehensive and unhampered access beyond the AZRF to create a second out-of-area layer of defence to protect the *Bastion*.

These priorities have two direct consequences. They increase pressure on the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom (GIUK) and Greenland-Iceland-Norway (GIN) gaps, as well as on North Atlantic sea lines of communication (SLOCs). This has a direct impact on NATO and its allies in terms of freedom of navigation and uncontested access beyond the North Atlantic.

Furthermore, the priorities favour horizontal escalation in the North Atlantic and the Baltic region to ensure defence in depth for the Kola Peninsula. Russia's military posture is essentially seeking to remove military tension away from the AZRF as much as possible through escalation management.

This globally defensive posture, from Moscow's standpoint, has translated into a comprehensive revamp of Russia's military capabilities and installations across the AZRF since the late 2000s. Russia is indeed remilitarizing the Arctic. Military capabilities and deployments, such as the Arctic Brigade, equally demonstrate presence and project ambitions across Russia's northern border.

On top of a hardened, Arctic-capable, multi-layered network of air and coastal defence capabilities, Russia has been reconstructing a disparate network of forward bases and outposts in the AZRF. This also responds to dual-use

needs such as search and rescue operations, as well as situational awareness along the Northern Sea Route (NSR). With the creation of the new Northern Military District in early 2021, priority is now given to completing and strengthening existing bases, as well as recapitalizing the Northern Fleet as the mainstay of the new command structure of the Arctic forces.

Flashpoints of tension in the European Arctic

Considering the above, the European Arctic is no longer exempt from wider security risks and geopolitical tension. Flashpoints of tension can be made out and defined in two overlapping categories. These flashpoints are all, to a degree, bearing the risk of miscalculation and potential conflict.

'Soft spots' relate to existing normative, economic, and legal challenges between Russia and other Arctic nations. For instance, diverging interpretations over the legal status of the Northern Sea Route, which could lead Russia to change its stance on transit through the NSR, are a 'soft spot'. Moscow is already enforcing strict regulations for vessels with foreign flags – which goes against freedom of navigation under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). In practice, these procedures deny innocent passage under UNCLOS and create a *fait accompli* that the NSR is Russian waters. Any party seeking to enforce freedom of navigation could amplify tension with Russia.

Another example of a 'soft spot' in the Arctic is the ongoing delimitation of the seabed with Canada and Denmark in the context of the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS). Russia seeks to extend its exclusive reach on the seabed beyond the 200 nautical mile limit of the AZRF. The Commission is currently going through Russia's 2016 claim, but also needs to consider overlapping submissions by Denmark and Canada. Yet in the absence of a common, trilateral claim, it is unlikely that Russia's endeavour will succeed. On top of denting Russia's prestige, losing the CLCS submission could potentially force Russia to act unilaterally and outside legal provisions, therefore increasing regional tension.

Finally, the contested economic and legal status of the Svalbard archipelago has been fuelling speculations regarding Russia's ambitions there. Moscow does not hide its discontent with the 1920 Svalbard Treaty and the status of the Svalbard Fisheries Protection Zone. Historical grievances have so far not translated into overt military threat – contrary to accepted wishful thinking. Russia has, for now, no intention to conduct a 'pre-emptive land grab' of the archipelago.⁴ It is not entirely impossible, however, that Russia might decide to

become more visible in and around the archipelago in order to more actively contest Norwegian sovereignty there.

The second category of flashpoints relates to ‘hot spots’ – namely more pressing military tension involving a higher risk of miscalculation and conflict potential. The first one is linked to Russian brinkmanship-prone military activities in the European Arctic. Going beyond the normally accepted peacetime signalling, Russia is growing bolder with its unacceptable military activity – from GPS jamming to snap military drills and airspace buzzing. These have a direct impact on civilian security and could easily lead to accidents.⁵ In turn, accidents increase the risk of miscalculation and escalation, especially since restraint is no longer guaranteed from Russia’s side. More activity and military presence in the GIUK and GIN gaps will require careful management to avoid escalation.⁶

Another ‘hot spot’ is what could be defined as a FONOP vicious circle. For the past few months, a predictable pattern of military activity seems to be emerging between Russia and NATO in the European Arctic. Both parties are seeking to demonstrate access to and active presence in potentially contested waters through successive Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs) around the North Atlantic and the Baltic Sea. This cycle is carrying the potential for tactical errors, and is feeding Moscow’s ‘besieged fortress’ narrative and sense of encirclement. One FONOP at a time, the security dilemma defining NATO-Russia relations elsewhere could easily be replicated in the High North, therefore endangering Arctic exceptionalism.

NATO’s role in the High North and the US-Russia ‘icebreaker gap’

NATO and its allies, Sweden and Finland, must define ‘how much NATO’ is needed (and necessary) in the region. For the past few years, the Alliance has been waking up to the Arctic as an area of potential conflict. But it cannot simply play catch-up to Russian capabilities. Without overreaching and being directly involved militarily, the Alliance must determine its level of endeavour for Arctic affairs. This was made clear in the NATO 2030 report, outlining the need to increase ‘situational awareness across the High North and the Arctic’.⁷

There is a difference between overtly militarizing the European Arctic and keeping watchful attention on Arctic military affairs. The Alliance should develop a *Smart Presence Concept* for the European Arctic aimed at demonstrating and maintaining presence in a potentially contested environment – without, of course, endangering the careful balancing acts of Norway and Finland in their relationships with Russia, or feeding the

aforementioned FONOP vicious circle. This can be achieved by prioritizing efforts to reinforce mobility, situational awareness, anti-submarine warfare, air policing, and underwater surveillance networks.

The approach retained by Joint Force Command Norfolk (JFCN) is a good stepping-stone. NATO's new joint operational level command for the Atlantic is meant to shape a North-South continuum beyond the North Atlantic SLOC. It aims to strengthen the security of the whole region, increase NATO's defence in depth, and simultaneously reinforce Russia's operational dilemma in the European Arctic.

Further to this, there are growing concerns over the 'icebreaker gap' and the subsequent risks of militarizing the US-Russia relationship in the European Arctic. This gap generally refers to the asymmetry in the number of icebreakers between the US and Russia – especially since the US only has one operational icebreaker. However, recent developments in both countries bear the risk of seeing the proliferation of military – and therefore armed – icebreakers in the region.

On Russia's side, there are plans to build a new class of armed and versatile patrol icebreakers, the *Ivan Papanin* class (Project 23550). It is supposed to carry Kalibr missile systems, among others. The first vessel will not be commissioned before 2023, at best. These developments are compounded by the fact that the Northern Fleet lacks ice-class surface vessels and generally needs the support of civilian vessels from Rosatomflot. Only the diesel-electric icebreaker *Ilya Muromets* (Project 21180) is currently in active service with the Northern Fleet. Another option for Russia would be to arm civilian icebreakers, and notably the new LK-60 class (Project 22220) nuclear-powered icebreakers.

On the US's side, policy documents are now officially mentioning the 'icebreaker gap' as a challenge in terms of access to the theatre and freedom of navigation in the Arctic. The recent *Memorandum on Safeguarding U.S. National Interests in the Arctic and Antarctic Regions*⁸ provisions the construction of at least three heavy icebreakers by 2029 for the US Coast Guard. The document also mentions 'adequate' defensive armament for surface assets operating in the region. Nothing guarantees, however, that this policy course will be continued under the new Biden administration.

Towards a High North hard security architecture

Arctic nations must ensure that the aforementioned 'grey rhinos' do not become self-fulfilling prophecies. Considering the risk of tension in the European Arctic, much remains to be done to define the 'rules of the road' and create a proper military-security architecture for the region. This is

compounded by the need to increase the transparency over recent developments in the Russian Arctic – notably the Norilsk oil spill in May 2020 and the Nyonoksa radiation accident in August 2019, as such events affect the whole region.

The Arctic needs dedicated military-security stakeholder consultations, as well as a tailored hard security architecture. For the past few years, research and policy efforts have been teeming with ideas – both good and bad – regarding the creation of a regional security architecture and NATO's role as a security provider.

Two priorities can be made out: determining an exact framework and outlining which priorities to set on the agenda. In terms of the framework, creating a new dialogue mechanism solely addressing defence-related and military security issues might be necessary. In the meantime, existing endeavours such as the Arctic Coast Guard Forum, the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable (ASFR), or the Arctic Chiefs of Defence meetings should be strengthened. They could also more comprehensively address future planning, in terms of military exercises in the region, and overall transparency measures. The issue is that Russia has been excluded from the ASFR and the Chiefs of Defence meetings since 2014.

In terms of priorities, an immediate first step in this endeavour could be the creation of an Arctic Military Code of Conduct (AMCC). A functional, holistic framework regulating military activity would help determine what is considered legitimate, intentional, and acceptable military practice in the Arctic, as well as promote transparency over military security affairs and decrease the risk of miscalculation.⁹

'Low tension' in the High North is no longer a given, nor should it be taken for granted anymore. However, it is still in the interest of Arctic nations – Russia included – to cooperate within established multilateral frameworks. As Russia prepares to assume the chairmanship of the Arctic Council and the Arctic Coast Guard Forum between 2021 and 2023, there is a unique opportunity to engage in constructive discussions in the military-security realm and start preparing the ground for a dedicated High North security architecture.

Notes

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9

Coercive Cooperation: Grey-Zone Strategy in the Arctic

Elizabeth Buchanan

There is a certain formula to follow when writing on Arctic geopolitics. First, one must point out that global warming is melting Arctic ice, unlocking a bevy of untapped energy resources that lay beneath the ice. Next, one notes that states are busy militarizing to secure access to these resources. Finally, one draws together conclusions, arriving at the bleak and simplistic assessment that the Arctic is set to feature a ‘new’ Cold War. Central to this argument is the idea that the Arctic is ‘up for grabs’, a lawless sphere where ‘might dictates right’. Of course, this notion is painfully inaccurate, given that the Arctic is functioning according to agreed-upon international law, norms, and governance structures. Nevertheless, there are challenges arising from this cooperative, rules-based theatre that warrant ongoing investigation.

This short chapter examines the emerging Arctic trend that I dub *coercive cooperation*. It argues that while narratives of looming Arctic conflict, resource wars, and expansionist great power agendas are overstated, we tend to also laud cooperative activity and understate the ‘work’ required to maintain low tensions in the High North. In doing so, I argue that we miss the coercive statecraft operating beneath the surface of cooperative Arctic agendas. This piece outlines the long-term strategic consequences of doing so, emphasizing that it is important to delve into the grey-zone strategies at play in the contemporary Arctic context to illustrate the tensions simmering beneath the cooperative Arctic. Doing so also positions analysts to better anticipate and understand future swings between conflict and cooperation in the region.

Coercive statecraft in the Arctic context

Coercion is about compelling the ‘other’ to do what you want them to do, void of their own volition. This can be achieved by force, power of authority, intimidation, or other tools of compulsion, ultimately applied to control or to dominate. Coercion operates in a rather opaque manner in the Arctic context, primarily because there is a duality to coercive statecraft. First, coercive cooperation is employed by states that are in positions of authority and Arctic ‘control’ by way of geography. The Arctic Five (A5) are the five Arctic Ocean

littoral states. Primarily, it is the A5 that, to varying degrees, implement coercive cooperative agendas. For example, Canada and the US cooperate in the context of NORAD, which protects the sovereign North American airspace and early warning systems, including those stretching across the North American Arctic. This binational command employs intimidation and force to dominate and control the North American Arctic aerospace. Another example can be seen in the establishment of the cooperative intergovernmental forum, the Arctic Council. Membership in the Council comprises the A5 plus three states – Finland, Iceland, and Sweden – that have territory above the Arctic Circle. Together, the Arctic Eight (A8) cooperate to dominate and ensure that the ‘rules’ of the Arctic are followed. This self-imposed authority is enshrined in the Arctic Council’s ‘observer’ mandates and application processes, which are designed to preserve and assert the centrality of the Arctic states in regional governance.

Coercive cooperation is also evident in the way that the Arctic-rim states deal with international law. The US refuses to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which would presumably allow Washington to join Denmark, Canada, and Russia in tabling an extended continental shelf claim up to the North Pole. Nevertheless, the US generally abides by and promotes the principles of UNCLOS (which it accepts as customary international law) in the Arctic. While the US and Canada cooperate in the air, and to a large extent on the seas, the coercive elements of their cooperation emerge when we consider that Ottawa considers the Northwest Passage (NWP) to be its historic internal waters, whereas Washington deems the passage to be international waters.

Another way in which the Arctic-rim states exploit international law for their national interests is evident in Russia’s approach to the Northeast Passage (NEP). Moscow dubs this global maritime corridor, which almost halves the distance that cargo must travel between Asia and Europe, the Northern Sea Route (NSR). Here, Russia has interpreted UNCLOS Article 234 (known as the ‘ice law’) to argue that the environmental characteristics of the NSR (a water body known to be covered by ice for most of the year) provide Russia with the right to manage access to and use of the NSR under a special regime. Denying that this passage constitutes an international strait with corresponding freedom of navigation rights, Russia mandates that tolls must be paid, pre-transit applications lodged, and Russian pilots used for all vessels, including Russian icebreaker support. As such, Russia perceives that international law allows it to specially regulate ice-covered areas within the NSR as national jurisdiction. This is one area to watch as climate change leaves much of the NSR ice-free for increasingly longer periods of the year. Indeed, the grey zone

for the ice law appears to stem from the lack of a definition in UNCLOS regarding what constitutes ice-covered areas for ‘most of the year’. For now, Russia’s interpretation of Article 234 is useful for its own geostrategic ends – keeping others out of the NSR unless permitted, all under the guise of abiding by and upholding international law.

Furthermore, coercive cooperation trends are evident in the great power Arctic narrative that has been enshrined by the most recent wave of US Arctic strategies. The Arctic strategies of the US Navy and Coast Guard characterize the Arctic as a zone of simmering tensions, yet home to strong North Atlantic ties. These documents call for strengthening the existing cooperation between Washington and its European, North American, and Scandinavian ‘allies’ or ‘like minded partners’. These ties are to be enhanced in the face of rising Chinese and resurgent Russian Arctic interests. Coercive elements of the United States’ return to the Arctic include ‘diplomatic intimidation’ to pressure ‘like minded partners’ to reconsider, and in some cases reject, Chinese capital and investments in Arctic projects. Wariness of Chinese economic coercion has, in this sense, been weaponized by Western states (for credible reasons) to pressure and coerce Arctic states to opt for US partnerships and capital ventures.

Navigating coercive cooperation in the Arctic

The duality of Arctic cooperation is understudied in the field of Arctic studies. Much of the literature remains focused on placing geostrategic developments along the spectrum of Arctic conflict and cooperation, carving up political and strategic events as evidence of either low tensions or high tensions. But what of coercive cooperation? The increasing ‘swing’ towards Arctic cooperation, and the Arctic’s quantification as a zone of entrenched regional dialogue, engagement, and collaboration, run the risk of missing the coercive undertones of the evolving Arctic cooperation. This cooperative sentiment has been bolstered by the Biden administration, which appears to have discarded Trump’s great power politics Arctic playbook in favour of a collaborative climate and environmental stewardship agenda. Mitigating climate change in the Arctic context is a security challenge that bridges the Russia-US divide, and that thus poses a legitimate basis for regional cohesion with the goal of developing and promoting climate change strategies.

As long as the coercive undertones of cooperative Arctic agendas exist, the region faces the potential for rapid shifts. An effective intergovernmental forum, even if strengthened within its existing mandate, cannot avoid its innate liability of failing to manage military-security issues. Assuming that regional cooperation is going to be rather organic given that the rules of the region are

rather well known and effective (at least for now), Arctic policymakers are susceptible to the possibility of a future strategic surprise. After all, what we deem to be ‘cooperation’ in the Arctic context is arguably, in its most basic form, merely the absence of conflict. Therefore, it is crucial to focus on the cooperation end of the Arctic geostrategic spectrum. Coercive cooperation will continue to prove challenging, primarily because many analysts still assess the Arctic in black and white terms. Missing the elements of coercion, and mistaking cooperation to be a static concept in the Arctic, mean that stakeholders are at risk of strategic complacency. Overcoming this complacency requires enhanced subject matter expertise on Arctic geopolitics, specifically in terms of Arctic-rim national agendas. Because these agendas vary, national security interests in the Arctic context do not align as neatly as they do in other theatres where the US and its partners operate.

Ultimately, while deterring the more coercive aspects of Arctic cooperation remains an important priority, I argue that dialogue is just as crucial to navigating the future history of the Arctic. This is particularly salient given that the region’s largest stakeholder, Russia – a state with the lion’s share of Arctic territory, economic interests, Indigenous peoples, and nuclear weapons in the region – holds most of the cards. Moscow is also well versed in coercive cooperation and grey-zone strategy. As Russia gears up to chair the Arctic Council for two years beginning in May 2021, stakeholders should expect a broad cooperative agenda spanning sustainable development, climate change action, and the cultivation of the Arctic ‘blue economy’. If other stakeholders fail to recognize and grasp the coercive elements that Russia is likely to couple with these cooperative agenda items, they will find themselves increasingly vulnerable in the evolving Arctic ‘great game’.

10 The Sino-Russian Partnership in the Arctic

Andrew Foxall

There is a prevailing belief in Western capitals that an alliance between Russia and China exists in the Arctic. This stems from, inter alia, the increasing level of cooperation between Beijing and Moscow in areas including energy and the Northern Sea Route (NSR), as well as broader shifts in the international system. It also stems from the efforts of both Moscow and Beijing to portray their relationship as a 'strategic partnership' – a model of international cooperation that is pragmatic, interests-based, and mutually beneficial. Viewed from China and Russia, the two countries' relations embody the promise of a 'multipolar world order'. Viewed from the West, however, these same relations seem to represent a concerted and unified challenge to the rules-based order.

Such a belief, however, is misleading. Sino-Russian relations in the Arctic, as elsewhere, are ambiguous and full of contradictions. While both countries talk the language, and undertake some of the actions, of 'strategic partnership', the relationship is undermined by historical suspicions, geopolitical rivalry, and competing priorities. To be sure, Russia has, since 2014, sought to engage with China more intensely than at any point since the 1970s, when Moscow and Beijing were seemingly implacable enemies on the verge of nuclear confrontation. But this does not mean that the two countries enjoy a bona fide 'strategic partnership'. Russia and China share neither a long-term vision of the world, nor a common understanding of their respective places within it, and both of these come into sharp focus in the Arctic.

As it proceeds, this chapter makes three main arguments. The first is that the partnership between Russia and China is one between strategically autonomous actors, each with its own distinct agenda. The second is that although Moscow and Beijing agree on much in the Arctic, they do not operate as a coordinated force in the region. The third and final argument is that the long-term outlook for the Sino-Russian partnership in the Arctic is uncertain. Against the backdrop of a fluid international environment, Beijing and Moscow face significant challenges in sustaining their current levels of cooperation.

The world as seen from Beijing and Moscow

On the face of things, there is significant overlap between how China and Russia view international affairs.¹ They both voice concerns about American 'hegemonic' tendencies, agree about the need for a 'multipolar world order', and are highly protective of state sovereignty. They also agree about a range of specific issues, from so-called 'cyber-sovereignty' to Iran and North Korea. Scratch beneath the surface, however, and Chinese and Russian views differ substantially – including on fundamental questions of global order and governance.

As the prime beneficiary of the post-Cold War order, China seeks to maintain this order – at least, that is, for the time being.² China has benefitted from unprecedented access to international markets and investment, and the country's remarkable economic growth over the past three decades has reinforced the (domestic) legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) rule. Beijing seeks to infiltrate the existing international system and strengthen its position *within* it so that China can become, in CCP Chairman Xi Jinping's words, "a global leader in terms of composite national strength and international influence".³

At the same time, Beijing views international affairs primarily through the prism of its relations with Washington, DC. Chinese policymakers habitually reject the notion of a 'G-2', following their country's long-time approach to foreign policy, which was summed up in 1990 by former paramount leader Deng Xiaoping as "hide your strength and bide your time". Nevertheless, they see the interaction between China and the United States as central to twenty-first century global governance and to maintaining the benign international environment that has allowed China to act increasingly assertively beyond its own borders.

Russia has a rather different view of the post-Cold War order. The current Russian leadership, including President Vladimir Putin and those around him, believes that the order has unfairly harmed the country's development, undermined its national security, and reduced its international position.⁴ This view, around which there exists a consensus amongst policymakers and politicians in Moscow, was articulated most clearly in Putin's speech at the Munich Security Conference in 2007,⁵ and has only been reinforced by events since then.

Although Russia exerts influence within the post-Cold War order, not least as a result of being one of the five permanent members of the UN Security

Council, it sees little point in trying to work within the order to further its interests. Instead, Moscow prioritizes traditional great power relations and seeks to bring about a twenty-first century ‘Concert’ of Great Powers. At the same time, Russia has pursued an aggressive and destructive foreign policy. In Ukraine, it annexed Crimea and invaded the Donbass. In Syria, it intervened decisively on behalf of Bashar al-Assad’s regime. In the United States, France, and elsewhere, it interfered in democratic processes.

That China acts *within* the post-Cold War order while Russia seeks to *undermine* the order has implications for their strategic cooperation. Both countries have reconciled their contrasting agendas and priorities, and avoid actions that might harm each other’s vital (or ‘core’) interests. But while the basic contradiction has not prevented cooperation, it has limited its extent. In the words of the Russian political analyst Dmitri Trenin, the Sino-Russian relationship is guided by the principal of “never against each other, not always with each other”.⁶ This is apparent from the qualified nature of their cooperation in various parts of the world, including the Arctic.

The Sino-Russian relationship in the Arctic

Sino-Russian relations in the Arctic are less a ‘strategic partnership’ and more, to quote the Australian foreign policy expert Bobo Lo, an “axis of convenience.”⁷ While Beijing and Moscow have mutually beneficial interests in the region, the current basis of the relationship is commercial realpolitik. Mutual suspicions abound, and the relationship navigates existing fault lines, such as China’s view of the Arctic as a ‘global commons’ (which underpins its claim, subsequently emphasized in the 2018 Arctic Policy, to be a “near-Arctic state”⁸) and Russia’s view of the Arctic as solely the concern of the littoral states.

Opportunities

The most obvious area where Chinese and Russian interests overlap in the Arctic is energy. As the world’s largest consumer, China’s energy appetite is insatiable. Over the last decade, Beijing has committed to an import diversification strategy stretching from Africa and the Middle East to the Arctic. China’s Arctic policy, adopted in 2018, identifies energy as a key pillar of the country’s engagement with the region.⁹ Under Vladimir Putin, Russia has renationalized energy, and the sector continues to underpin the country’s economy, now accounting for more than 50% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Russia’s Arctic strategy, adopted in 2008, identified resource deposits

in the Russian Arctic zone (onshore and offshore) as the basis for the country's future development.

The Western sanctions imposed on Russia following its annexation of Crimea and invasion of the Donbass in 2014 restricted Russia's access to capital and technology for energy projects in the Arctic. The sanctions targeted Western companies cooperating with Russian energy firms and investing in Russian Arctic projects. Moscow's need for foreign capital provided an opportunity for Beijing to engage, placing China in a position of power. In May 2014, Russia's state-run gas giant Gazprom signed a US\$55 billion deal with China's oil and gas major CNPC (China National Petroleum Corporation) to build a 3,000-km-long natural gas pipeline linking Russia's Siberian fields to Northeast China. The 'Power of Siberia' pipeline was opened in December 2019 and will eventually allow for 38 billion cubic metres in annual gas supplies.

Even before 2014, China invested in Russia's gas projects. In 2013, CNPC bought a 20% stake in the US\$20 billion Yamal liquefied natural gas (LNG) project, making it the largest foreign shareholder. But this involvement has increased markedly in the years since. In 2015, the Chinese state-owned Silk Road Fund purchased a 9.9% stake in Yamal LNG, which started production in 2017. Chinese entities also play key roles in the Arctic LNG 2, the second major natural gas project currently under development in the Russian Arctic. In 2019, the China National Oil and Gas Exploration and Development Company (CNODC) and the China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) each signed agreements for a 10% share in the project.

Additionally, China is in talks with Gazprom on two additional gas pipelines: Power of Siberia 2, which will deliver 30 billion cubic metres a year to China's western border with Russia; and another smaller pipeline from Sakhalin Island.

Another area where Chinese and Russian interests overlap in the Arctic is the Northern Sea Route (NSR). As climate change makes the NSR easier to navigate year-round, it offers Beijing two things. First, it provides easier access to Russian Arctic energy resources – primarily LNG, which China sees as key to its transition to a low-carbon economy. Second, using the NSR reduces the distance between Northern Europe (the European Union, or EU, is one of China's largest trading partners) and China by roughly 30% compared to making the journey via the Straits of Malacca or Suez Canal, according to the US Coast Guard.¹⁰

In order to make the NSR both safe and commercially viable, successive iterations of Russia's Arctic policy have envisaged a network of port terminals and logistics centres along the route.¹¹ However, the reality has been somewhat

underwhelming, and the development of the network has been undermined by a lack of finance. As early as 2012, Putin suggested that Moscow might seek funding from Beijing for this network, describing it as “a chance to catch the Chinese wind in the sails of our economy”.¹² In the years since, Russia has welcomed limited capital injections from China for building infrastructure along the NSR, such as icebreakers, and has courted additional investment.

In 2015, Russia pitched the NSR as a part of China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This was later conceptualized in Beijing as an ‘Arctic Silk Road’ (literally ‘Silk Road on the Ice’, or *Bingshang Sichouzhilu*). Speaking in 2019, Putin stated that “we give major attention to the development of the Northern Sea Route [and] are considering the possibility of connecting it with the Chinese Maritime Silk Road”.¹³ The inclusion of the NSR in the BRI is an attractive proposition for Russia because it comes with the promise of major funding from China at a time of economic stagnation.

Challenges

Vladimir Putin came to power in 2000 committed to ensuring Russia’s re-emergence as an independent centre of power. This means preserving strategic flexibility and not being hostage to any other country’s goals, whether the United States or China. While Moscow values the Sino-Russian partnership in the Arctic as a force multiplier, it is conscious that an overreliance on Beijing to fulfill Russia’s economic security agenda could increase China’s regional footprint. Thus, in addition to seeking Chinese finance for projects in the Arctic, Russia has also sought to diversify, securing financing from India, Japan, and South Korea, and deepening bilateral relations with Singapore.

Beijing is similarly wary of Russia’s aims. China has economic interests and has made significant investments in the Russian Arctic (see above), but it has also made huge investments in other Arctic states, such as the United States, Canada, Norway, Iceland, and Greenland (Denmark), taking care to ensure that it is not overly dependent on any one country. The inclusion of the NSR in the BRI requires Russian acquiescence, but Beijing is acutely aware that its involvement in the Arctic per se does not rely solely on Moscow.

None of this is to suggest that Moscow and Beijing are looking to move away from each other. Rather, both countries wish to remain strategically autonomous – having a ‘strategic partnership’ with each other, while diversifying relations with countries in regions that each perceives as being within its sphere of “privileged interests” (to quote Russian President Dmitry Medvedev in 2008¹⁴) – in order to place themselves at the centre of the international system. Such caution is visible even in areas where the two countries do cooperate. Their summit communiqués are full of sentiments

about solidarity, but joint action has been slow to emerge. Bilateral deals are a case in point.

The ‘Power of Siberia’ pipeline had been under discussion for two decades when the deal was signed by Beijing and Moscow in 2014, and its construction had been approved by Russia’s Ministry of Industry and Energy as early as 2007 (under the name of the ‘Eastern Gas Program’). Yet, disagreements over pricing, routing, and upstream investments delayed the deal. The deal’s signing amidst the Ukraine crisis highlighted the changed geopolitical context and is frequently cited as evidence of Russia’s much-heralded ‘pivot’ to Asia.

For China, economic investment trumps all else. Beijing believes that its investments should give it a deciding say over any projects. However, Russian law stipulates that while private Russian energy firms can develop in the Arctic zone, they may not cede controlling stakes to foreign firms. Thus, neither of the two key LNG projects on the Russian Arctic’s Yamal Peninsula that have received significant Chinese investment are actually controlled by China. In the case of Yamal LNG (discussed above), CNPC holds a 20% stake, the Silk Road Fund has 9.9%, France’s Total holds 20%, and the 50.1% balance remains with Novatek. There is no indication that Moscow will deviate from this approach.

The frictions between how China and Russia each view the international order also limit the extent of their cooperation in the Arctic. The Arctic Council, the region’s sole governance institution, delayed making a decision on China’s application for ‘observer’ status for years, as both Russia and Canada believe that the region should not be ‘internationalized’, but instead is the sole interest of the littoral states.¹⁵ Russia’s opposition continued at the 2013 Council meeting, at which China formally became an ‘observer’ under new detailed criteria that explicitly required it (and other ‘observer’ states) to “recognize Arctic States’ sovereignty” and the “extensive legal framework” that applies to the Arctic Ocean, “including, notably, the Law of the Sea.”¹⁶

Another area where Sino-Russian cooperation is uneasy is the NSR. During China’s fifth Arctic Expedition in 2012, Russia blocked Chinese vessels from operating in the NSR, causing Beijing to suspend its activities. (Russia did the same during China’s second Arctic Expedition, in 2003.) In 2013, Moscow refused to allow Chinese researchers to rent Russian vessels to undertake work in the Arctic on security grounds. All of this changed following Ukraine’s Revolution of Dignity, and Beijing is acutely aware why Moscow now encourages Chinese vessels to use the NSR. Nevertheless, Russia has not given China privileged use of the route, and those Chinese vessels that use it have to abide by Russian transit laws: vessels must be piloted by Russian pilots, transit fees are charged, and Russia must be given notice about trips.

While China appears to adhere to the management of Arctic shipping routes according to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), Beijing's Arctic Policy puts it at odds with Moscow over UNCLOS' Article 234. Known as the 'ice rule', the article grants coastal states special authority to regulate ice-covered areas within their national jurisdictions. As year-round ice coverage decreases, the Australian Arctic expert Elizabeth Buchanan explains, "Beijing is likely to push back against Moscow's use of Article 234 and seek free transit of the parts of the Northern Sea Route within international waters", reducing Russia's income from transit fees.¹⁷

Conclusion

Contrary to the belief that there is a Sino-Russian alliance in the Arctic, the evidence points to the opposite – Beijing and Moscow pursue separate agendas that have little (or no) reference to each other. While both capitals use the language of 'strategic partnership', the reality is something akin to 'strategic tension'. Disagreements are widespread and are managed by maintaining public neutrality or discreet silence, while both countries avoid the other's most controversial issues. Even in areas where Chinese and Russian interests converge, such as in the energy sector or over the NSR, joint action is more often than not limited.

That there is less than meets the eye about the Sino-Russian relationship in the Arctic is particularly evident where military ties are concerned. Although China has, over recent years, participated in several large Russian-led military exercises, such as Tsentr 2019 and Vostok 2018 (both of which had significant Arctic components), interoperability between the two countries' armed forces is minimal. Similarly, while China is a major market for Russian military exports, Moscow exports more to India, and over recent years has greatly expanded exports to other Asian countries, such as Vietnam and Indonesia.¹⁸ At the same time, the majority of China's arms imports are from Russia, but Beijing also buys from France, Ukraine, and elsewhere.

The long-term future of the Sino-Russian partnership in the Arctic may depend on Beijing and Moscow's willingness to continue with the current division of labour: China has money, and Russia has resources. Given that both countries see the international system, to varying degrees, through the prism of 'great power competition', focused on geopolitical and security priorities, the prospects for an alliance are limited. The priority will be accommodation, rather than cooperation.

Notes

- ¹ Vladimir Putin and Jinping Xi, Summit press statements, 5 June 2019, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/60672>.
- ² The famous 2013 ‘Document 9’, an internal communique issued under Xi Jinping’s name, makes clear that China is engaged in a multi-layered, multi-century struggle against the West in order to surpass and defeat it. China does not, thus, support maintaining the post-Cold War order indefinitely.
- ³ Jinping Xi, Report to the 19th Party Congress, *Xinhuanet*, 3 November 2017, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/special/2017-11/03/c_136725942.htm.
- ⁴ Keir Giles, *Moscow Rules: What Drives Russia to Confront the West* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2019).
- ⁵ Vladimir Putin, Speech and Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy, 10 February 2007, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034>.
- ⁶ Dmitri Trenin, “How Russia Can Maintain Equilibrium in the Post-Pandemic Bipolar World,” *Carnegie Moscow Center*, 1 May 2020, <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/81702>.
- ⁷ Bobo Lo, *Axis of Convenience: Moscow, Beijing, and the New Geopolitics* (Washington: Brookings University Press, 2008).
- ⁸ Keynote Speech by Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Ming at the China Country Session of the Third Arctic Circle Assembly, 17 October 2015, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjbxw/t1306858.shtml.
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- ¹⁰ United States Coast Guard, *Arctic Strategic Outlook*, 2019, https://www.uscg.mil/Portals/0/Images/arctic/Arctic_Strategic_Outlook_APR_2019.pdf.
- ¹¹ Elizabeth Buchanan, “The overhaul of Russian strategic planning for the Arctic Zone to 2035,” *NATO Defense College*, 19 May 2020, <https://www.ndc.nato.int/research/research.php?icode=641>.
- ¹² Vladimir Putin, “Rossiya i menyayushchiysya mir” [Russia and the changing world], *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 27 February 2012, <https://rg.ru/2012/02/27/putin-politika.html>. Available in English at: “Russia and the changing world,” Embassy of the Russian Federation to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, <https://rusemb.org.uk/press/612>.
- ¹³ The Kremlin, “Zasedaniye kruglogo stola foruma ‘Odin poyas, odin put’” [Roundtable meeting of the “One Belt, One Road” Forum], 27 April 2019, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/60393>.
- ¹⁴ Interview given by Dmitry Medvedev to Television Channels Channel One, Rossia, NTV, 31 August 2008, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/48301>.

¹⁵ Matthew Willis and Duncan Depledge, “How We Learned to Stop Worrying About China’s Arctic Ambitions: Understanding China’s Admission to the Arctic Council,” *The Arctic Institute*, 22 September 2014, <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/china-arctic-ambitions-arctic-council/>.

¹⁶ Arctic Council, “Observers,” <https://arctic-council.org/en/about/observers/>.

¹⁷ Elizabeth Buchanan, “There Is No Arctic Axis,” *Foreign Policy*, 21 July 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/07/21/no-arctic-axis-china-russia-relationship-resources-natural-gas-northern-sea-route/>.

¹⁸ Richard Connolly and Cecilie Sendstad, “Russia’s Role as an Arms Exporter: The Strategic and Economic Importance of Arms Exports for Russia,” *Chatham House*, March 2017, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2017/03/russias-role-arms-exporter/2-russias-position-global-arms-supplier>.

11

Open Skies in the Arctic: Challenges and Opportunities

Katarina Kertysova and Alexander Graef

A security dilemma is developing in the Arctic.¹ Both Russia and NATO member states are increasing their military presence and activities in the region, and threat perceptions on both sides are intensifying. Although there are various frameworks for regional and sub-regional cooperation – most notably the Arctic Council – none of them address military security issues. In addition, since 2014, important platforms for security cooperation, such as the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable and the Arctic Chiefs of Defence Staff meetings, have been suspended or held without Russian participation. At the moment, there is no Arctic forum in which hard security issues could be discussed that also includes Russia.

In the absence of military cooperation and dialogue, this re-emerging strategic rivalry presents the risk of military escalation stemming from the miscalculation and misinterpretation of intentions. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union and the US addressed this potential danger in the form of bilateral agreements such as the Hot Line Agreement (1963), the Incidents at Sea Agreement (INCSEA, 1972), and the Agreement on the Prevention of Dangerous Military Activities (DMA, 1989).² After the signing of the 1975 Helsinki Accords, members of both NATO and the Warsaw Treaty Organization followed suit by developing first arms control and confidence- and security-building measures (CSBMs) that culminated with the signing of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE, 1990),³ the Vienna Document (VD, 1990),⁴ and the Treaty on Open Skies (OST, 1992).

In terms of Arctic security, the Treaty on Open Skies holds much promise. Its area of application currently covers the entire sovereign territories, including “islands, and internal and territorial waters”⁵ of 33 states in Europe and North America. Membership includes all of the Arctic states, namely Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, and Sweden, with the exception of the US, which left the Treaty on 22 November 2020. The Treaty allows members to conduct joint, short-notice, unarmed observation flights over each

other's territory to collect imagery on military forces and activities, as well as industrial sites.

At present, the fate of the Open Skies Treaty is uncertain. Following the US exit from the Treaty, on 15 January 2021 the Russian Foreign Ministry announced that it would initiate domestic procedures for withdrawal as well, but indicated that this decision could be reversed if the US rejoins. This paper demonstrates the continued relevance of the Open Skies regime for Arctic security. It first outlines challenges that the Open Skies regime faces for conducting Arctic overflights, and then looks at opportunities it presents for enhanced cooperative security. Even if the Treaty falls apart, cooperative aerial observation in a different format has an important and useful role to play in mitigating military security risks and, potentially, addressing environmental challenges in the region.

Arctic security and Open Skies practice

The Arctic has been at the centre of discussions about Open Skies since its first inception in the mid-1950s.⁶ First envisioned as an instrument to illustrate the possibility of verifying a future disarmament agreement, the focus shifted, from spring 1957 onwards, towards the prevention of (nuclear) surprise attack. To this end, the US proposed the Arctic as a suitable territory to test cooperative aerial observation, and negotiations about the idea continued for several years in the United Nations. Ultimately, the Soviet Union declined the offer, in part to uphold military secrecy.⁷

The shooting down of U-2 pilot Gary Powers in May 1960 over Yekaterinburg (then Sverdlovsk) put an end to ideas about cooperative aerial observation. The parallel development of ballistic missiles as delivery vehicles for nuclear warheads reduced the warning time to minutes, which changed the overall military and political rationale. Although both the US and the Soviet Union continued to rely on aerial reconnaissance and surveillance, aircraft lost their use in addressing the problem of surprise attack. Instead, from the early 1960s onwards, time-sensitive reconnaissance and most other forms of imagery intelligence gathering became the domain of satellites.⁸

As a result, when President George H. Bush revived Eisenhower's original idea of Open Skies in May 1989 on a multilateral basis, he focused less on intelligence collection and more on politics, arguing that "such unprecedented territorial access would show the world the true meaning of the concept of openness," and could reveal the Soviet Union's commitment to change.⁹ In his words, the Treaty's objective was "to enhance mutual understanding and confidence by giving all participants, regardless of size, a direct role in observing

military or other activities of concern to them.”¹⁰ Even today, the Open Skies Treaty presents a unique instrument for military-to-military cooperation between states that are often competing in other areas.¹¹

Since the Treaty entered into force in January 2002, its member states have conducted more than 1,500 overflights.¹² The Treaty sets fixed passive quotas, which are the maximum number of flights each state has to allow over its territory. For example, Russia and Belarus, which form one group under the Treaty, have to allow 42 overflights (like the US before the withdrawal) per year. For the remaining Arctic states, the numbers are much lower (Table 1).

The number of passive overflights corresponds to the maximum number of active flights that a state can conduct, but member states need to find a consensus on the actual distribution of active flights every year. Among the Arctic states, Russia (together with the US until 2020) is the only country that receives more than one or two overflights per year. This fundamental asymmetry reflects both the dominant interest in overflying Russia-Belarus, and the agreement among NATO members not to inspect each other. In principle, the Treaty would allow a significant increase in the number of overflights, including those over the Arctic.

The current practice of overflights is strictly regulated by the Treaty and the subsequent decisions of its consultative organ – the Open Skies Consultative Commission (OSCC). States designate points of entry (POEs) to their territory, airfields from which overflights must start and end (sometimes identical with the POEs), as well as airfields for refuelling and overnight stops, where required by a country’s size. It is important to note that while POE and refuelling procedures are in place, informal agreements have, from time to time, been brokered between State Parties to enable a particular set of mission objectives on a case-by-case basis.

In most cases, official data about the exact flight routes of Open Skies flights have not been released, making it difficult to provide an exact evaluation of the territorial distribution of previous Arctic overflights. Available data suggest that flight practice over the Arctic has been somewhat limited, at least in comparison to other regions. For example, from 2004 to 2014, not one of the ten Russian flights over Canada went over its Arctic territory.¹³ Russia has nevertheless made it clear that it wishes to undertake overflights further north in Canada, and has requested adjustments to the use of POEs and refuelling airfields to enable such flights for the Tu-154M.¹⁴ Russia is also known to have conducted an inspection flight over Norwegian Arctic territory in the summer of 2014, with a take-off from Bardufoss.¹⁵

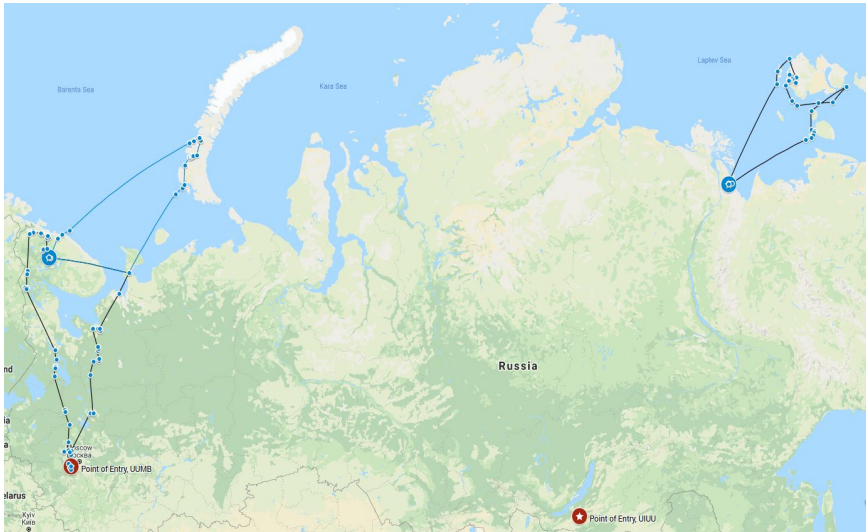
Table 11-1: Passive Treaty Quotas and the Actual Number of Successful Overflights of Arctic States

Member State	Passive Flight Quota p.a.	Possible Overflights 2006-2019 ¹⁶	Total Overflights 2006-2019	Overflights by Russia-Belarus 2006-2019
Russia-Belarus	42	546	465	-
US	42	546	77	77
Canada	12	156	15	15
Sweden	7	91	22	16
Norway	7	91	20	20
Denmark	6	78	21	18
Finland	5	65	17	14
Iceland	4	52	0	0

Source: Own compilation based on Alexander Graef and Moritz Kütt, “Visualizing the Open Skies Treaty,” 27 April 2020, <https://openskies.flights/>.

Of the 28 successful Canadian flights from 2003 to 2016 over Russia-Belarus for which data are available, only five crossed the Arctic Circle.¹⁷ In these five cases, observations have focused on three areas: the Kola Peninsula, Novaya Zemlya, and the New Siberian Islands. For example, in August 2009 and July 2016, the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) conducted joint flights (one with Norway, the other with the US) from the military airport in Tiksi, which Russia had designated as an Open Skies airfield, to the Lyakhovsky Islands. Future overflights of Tiksi can help Arctic states better understand how the ongoing upgrading of air and naval facilities fits into Russia’s Arctic strategy and the opening up of the Northern Sea Route (NSR).¹⁸

Figure 11-1: Canadian Open Skies observation flights over Russia, August 2011 and July 2016.



Source: Map data ©2021 Google, own illustration based on OS/CA/11/0040/F14/O and OS/CA/16/0049/F14/O, see fn. 18.

Similarly, in April 2009, August 2011, and June 2013, Canadian flights went over the Kola Peninsula, which remains the home base of Russia's strategic sea-based nuclear forces. These flights usually start at the Kubinka airfield near Moscow as the POE, and take an intermediate stop at the OST refueling airfield Olenya about 90 km from Murmansk, which serves as a forward deployment field for Russia's Long-Range Aviation.

Opportunities

Military confidence and transparency

During Open Skies overflights, representatives of both the observing and the observed states are present in the observation aircraft. As such, military officers from different states, particularly NATO member states and Russia, exchange information and engage with each other on a regular basis. Foreign delegations are frequently invited to join excursions or learn more about the culture of the host state. For example, during the first Russian observation flight over Canada in September 2004, the RCAF organized a bus sightseeing tour of Ottawa, a walking tour downtown, and a guided tour of the Canadian

Aviation Museum.¹⁹ Visits to Niagara Falls, which is located in the proximity of Canada's Open Skies POE, have proven very popular too.²⁰ Neither drones nor satellites can replace this direct interaction between state parties.

What is more, the observed states always receive certified first copies of all imagery that has been acquired during overflights, and all Open Skies member states can purchase additional copies at the cost of production. This level of transparency and cooperation is unique, and it allows small and even middle-sized states access to data that they would otherwise have no hope of acquiring. Given the end of on-site inspections in Russia within the context of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) and CFE Treaties, the Open Skies Treaty constitutes a valuable instrument for military-to-military engagement, and has special relevance for Russia-West relations.

In the European Arctic, which currently sees the most military activity in the region, the Treaty can also contribute to greater predictability and a better understanding of the military intentions of individual Arctic states. More specifically, Open Skies assets can be effective in monitoring the construction of new Arctic military bases, including airfields, naval facilities, radar and testing sites, or missile storage facilities. In addition to known sites of military interest, Open Skies aircraft could also monitor the overall infrastructure development of the Arctic – including the construction of industrial facilities, deepwater ports, and border and coast guard stations – which is progressing at an accelerating speed in anticipation of increased commercial shipping through the NSR.

Aerial observation and the polar satellite gap

Although Open Skies and satellite imagery are often pitted against each other,²¹ they are, in practice, complementary. Open Skies platforms offer several advantages. They are more flexible than orbit satellite installations, which have longer response times and are harder to manoeuvre to areas of interest. Aircraft can fly below cloud formations when and where needed. The full sensor set ensures all-weather, day-and-night observation capability, as well as broad-area and same-day coverage.²² Its ability to operate at oblique angles and low altitudes, coupled with tailored sensor options and imaging strategies, can provide a more enhanced imaging quality.²³ A Canadian Open Skies mission report from January 2016 clearly emphasizes this point, stating that “although sensor resolution is limited to 30 centimetres ... the aircraft fly at low altitudes and are capable of collecting images unavailable through other means”.²⁴ In contrast to commercial sources, which can be digitally manipulated, Open Skies prevents photo tampering. There is a verifiable chain of custody of images, which provides assurance of their accuracy.²⁵ Moreover,

since Open Skies assets can make a number of passes over the same target from different angles, they allow the ‘synoptic layering’ of various imagery samples that together create a highly detailed product.

Another advantage is that the Treaty levels the intelligence playing field by making the data collected on overflights available to all state parties.²⁶ While the US has its own space surveillance network (to which Canada contributes) and is able to monitor the Arctic, not all Arctic states possess overhead reconnaissance platforms or the ability to operate them. The Russian constellation of imagery satellites, for example, is far more limited in comparison to the US – hence the relative importance placed upon Open Skies capability, as reflected in Russia’s investment in the Tu-214ON and new digital systems.

Lastly, most commercial earth observation satellites do not focus on the polar regions as their primary area of interest. Another issue pertains to the imminent gap in polar satellite altimetry capabilities for measuring ice-sheet and sea-ice thickness change.²⁷ Of the seven satellite altimeters in orbit today, only two reach polar latitudes. Both will likely reach their end of life before replacements are available, which will reduce our capacity to assess and improve climate model projections for two to five years.²⁸ Airborne systems – such as ice-resistant drones or Open Skies assets equipped with the necessary lasers – or under-ice hyper-spectral imaging systems could mitigate this gap and serve as a bridging capability.

Environmental monitoring and assessment

As illustrated above, aerial observation and measurements can provide benefits that go beyond arms control verification and military-to-military trust and confidence-building. The Open Skies Treaty can also play a role in environmental monitoring and assessment in the Arctic. The region has been warming twice as fast as the rest of the planet. Melting ice sheets affect sea level rise, ocean circulation, and weather patterns. Last year alone, we witnessed unprecedented heatwaves and wildfires across Siberia, a powerful ice storm in Russia’s Far East (which left over 100,000 residents without water, electricity, or heat), and a disastrous oil spill near the industrial city of Norilsk, believed to have been linked to permafrost thaw.²⁹

In principle, Open Skies assets can be effective in monitoring ice melt and water supply, wildfires and deforestation, severe weather events (such as cyclones and hurricanes), heavy precipitation and flooding (both coastal and interior), and environmental contamination, such as oil spills, industrial

emissions, and nuclear accidents.³⁰ Airborne sensors can also monitor evidence of human displacement linked to natural disasters and the impacts of climate change. Open Skies data can then support disaster relief, search and rescue, border security, or oil spill extent mapping. For example, Open Skies imagery was used in support of disaster relief in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina (2005) and the Haiti earthquake (2010), as well as to map the extent of an oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010.³¹ The US government also considered deploying Open Skies assets as part of its Continental Air Reconnaissance for Damage Assessment (CARDA) missions. In the future, Open Skies aircraft and sensors could be used to support international environmental agreements, which require satellite or airborne monitoring and verification.³²

Currently, Open Skies operations remain within the purview of Ministries of Defence, while Open Skies diplomacy falls under the responsibility of Ministries of Foreign Affairs. Although other government departments, like Ministries of Environment or Departments of Fisheries and Oceans, are generally aware of Open Skies mission activity, the environmental monitoring aspect of the Treaty is not well known. “The use of Open Skies to cooperatively monitor the health of the environment,” as Peter Jones argues, “would be a sea-change in the way people have conceived of these flights to this point and could bring entirely new groups of users into the Open Skies process.”³³ In fact, nothing in the Treaty precludes other state agencies from submitting their input or a request to Ministries of Defence to include a particular object or area of interest in mission profiles.

Challenges

Aircraft and airfield constraints

The availability of aircraft and suitable aerodromes is among the most significant constraints on conducting Open Skies overflights in the Arctic.³⁴ Arctic territories are vast and sparsely populated, and the number of (refuelling) airfields is limited. Some of the airfields are further constrained in terms of runway lengths and the servicing that is available at a given site. Flying over remote Arctic areas thus carries additional risks of the aircraft becoming stranded.³⁵

In some cases, state parties also need to travel enormous distances from the points of entry to designated regional airfields, which increases both the time necessary to conduct missions and their costs. The Treaty governs the maximum flight distances (MFDs) and durations of observation flights allowed from a designated Open Skies airfield, which, in turn, affect the possibility of conducting Arctic overflights.³⁶ For instance, in the cases of Russia and Canada,

the MFDs vary between 5,000 and 7,200 km,³⁷ whereas for Norway, Sweden, and Finland, they are below 2,000 km. The exception is Denmark, with a limit of less than 1,000 km for the mainland and more than 5,000 km for flights over Greenland. For the Open Skies regime to be effective and worthwhile in the Arctic, and for the overflights to be able to monitor larger parts of the Arctic region, Treaty members will need to make more airfields available for refuelling and consider extending the allowed flight distances.

As regards the availability of Open Skies aircraft, only Russia and Canada operate long-range aircraft capable of flying up to 5,000 km and more.³⁸ Canada relies on the airframe of the Lockheed C-130 Hercules. Russia uses the An-30 aircraft for flights in Europe, and conducts its long-range overflights with either the Tu-154M or, from 2019, the Tu-214OS aircraft. In addition, Sweden operates the Saab 340 with a flight range of up to 2,500 km, which is frequently leased to other state parties, including Norway, Denmark, and Finland. This practice points to a possible area of future cooperation. The new German Airbus A319, which has a range of over 6,000 km and is expected to become available in 2022, could also be used for Open Skies missions in the Arctic. The pooling of resources, for example by acquiring a common Open Skies platform (even one specifically attuned to the Arctic conditions), would reduce costs and enable all Arctic states to participate more fully in aerial observation.

Sensor limitations

The Open Skies Treaty currently allows four different sensors: panchromatic (black-and-white) optical panoramic and framing cameras with a ground resolution of 30 cm; video cameras with a ground resolution of 30 cm; infrared line scanning devices with a ground resolution of 50 cm; and (active) synthetic aperture radars (SAR) with a ground resolution of 300 cm.³⁹ In practice, however, only optical and video cameras are in use, since the remaining sensor types have not yet been certified by member states.⁴⁰ While there exist sensor satellites that exceed Open Skies imagery resolution specifications, 30 cm/pixel nevertheless constitutes a significant capability. This resolution makes it possible to recognize and collect basic information on major military equipment – that is, to distinguish a tank from a truck – as well as to monitor civilian and military infrastructure, such as roads, airports, railway lines, and industrial plants. It is, however, insufficient to provide detailed technical intelligence or details about items such as electronic equipment.⁴¹

Over the last decade, member states have started to introduce digital cameras. After a lengthy certification process, Russia was the first party to introduce a digital monochromatic RGB camera. The new German Open Skies aircraft mentioned above will also be equipped with digital cameras. Given the end of production lines for wet film cameras, the remaining member states operating Open Skies aircraft will likely follow suit.

Although near-infrared sensors can already measure vegetation indices, using the Open Skies regime for environmental monitoring will necessitate the introduction of entirely new, non-imaging sensor types, which could, for example, detect atmospheric pollution or radioactivity. While these capabilities might become essential in the Arctic for environmental protection, the monitoring of compliance with international environmental agreements, and in case of emergencies, the procedures for their introduction and the political ramifications are still unclear.⁴²

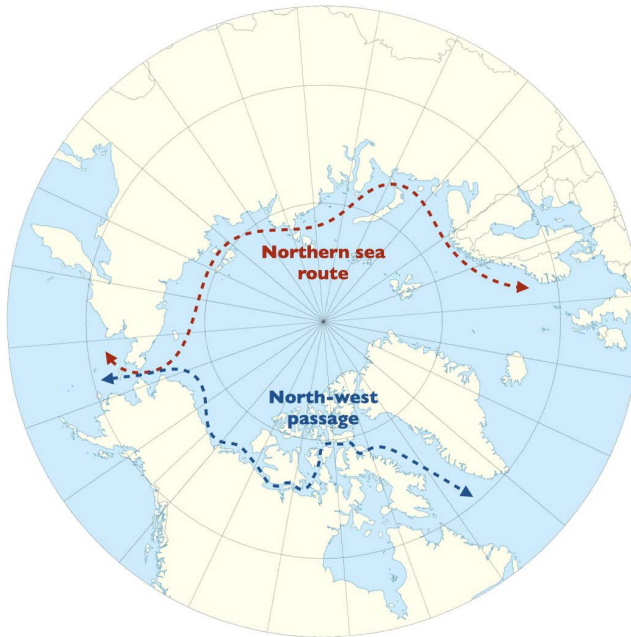
Sovereignty of contested spaces

Another issue pertains to the observation of sensitive areas and contested spaces.⁴³ Even though the Arctic features various disputed maritime claims, the most contentious legal debates surround the statuses of the Northwest Passage (NWP) across the Canadian Arctic Archipelago and the Northeast Passage – also known as the NSR – along Siberia’s northern coast (see Figure 11-2). Canada and Russia claim these as internal waters, which the US disputes. The Open Skies regime only applies to the land, islands, and internal and territorial waters, over which a State Party exercises sovereignty.⁴⁴ Even though the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) and international waters of the Arctic Ocean are not explicitly included in the Treaty provisions, such overflights are allowed under international law.

Overflights of the NWP and the NSR, which have both been subject to increased traffic and activity in recent years, would be of relevance to State Parties to the Treaty on Open Skies, particularly those who are members of the Arctic Council and whose economic and shipping interests are at stake. While technically possible, such overflights have not previously taken place for political and diplomatic reasons. Getting Russian permission to overfly the disputed waters of the NSR would recognize Russian sovereignty over the territory. The same holds true for Open Skies overflights of the NWP.

To overcome this challenge, a specialized regime might be required. One possible solution would be to reach an agreement in the OSCC that flights over such “contested spaces” would be undertaken under the aegis of the Conflict Prevention Centre of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in

Figure 11-2: Illustration of the Northwest and Northeast Passages in the Arctic.



Source: Authors' illustration, map adapted from Wikimedia Commons: Arctic Ocean Location.

Europe (OSCE), using the aircraft of an agreed “neutral” third party.⁴⁵ The key would be explicit impartiality and an agreement that these flights would not constitute a recognition of any one side’s sovereignty over the contested area.⁴⁶

Conclusion

Increasing military activity in the Arctic continues to elevate the risk of a misunderstanding and unintended escalation. In the absence of a proper institutional mechanism through which Arctic states could address their military security concerns, measures of transparency and openness can calm emerging tensions, prevent dangerous misperceptions, and, ultimately, avoid the emergence of a security dilemma. With increased transparency, Arctic states can replace unwarranted fears and worst-case assumptions with facts that are collected collaboratively.

In this regard, the Treaty on Open Skies holds much potential to build confidence and trust in the region. It covers most of the Arctic region and – prior to the US withdrawal from the agreement – comprised all Arctic states. The Treaty not only contributes to greater military transparency, predictability, and a better understanding of the military intentions of individual Arctic states, but it also has the potential to play an important role in the monitoring and protection of the Arctic environment.

Despite the Treaty's clear added value for cooperative security in the Arctic, flight practice over the region has been rather limited to date, at least in comparison to other regions. First, the lack of publicly available data impedes the exact evaluation of the Open Skies flight practice over the Arctic. Second, the Open Skies regime currently faces several constraints on conducting Arctic overflights that need to be addressed. These include the availability of airfields and aircraft capable of Arctic overflights, limitations on overflight distances and approved sensors, and the inability to overfly the disputed waters of the NSR and the NWP without recognizing either side's sovereignty over these contested areas. For the Open Skies regime to be effective and worthwhile in the Arctic, and for overflights to be able to monitor larger parts of the region, Treaty members would need to agree to expand the use of the OST, including in the area of environmental monitoring and air sampling. This would also require the adjustment of flight and distance rules to encourage more Arctic overflights.⁴⁷

Although the US withdrawal poses a fundamental challenge to the future of the Open Skies regime, it also presents an opportunity. The Treaty framework has changed very little since it was signed in 1992, despite more than 180 technical decisions having been taken by the OSCC.⁴⁸ The current political standoff can be used by member states to rethink, modify, and update the Treaty. This would not only provide additional incentives for the US to rejoin, but could also make the Treaty more adept at addressing current security challenges, including those that are emerging in the Arctic. In doing so, the Open Skies Treaty would help to integrate the Arctic more thoroughly into the existing framework of European regional security.

Notes

¹ See, for example, Kristian Åtland, "Interstate Relations in the Arctic: An Emerging Security Dilemma?" *Comparative Strategy* 33:2, April 2014.

² 'Report on Arctic Policy' (Washington, DC: International Security Advisory Board (ISAB), 21 September 2016), <https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/262585.pdf>.

³ The CFE Treaty combines disarmament with comprehensive information exchange and an intrusive on-site inspections regime.

⁴ The Vienna Document is a politically binding agreement that concerns the exchange and verification of military information, including the locations and composition of deployed forces, defence budgets, notification of exercises, and observation of certain military activities. The VD has been revised four times – most recently in 2011.

⁵ Treaty on Open Skies, Art. II, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/1/5/14127.pdf>.

⁶ See, for example, Trevor Lloyd, “Open Skies in the Arctic?” *International Journal* 14:1, 1959, pp. 42-49.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Jane Boulden, “Open Skies: The 1955 Proposal and its Current Revival,” *Dalhousie Law Journal* 13:2, 1990, p. 630.

⁹ George H.W. Bush, Commencement Address at Texas A&M University, 12 May 1989, <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/may-12-1989-commencement-address-texas-am-university>.

¹⁰ George H.W. Bush, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: 1992-1993* (Washington: White House, 1993), p. 1346. For background on the negotiation of the Treaty, see P. Jones, *Open Skies: Confidence-building, Transparency and the End of the Cold War* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2014); J. Tucker, “Negotiating Open Skies: A Diplomatic History,” in M. Krepon and A. Smithson (eds.), *Open Skies, Arms Control and Cooperative Security* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1992); and P. Dunay, M. Krasznai, H. Spitzer, R. Wiemker, and W. Wynne, *Open Skies: A Cooperative Approach to Military Transparency and Confidence Building* (Geneva: UNIDIR, 2004).

¹¹ For most states without reconnaissance satellites, Open Skies overflights provide otherwise unavailable data. Even the US and Russia consider the information collected during overflights to be a valuable supplement to their national technical means of verification.

¹² Alexander Graef and Moritz Kütt, “Visualizing the Open Skies Treaty,” 27 April 2020, <https://openskies.flights/>.

¹³ The data were provided in response to a request by Steffan Watkins under the *Access to Information and Privacy Act* in 2020. They cover Open Skies mission reports and detailed flight data for 9 of the 10 Russian flights over Canada from 2004 to 2014, but for just 28 of the 44 successful Canadian overflights over Russia-Belarus between 2003 and 2016. The reason for this omission is arguably related to the more restrictive handling of data in the case of joint flights, including primarily those with Hungary, Norway, and the US. The released data are available here:

<https://steffanwatkins.medium.com/declassified-open-skies-treaty-mission-reports-show-over-a-decade-of-diplomacy-and-cooperation-655da50227d6>.

¹⁴ Interview with David S. Higgins, 18 November 2020.

¹⁵ Trude Pettersen, "Russian surveillance flight over Norway," *Barents Observer*, 30 July 2014.

¹⁶ From 2002 to 2005, member states were obliged to receive only 75% of their passive quotas. Full implementation started in 2006. In 2018, member states conducted no regular flights, because they were unable to agree on the distribution of active flight quotas in October 2017 due to a conflict between Georgia and Russia. Hence, the year 2018 has been excluded from the count.

¹⁷ *Op. cit.* fn. 15.

¹⁸ Matthew Melino, Heather A. Conley, and Joseph S. Bermudez Jr., "Tiksi Airbase - Many Russian Announcements, Little Equipment," CSIS Briefs, March 2020, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/ice-curtain-tiksi-airbase%E2%80%94many-russian-announcements-little-equipment>.

¹⁹ Operation Passive Skies 01/04, After Action Report, p. 3, see fn. 15.

²⁰ Interview with David S. Higgins, 18 November 2020.

²¹ Open Skies Treaty critics point to the availability of (commercial) satellite imagery as an alternative data source, arguing that it is similar to or even exceeds the quality provided by Open Skies sensors.

²² Open Skies RevCon 2010: Potential Non-Treaty Applications for Open Skies Assets, <https://www.osce.org/secretariat/68251>.

²³ Satellites that belong to US companies – which dominate the market – are subject to US federal law, which prohibits commercial imagery with a resolution better than 25 cm. As such, the permitted 30 cm resolution of Open Skies cameras is similar to the resolution of the best commercially available satellites, which are few. Sources: Warren Ferster, "U.S. Government Eases Restrictions on DigitalGlobe," *SpaceNews*, 11 June 2014, <https://spacenews.com/40874us-government-eases-restrictions-on-digitalglobe/>; VERTIC, "A Primer on the Treaty on Open Skies," Fact Sheet 14, October 2019.

²⁴ Strategic Joint Staff, Arms Control Verification, "Verification Mission Report Operation Passive Skies 15-2 Russian Federation Mission in Canada, 18-23 December 2015," p. 2, see fn. 15.

²⁵ See, for example, Dan Lindley, "Cooperative Airborne Monitoring: Opening the Skies to Promote Peace, Protect the Environment, and Cope with Natural Disasters," *Contemporary Security Policy* 27:2, August 2006; Andreas Persbo and Larry MacFaul, "Closing the sky would lose all the security advantages of keeping it open," European Leadership Network, 14 November 2019, <https://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/commentary/closing-the-sky-would-lose-all-the-security-advantages-of-keeping-it-open/>.

²⁶ Interview with David S. Higgins, 18 November 2020.

²⁷ Jonathan Amos, "Polar scientists wary of impending satellite gap," BBC News, 28 November 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-55109092>.

²⁸ "Polar Altimetry Gap Letter of Concern," quoted in Amos, "Polar scientists wary of impending satellite gap."

²⁹ See, for example, Marc Lanteigne, "The Other Crisis: Present and Future Environmental Strains in the Arctic," *Over the Circle*, 28 June 2020, <https://overthecircle.com/2020/06/28/the-other-crisis-present-and-future-environmental-strains-in-the-arctic/>; Sonia Kopelev, "Russia's Environmental Disasters in 2020," *The Moscow Times*, 29 December 2020, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2020/12/29/russias-environmental-disasters-in-2020-a72508>.

³⁰ Mike Betts and Don Spence, "Potential Non-Treaty Applications for Open Skies Assets," Open Skies Review Conference, 7-9 June 2010, <https://www.osce.org/secretariat/68251>.

³¹ Betts and Spence, "Potential Non-Treaty Applications for Open Skies Assets."

³² Lindley, "Cooperative Airborne Monitoring."

³³ See Peter Jones, "Making a Better Open Skies Treaty," CNC Occasional Paper #50, 8 February 2021, <https://nonproliferation.org/making-a-better-open-skies-treaty/>.

³⁴ Interview with David S. Higgins, 18 November 2020.

³⁵ One only needs to recall the 1991 crash of a C-130 Hercules of the Canadian military, which was on a routine supply run to the Alert airstrip in the Canadian Arctic and whose survivors waited for 30 hours to be rescued, to understand such risks. See Clyde H. Farnsworth, "After a Plane Crash, 30 Deadly Hours in the Arctic," 5 November 1991, *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/1991/11/05/world/after-a-plane-crash-30-deadly-hours-in-the-arctic.html>.

³⁶ Treaty on Open Skies, Annex A, Section III, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/1/5/14127.pdf>.

³⁷ The exception is the airfield Khrabrovo in the Kaliningrad oblast with an MFD of 500 km.

³⁸ The US used to rely on the Boeing OC-135B.

³⁹ Treaty on Open Skies, Art. IV, Sensors, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/1/5/14127.pdf>.

⁴⁰ There have been debates about security concerns should radars and infrared line scanners be introduced in the future, which may also have contributed to the US withdrawal decision. See Anastasiya Ponamareva and Sergey Ponamarev, "Est' li zhizn' posle smerti? Ili sud'ba dogovora otkrytogo neba posle vykhoda iz nego

SShA” [Is there life after death? Or the fate of the Treaty on Open Skies after the US withdrawal], *Evropeyskaya bezopasnost': sobytiya, otsenki, prognozy* 58:74, September 2020, pp. 2-7.

⁴¹ See Hartwig Spitzer and Rafael Wiemker, “Image Analysis and data assessment: What can be learnt from Open Skies image data?” in Pal Dunay et al. (eds.), *Open Skies: A Cooperative Approach to Military Transparency and Confidence Building* (Geneva: UNIDIR, 2004), pp. 104-106.

⁴² See Hartwig Spitzer, “Prospects for Extensions of the Multilateral Open Skies Treaty,” in Pal Dunay et al. (eds.), *Open Skies: A Cooperative Approach to Military Transparency and Confidence Building* (Geneva: UNIDIR, 2004), pp. 136-138.

⁴³ See Jones, “Making a Better Open Skies Treaty.”

⁴⁴ Treaty on Open Skies, Art. II, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/1/5/14127.pdf>.

⁴⁵ Interview with Peter Jones, Associate Professor in the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs at the University of Ottawa, 26 November 2020.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Treaty on Open Skies: OSCC Decisions, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/t/avc/cca/os/c26158.htm>.

12

US Arctic Deepwater Port: Value-Added Capabilities in Support of National Security

Troy J. Bouffard and Edward M. Soto

Over the last decade, military security issues in the Arctic have continued to present growing competitive challenges throughout the region. Moreover, much of the emerging concern is focused on the maritime domain, as diminishing sea ice represents a forcing event that is enabling increased maritime access to the Arctic and evolving perspectives concerning emergency and security requirements. Discussion involving the opening sea lanes in the North and the ‘Race for Resources’ has dominated the debate for many years. However, experts have persistently debunked many of the myths, while pragmatic security-related concerns continue to solidify into the concrete realities of today’s defining Arctic military issues.¹ Yet even with improved clarity, the United States continues to face political commitment and resourcing challenges while developing Arctic-related national security priorities, especially with continuing national defense legacy requirements. In light of the difficulties, one effort in particular has consistently led as a strategic priority in terms of developing a key maritime infrastructure project.

Section 1041 of the FY20 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) describes the rationale and requirements for the Department of Defense to create the criteria for a strategic Arctic port.² Much of the driving force behind the initiative has come from US Senator Dan Sullivan of Alaska, who insists that a ‘home base’ must be established within the US Arctic as opposed to alternative locations much further south.³ Prior to the FY20 NDAA, studies had already been conducted for exploratory and preliminary purposes.⁴ All along, the natural choice largely centred on the Port of Nome, on the Seward Peninsula of Norton Sound in the Bering Sea a little south of the Arctic Circle. Although improvements would be required, the final decision is not necessarily based on an established location, but rather meeting capability requirements as defined by the Planning, Programming, Budget and Execution (PPBE) process, wherever that may be.⁵ Regardless, Nome still represents the leading choice in almost all ways, minus the final decision and funding.⁶

Although consideration of a Nome deepwater port often involves the discussion of national security, almost no literature exists that provides a substantial security-related examination.⁷ Furthermore, serious consideration finds little traction given the position of the US military, which cannot acknowledge the need for the port to meet defense requirements – largely an issue of lacking Arctic language in the National Security Strategy.⁸ As a result, this chapter explores the extent to which the Nome deepwater port could provide support for common strategy-defined, operational capabilities and requirements in the US Arctic. As part of the examination, this chapter will present a cursory review of fundamental national security aspects, including 1) the role and importance of logistics, and 2) the role and importance of forward presence and deterrence. For the US Arctic, logistical capabilities cannot be overemphasized when considering the austere environment, activity seasons, and distances to the operating area – whether in support of the maritime domain or land-based infrastructure. Furthermore, logistics plays an important role in support of forward presence and deterrence, which also empowers several national security fundamentals.

The Role of Logistics

Arctic Logistics

Arctic operations suffer from the tyranny of distance and time, with the nearest deepwater port of Dutch Harbor being over 600 nautical miles to the south of Nome, and the Departments of Defense and Homeland Security installations of Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Eielson Air Force Base (AFB), and United States Coast Guard (USCG) Air Station Kodiak being 450-550 nautical miles to the west and southwest. Congress and the Department of Defense (DoD) recognized the logistical impacts of not having forward-based capabilities as a 2020 NDAA “Item of Special Interest”, with Arctic search and rescue (SAR) calling for “forward-deployed/based assets in a sustainable location”.⁹ The 2021 NDAA further states the need for maritime power projection and presence, emphasizing search and rescue and infrastructure development for maritime defense.¹⁰ The lack of a deepwater port and coastal infrastructure in the region limits sustainable US power projection above the Arctic Circle and the ability to host or sustain USCG icebreakers, naval vessels, and other forward-based sea and air assets.¹¹ Having forward-deployed and logistically sustained forces at Nome will substantially decrease response time in the north Bering, Chukchi, and Beaufort Seas. For USCG vessels sailing from Kodiak, transit time alone is seven days, preventing timely all-season response to emergency and security incidents.¹² Seasonal logistical constraints impacting

maritime resupply due to sea ice formation and winter storms currently impose a limiting factor on sustained forward-based maritime power projection in the Bering Sea/Bering Strait and the North Slope of Alaska's Arctic region.¹³

In the Arctic, "logistics - the procurement, maintenance and transportation of materials, facilities and personnel - are dependent upon existing infrastructure."¹⁴ Logistics and sustainability are key to effective operations, and are the baseline enablers to sustainable security operations and supporting activities such as search and rescue, environmental response, and resupply. The Port of Nome, as it is, limits the "effective sustainment ... and means to enable [the] freedom of action and endurance and extended operational reach" needed to project power into the Arctic throughout the various domains.¹⁵ Currently, physical constraints and the seasonal sea ice build-up limit the Port of Nome in terms of the size and draft of the marine vessels able to utilize it economically and sustainably. USCG icebreakers, critical to sustained operations in the Arctic, cannot use the Port of Nome in its current state.¹⁶ The ability to conduct sustained security operations then becomes dependent on airborne logistics, which are often limited by time in the air, distance, and the ability to cache resources during periods of marine availability to generate airborne response efforts.

Regional Hub

Nome is a regional transportation, logistical, and economic hub for Northwest Alaska, and is strategically positioned to provide sustained services and access to the Arctic on both local and national levels, to include defense infrastructure such as the North Warning System.¹⁷ The Port of Nome is only 125 nautical miles from the Bering Strait and the convergence of the Arctic shipping lanes, most notably, the Northern Sea Route along Russia's north coast and Canada's Northwest Passage.¹⁸ As the sea ice continues to recede, increased maritime traffic through the Bering Strait will drive responses to security concerns and requirements for a deep-draft Arctic port system. Security concerns rather than economic factors will drive the analysis from a regional economic view to one in favour of national security. In either case, the Port of Nome is constrained by its draft and the onshore infrastructure required to sustainably host large commercial resupply vessels and security response vessels such as USCG icebreakers and naval ships.¹⁹ Icebreaking capability is critical to extending the seasonal use of the port and the region in general, with the Port of Nome currently iced in for up to six months annually.²⁰ A meaningful defense posture in the region, as called for in strategy and the NDAA, requires a deep-draft Arctic port system to forward-base the agile response capabilities and logistical support systems needed to sustain operations. The Navy's Strategy for

the Arctic calls for an integrated approach to security operations that includes Naval and US Coast Guard deepwater and littoral-capable forces. The strategy calls for an enhanced presence and access to infrastructure capacity to meet this approach.²¹ A deep-draft port in Nome would logistically enable sustained logistical support to the deepwater Naval and Coast Guard vessels, and bring – albeit to a limited degree – the shore-based maintenance, logistics, and training required for the littoral operational strategy.²² With the multi-year sea ice interface projected to move northward in the future, a deepwater port at Nome, sustaining operations, surveillance, and monitoring given its proximity to the Bering Strait, would enhance timely response to national security issues as the Arctic’s maritime traffic increases.²³ Improvements to the Port of Nome would reduce reach-back logistics and increase the operational sustainability required for all-season security and defense operations.

The Role of Forward Presence and Deterrence

Forward Presence

The forward presence of forces provides a means by which to instill and support regional stability, as well as impose deterrence via punishment or denial.²⁴ Traditionally, sea ice has kept presence concerns relatively negligible. However, recent changes throughout the Arctic region and maritime surface represent new challenges and opportunities, some of which drive the need for the forward presence of military forces. A key component that not only helps to support sustained freedom of navigation capabilities, but that also enables forward presence and force projection, often involves sea basing. According to the DoD joint concept, ‘sea basing’ is defined as:

...the rapid deployment, assembly, command, projection, reconstitution, and re-employment of joint combat power from the sea, while providing continuous support, sustainment, and force protection to select expeditionary joint forces without reliance on land bases within the Joint Operations Area (JOA). These capabilities expand operational maneuver options, and facilitate assured access and entry from the sea.²⁵

Alternatively, Tangredi offers a broader definition, stating that “sea basing refers to the capability to use the sea in the same way that U.S. forces use overseas regional bases, for deterrence, alliance support, cooperative security, power projection, and other forward operations.”²⁶ Traditionally, forward presence provides a critical role throughout the globe. Shunk et al. explain that while deterrence requires capacity, communication, capability, and will, physical presence conveys both commitment and intentionality.²⁷ An improved

deepwater Port of Nome would represent the foundational infrastructure from which numerous Arctic operational capabilities could be realized, in direct support of national defense and security requirements. Without it, maritime presence generally remains limited to (over)extended forward deployments. Perhaps most telling, the recent US Tri-Service Maritime Strategy provides an even stronger rationale, stating that:

We cannot cede influence in areas of emerging day-to-day competition, including U.S. regional waters and the Arctic. The coming decades will bring changes to the Arctic region that will have a significant impact on the global economy, given its abundance of natural resources and strategic location. China views this region as a critical link in their One Belt One Road initiative. Arctic nations are reopening old bases, moving forces, and reinvigorating regional exercises. These trends will persist in the decades ahead. We must continue to operate forward and posture our forces appropriately.²⁸

Deterrence

For the Bering Sea region and the North, the Port of Nome represents potential infrastructure that can host significant deterrence capabilities. In an extreme sense, the primary purpose of the US military is the deterrence of conflict, but if and when confronted, to engage and win under terms acceptable to the United States and its allies.²⁹ For more common purposes, deterrence can also impact the potential of criminal activity, such as illegal, unregulated, and unreported (IUU) fishing, which represents a persistent security threat in the US Arctic maritime region.

Militarily, one definition of deterrence is “to reduce the probability of enemy military attack by posing a sufficient prospect of suffering a net loss as a result, or at least a higher net loss / lower net gain resulting from no attack.”³⁰ While not all experts accept any particular definition, most agree on similar aspects of the well-grounded logic involving a distinction between deterrence by denial (defense) and deterrence by punishment (retaliation). Regardless, the goal of deterrence is to stop an adverse action before it occurs. One of the strongest, most enduring forms of deterrence in history (aside from mutually assured destruction) involves the principle of collective defense, enshrined in Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, which established NATO. In the Arctic, four out of the five littoral nations are founding members of NATO, with the other being the Russian Federation – and Russia largely detests the Euro-Atlantic alliance.

Elliott explains that deterrence refers to how “knowledge of the sanction affects perception of the cost of offending so that compliance is seen as more attractive than offending ... the most important considerations of deterrence-related punishment involve severity, swiftness, and certainty of punishment,” and unlike other mechanisms, the threat of punishment must always be present.³¹ Much like the European Deterrence Initiative,³² established in 2014 as a result of Russian aggression, an established Arctic presence provides further justification and rationale for the continued development of the Pacific Deterrence Initiative – especially the role of port infrastructure.³³

Conclusion

The FY20 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) and the work of the US Army Corps of Engineers include items regarding Arctic maritime security objectives. Developments involving the Port of Nome have confronted progress and commitment issues, temporarily culminating in 2015 due to local and national economic downturns resulting from declining interests in oil and gas developments.³⁴ However, circumstances have since changed. The current momentum and expectations involving adversarial advances, as well as US national interests, indicate the inevitability of a deepwater port at Nome. Defense hawks will likely gravitate toward support while skeptics remain unconvinced of the need, especially if demand signals remain absent from security strategies and policies. Ultimately, security trends indicate an increasing need for US Arctic operational capabilities, especially with regard to the maritime domain.

The normal course of development for defense infrastructure often relies on some kind of forcing event, like a disaster or hostile act, and is enhanced by the economic benefit to the region. For a deepwater port in Nome, the driving influence is adversarial potential and activity expectations, as well as international economic competition for Arctic resources and shipping. *Prevention*, although difficult to measure in terms of effectiveness and success, increasingly becomes the guiding principle with regard to strategic rationale. The Arctic is not a place to accept risk. Even under optimal circumstances, operational response remains significantly more challenging in higher latitudes. As a result, co-location within the threat/hazard environment is essential for response – whether civil or military. A deepwater port in Nome provides a much-needed solution to fill many of the related current gaps and seams.

A deepwater port in Nome is much more than just a place for larger vessels to park. The United States has significant gaps and seams involving Arctic-related national security. Currently, most of the response in the US Arctic

occurs under surge conditions, which also underscores many of its limitations. In order to effectively demonstrate reliable defense and security capabilities, sustainability is required. Logistics provides the key to sustainable operations. Forward presence also offers substantial value-added purpose and can prevent any number of problems that might otherwise go undeterred. Both logistics and presence contribute exponentially to national security, the extent to which has only begun to be explored. A deepwater port in Nome is by no means a stand-alone solution to overcoming US Arctic operational deficiencies. However, few options enable as many maritime capabilities in support of national security as coastal infrastructure that is located in the area of responsibility. Furthermore, the civil and economic benefits of a deepwater port only magnify the potential added value. The Circumpolar North will only continue to increase in operational importance, and the United States urgently needs Arctic maritime infrastructure. One of the tasks for stakeholders now involves the exploration of how such developments can support not only national security, but also Arctic regional stability.

Notes

The perspectives offered in this chapter by the authors are personal and do not represent the views of the Department of Defense or the US government.

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13 Reinigorating Old Friendships: Why the US Should Pursue an Engagement Strategy in Greenland

Jon Rahbek-Clemmensen

Former President Donald Trump's 2019 offer to buy Greenland, a semi-autonomous territory within the Kingdom of Denmark, came as a bolt out of the blue, causing global astonishment and no small amount of ridicule.¹ For many of his detractors, the offer once again demonstrated Trump's lack of diplomatic knowledge and his tendency to offend his allies unnecessarily, especially once he cancelled a state visit to Denmark upon learning that Danish leaders were uninterested in selling Greenland.² Many of his supporters, meanwhile, saw Trump's offer as a potential diplomatic masterstroke that would solidify the United States' position in a geopolitically important territory.³

As is often the case, the truth lies somewhere in between these extremes. Trump's offer to buy Greenland is not a wild-eyed fluke. Instead, it reflects a steadily increasing American interest in Greenland that is spurred by the fear of Chinese and Russian encroachments. At the same time, however, a quest to purchase Greenland is not the optimal way to achieve American security interests, as it is unlikely to succeed, and even if it did, it would be far more expensive than other, more sensible approaches. Instead, the United States should engage with Denmark and Greenland to find common ground on shared concerns.

Greenland illustrates how the current transformation of Arctic security and enhanced great power competition affect different parts of the Arctic differently. Greenland's unique constitutional set-up and geostrategically important location in the Arctic create different challenges and opportunities for the United States in Greenland compared to in other parts of the region. This chapter thus further illustrates Andreas Østhagen, Gregory Sharp, and Paal Hilde's argument that "the Arctic needs to be understood as not one region, but a series of sub-regions".⁴

It's all about military geography

So why is Greenland important in the first place? As a former American diplomat whom a colleague and I interviewed in 2016 put it, the American interest in Greenland is about “geography, geography, geography!”⁵ It is located between Russia and North America, close to the straits that connect the Arctic Ocean and the North Atlantic. The United States has been present in Greenland since World War II. When Denmark was occupied by Germany in 1940, the United States seized control of Greenland (with permission from the Danish embassy in Washington) to prevent Germany from using the island for weather measurements and as a stepping-stone for an invasion of North America.⁶ American forces stayed in Greenland after the war. In the early Cold War, Greenland continued to be important for weather forecasts, which were a crucial aspect of military planning. It was also used for strategic bombers that would attack Soviet targets with nuclear weapons in the event of a great power war. When missiles replaced bombers as the primary delivery vehicle for nuclear weapons, the ballistic missile early warning radars at the American air base in Thule in northwestern Greenland became the primary US asset.⁷

Many of the same dynamics are still at play on the island today. The radars at Thule remain the main American asset, especially since they were upgraded and made part of the American missile defense system.⁸ Greenland's shores, ports, and airports could become important for hunting submarines, as anti-submarine warfare in the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom gap is generally becoming more important for the United States and its allies. As part of the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act, Congress has asked the armed services and the Maritime Administration to find a new strategic port in the Arctic, and several sites in Greenland could be viable options.⁹ Greenland's significance is thus still tied to its militarily important location between Russia and North America.

However, while much is the same, a few things have changed as great power competition between the United States, Russia, and China has become more salient in the Arctic in general. Two new challenges have arisen: new Russian Arctic bases and the increased Chinese economic influence. Both are playing out in the context of climate change, which is changing the geography of the Arctic.

New Russian capabilities

Over the past few years, the United States has come to see Russia as more of a military threat in the Arctic. In 2007, Russia resumed flights with strategic bombers in the Arctic. Since then, it has been reopening old Soviet bases and

building new bases, landing strips, and radar facilities, while replacing its Soviet-era submarines with more potent vessels. Although many of these new capabilities most likely serve a defensive purpose, allowing Russia to operate in its Arctic seas, which are opening due to climate change, they could also have an offensive potential.¹⁰ One of the new Russian bases is Nagurskoye in the Franz Josef Land archipelago, which will be the world's most northern operational air base once finished. According to the Danish Defence Intelligence Service, Russian combat aircraft will be able to attack Thule Air Base from Nagurskoye, thus potentially creating a gap in the American missile defense and early warning system.¹¹ Responding to this threat involves bolstering the air defense at Thule by investing in new anti-aircraft radars and missiles, and ensuring that fighters can quickly be deployed to Greenland in the event of a crisis.

The United States cannot make the decision to enhance these capabilities unilaterally. It requires consent from both Denmark and Greenland. The two nations have divided the responsibility for different issue areas. Foreign, security, and defense policy is Denmark's responsibility, and the Greenlandic government controls a host of other issues, such as transportation and resource policy. However, when issues fall between these categories, they are typically decided through either a compromise or a legal fight between Denmark and Greenland.¹²

These complex procedures affect the response to the Russian threat. Fighters require airports with the right hangar installations, runways, and other facilities, as well as weather conditions that permit frequent flights. Currently, the airports at Kangerlussuaq and Thule can fit these requirements once minor upgrades have been made. However, as the Greenlandic government controls transportation policy and was hesitant to keep Kangerlussuaq Airport open, Denmark had to negotiate with the Greenlanders to ensure that it had the necessary airport infrastructure.¹³

Lurking Chinese investments

While Russia has strengthened its military capabilities, Chinese interest in Greenland has also been on the rise. Greenland has been one of the places where the Chinese government and companies have tried to get a foothold. Chinese private and state-owned companies have invested in mining projects over the past decade.¹⁴ However, low world market prices and high production costs have meant that most of these projects have yet to become operational.¹⁵ Furthermore, in 2016, a Chinese investment company was reportedly interested in buying a former naval station, and in 2017, the Chinese

government applied for permission to build a satellite receiving station (Greenland has yet to make a decision).¹⁶ China Communication Construction Company, a state-owned company, recently made a bid to build Greenland's new airports. The airport project caught Washington's attention, and at a 2018 meeting, then-Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis warned his Danish counterpart, Claus Hjort Frederiksen, that such investments could have security implications. Soon after, the Danish government announced that it would be providing 1.6 billion Danish kroner (\$240 million) worth of funds and low-interest loans for the airports. The Chinese company withdrew its bid in 2019.¹⁷

The Chinese interest in Greenland poses two problems for the United States. First, many of the facilities that attract Chinese investments are dual use, meaning that they could become part of the Chinese military infrastructure in the Arctic, e.g., by serving as refuelling stations for military vessels. Second, because the Greenlandic economy is very small, Chinese companies could easily make up a significant share of the island's economy, giving China leverage that could be used to pursue political-military interests, such as interfering with the American presence.¹⁸

An effective American response to the Chinese involvement also requires consent from Denmark and Greenland.¹⁹ Like transportation policy, resource policy also falls within the Greenlandic government's purview. Restrictions on Chinese investments will only be possible if Greenland is somehow compensated for the revenue streams it will be missing.

Buying Greenland is a *cul-de-sac*

But would it not be easier to simply buy Greenland? If Greenland became an American territory, the United States would not have to deal with two other parties. It could simply pass laws restricting Chinese investment and ensuring that it had the military airports it needed to rebuff the Russian aerial threat. These are good arguments and likely the rationale behind President Trump's recent offer. However, this is a suboptimal strategy for at least three reasons.

First, Denmark and Greenland are not willing to sell. The vast bulk of the Danish political elite has accepted that Greenlanders decide Greenland's fate. The current law governing the relationship between the two countries, which draws broad support from both sides of the Danish Parliament, stipulates that the Greenlanders "constitute a people under international law with a right to self-determination," and basically spells out the steps that Greenland would have to take to become independent.²⁰ That is why the Danish prime minister's response to the president's offer was that "Greenland is not for sale. Greenland

is not Danish. Greenland belongs to Greenland.”²¹ At the same time, gaining full independence is a project that unites most of Greenland’s 56,000 inhabitants. Polls show that the Greenlanders overwhelmingly favour independence, and that most Greenlandic parties in their parliament want to become a sovereign state.²² They would hardly be satisfied with simply replacing being part of one country (Denmark) with becoming part of another (the United States). This extensive autonomy and roadmap to (and desire for) independence set Greenland apart from most other territories in the Arctic, and have unique implications for its security dynamics.

Second, even if it were politically viable, buying Greenland would not make fiscal sense. In the current situation, the United States can pursue its interests in Greenland. Securing the American position may require new initiatives to strengthen the bond with Denmark, and finding ways to indirectly support Greenland economically. But the overall cost of these initiatives will be well below the annual cost of supporting Greenland (an estimated cost of at least 5.5 billion Danish kroner, or \$870 million) that the United States would suddenly have to cover if it bought the island.²³ Arguably, the current setup gives the United States the best of both worlds: control over a militarily important territory, without the hassle and expenses involved in running a welfare state under Arctic conditions.

Finally, public discussions of this idea undermine America’s relationship with Greenland. There is a long history of Greenlanders not being consulted when Danes and Americans make sweeping decisions with wide repercussions for the locals. This was especially the case during the Cold War, when Indigenous communities were moved from their homes and hunting grounds with only a few days’ notice to make room for an American base, and nuclear weapons were placed on the island in secret.²⁴ The idea that Denmark could sell Greenland in “a large real-estate deal” reinvigorates these memories.²⁵ It gives the impression that the United States will once again ignore the opinions of the Greenlanders, making them less open to American overtures.

What to do?

Instead of offering to buy Greenland, the United States should pursue an engagement strategy that combines targeted concessions with clever diplomacy to get the Danes and Greenlanders to cooperate. Luckily, if approached correctly, both nations are very interested in supporting US security interests, as they are broadly shared – especially in Copenhagen. The key will be to see this not as a zero-sum game, but as a win-win-win situation.

Keeping the United States involved in Europe and maintaining a close relationship with Washington are the core interests driving Danish foreign and security policy. Consequently, all recent Danish governments, regardless of their ideological persuasion, have viewed the American-led wars of the past decades as opportunities to demonstrate the value of continued cooperation within NATO and a good bilateral relationship with Denmark specifically. Denmark has thus been among the most active European countries in these conflicts, losing more troops per capita (43, out of a national population of 5.8 million) in Afghanistan than even the United States.²⁶

Copenhagen sees Greenland as another arena in which it can forge a stronger relationship with Washington. Denmark will be interested in linking its efforts in Greenland to the wider burden-sharing debate in NATO. Denmark will see initiatives that protect the American presence on the island as being in its own interest if it can use Greenland to lessen the American critique of its low defense budget (scheduled to reach 1.5% of its GDP in 2023).²⁷ The United States should also reassure the Danes that they will not be sidelined from discussions about Greenland or kept in the dark about US activities on the island.

Greenland is interested in international recognition and foreign investments. Being recognized as an equal partner is essential for the Greenlanders, who are sensitive (and, given their history, often rightly so) about being left on the sidelines when decisions about their future are being made. At the same time, Greenland needs foreign investment. The island's poor fiscal situation is the one thing keeping it within the Kingdom of Denmark, as it cannot sustain itself without economic and administrative support from Copenhagen.²⁸ Chinese companies have long been the main outside investors on the island, but this is more the result of a lack of options than a deeply felt connection to Beijing. Greenlandic governments have previously announced that a future independent Greenland should become a NATO member, and the United States would therefore be a natural partner if the interest were reciprocated.²⁹

There are three cost-effective options for the American efforts. First, the United States should offer to pay for the infrastructure that it needs to secure its position, and it should ensure that these facilities can also be used for civilian purposes. Civilians already use some of the current military installations.³⁰ On an island with sparse infrastructure, access to dual-use facilities can give an important boost to the local economy, and make it obvious that Greenland can benefit from the American presence.

Second, the United States should create additional economic opportunities for Greenland. The United States has already enhanced economic cooperation

by providing a small economic aid package for specific sectors in Greenland, and by ensuring that the service contract at Thule Air Base is once again given to a Danish-Greenlandic company.³¹ The next step is to ensure that Western investments crowd out Chinese companies. This can be done by establishing an Arctic investment fund in cooperation with Denmark.

Finally, the United States should seek concrete ways of enhancing cooperation between Greenland and American public and private institutions in areas such as education, health care, science, and business development. A framework for trilateral talks about such issues – the Joint Committee – has existed for fifteen years, but it has never led to concrete outcomes, much to the disappointment of the Greenlandic political class.³² Reinvigorating the Joint Committee, and using it as a way to get American investments into Greenland, would be an easy way to strengthen American-Danish-Greenlandic ties.

Greenland is once again becoming a crucial issue on the American security agenda, and it is time for the United States to secure its position on the island. However, the United States cannot just follow the same approach as it does in other parts of the Arctic. The circumstances in Greenland differ from those in other parts of the Arctic, mainly due to its geographical location and unique constitutional setup. Offering to buy the island is not the best way for the United States to achieve its strategic goals either. Not only will it be unlikely to succeed, but it will also make the United States worse off than it is today. Only proper engagement with Denmark and Greenland, based on the unique conditions on the island, can produce a win-win-win situation.

Notes

This chapter is a revised version of an article previously published by War on the Rocks under the title “Let’s (Not) Make a Deal: Geopolitics and Greenland.” Text and arguments are reused with permission from the publisher.

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14

Changing Strategic Geography in the GIUK Gap

Rebecca Pincus

Twentieth-century maritime history demonstrates the enduring strategic importance of the Greenland-Iceland-UK (GIUK) gap, even in the face of rapid technological advances in warfare.¹ There is a reason that the pre-eminent US military alliance is called the ‘North Atlantic Treaty Organization’ (NATO) – at the close of the Second World War and the dawn of the Cold War, the North Atlantic was the hinge upon which the global balance of power swung.²

The Second World War dramatically underlined the strategic importance of the North Atlantic and the GIUK gap. A key German line of effort in the conflict centred on cutting transatlantic sea lines of communication (SLOCs), by interdicting enough Allied shipping to starve the UK and sever its transatlantic lifelines. As one US news article explained in 1941, Iceland ‘has become this country’s most vital defense outpost in the Atlantic’.³ The war against Germany proved the importance of controlling the North Atlantic to winning a war in Europe, and with Germany’s defeat and the rise of the Soviet Union as the new threat, the GIUK region remained an area of intense focus. In 1948, during exploratory talks in DC, participants concurred that ‘there would be serious gaps in any North Atlantic security arrangements which did not include Norway, Denmark, Iceland, and Greenland’.⁴ Evidence for the high value placed on the GIUK by the US government comes from the priority given to the inclusion of Denmark, Iceland, and Norway during the early days of the NATO alliance.

During the Cold War, advancements in submarine and missile technology shifted strategic considerations in the GIUK region. While ranging German submarines were a threat to transatlantic convoys in the Second World War, now any Soviet ballistic submarine (SSBN) that escaped through the GIUK gap could threaten the homeland, increasing the importance of ongoing anti-submarine operations in the region. In 1966, Naval Facility (NAVFAC) Keflavik was established to process sound surveillance system (SOSUS) arrays across the GIUK gap.

In the 1980s, the US Navy’s Maritime Strategy called for US naval forces to pressure the Soviet Navy north of the GIUK gap, inside its bastions, to force Soviet attack submarines back into home waters to defend the SSBN fleet.

Admiral Watkins specifically invoked the Second World War and the Battle of the Atlantic, arguing that ‘this aggressive action ensures that we prevent such losses as the Germans inflicted on allied shipping.’

The intense US focus on the GIUK region and the adjacent Kola Peninsula area, which peaked during the 1980s with the Maritime Strategy and ‘forward defense’, resulted in an equally sharp downturn in interest following the collapse of the Soviet Union. For nearly two decades, the US and NATO presence in the GIUK region was permitted to atrophy. In 2006, the US pulled its P-3s out of Keflavik, Iceland. As the US commander explained during the ceremony marking the country’s departure, ‘in the height of the Cold War, this was the place to be to protect against Soviet submarines ... Now the world has changed’.⁵

GIUK is back

In retrospect, the US decision to close Air Station Keflavik was short-sighted. Just a year later, Russian President Vladimir Putin delivered a fiery speech in Munich, declaring that NATO expansion ‘represents a serious provocation’. He went on to accuse the US of having ‘overstepped its national borders in every way’.⁶ In 2008, Russian forces attacked Georgia, and it became clear that, riding a wave of oil revenue and led by Putin, Russia was again challenging US leadership. The Russian resurgence has once again drawn attention to the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom-Norway (GIUK–N) gap and its strategic islands. The majority of the Russian submarine force continues to be concentrated in the Kola Peninsula, making this area central to Russia’s second-strike nuclear capability.⁷

Given the long history of the GIUK region in the major conflicts of the twentieth century, it is no surprise that the return of great power competition contains echoes from the past. A clear example is the US return to Keflavik: the Department of Defense pledged to spend \$57 million in 2020 to build up the airfield in order to accommodate two P-8 squadrons at any time.⁸ According to media reports, the US Navy called the Keflavik base commander a month after the Russian annexation of Crimea to ask about returning and upgrading the base.⁹

Leading voices have also returned to scrutiny of the GIUK region. Admiral James Foggo has identified the ‘fourth Battle of the Atlantic’ as a major threat to NATO and the US.¹⁰ In 2019, Magnus Nordenman argued, in an echo of earlier strategic thinking:

... the Russian navy is increasingly well placed and equipped to operate in the far north Atlantic to strike at vital ports, airfields,

and command-and-control centers that are needed to bring in US and NATO reinforcements coming across the North Atlantic. If those cross-Atlantic reinforcements were stopped or delayed in coming ashore, NATO and the United States could very well lose a confrontation with Russia.¹¹

The importance of the GIUK region has persisted through paradigmatic changes in military technology, including the development of submarines, long-range aircraft, intercontinental missiles, and nuclear weapons. That the region has remained a key area in US strategy throughout illustrates the geographical importance of protecting transatlantic SLOCs and achieving sea control in a European conflict scenario, whether 75 years ago against Germany, 40 years ago against the Soviet Union, or today against Putin's Russia.

I argue that, in addition to being crucial in a transatlantic context, the GIUK–N region is taking on an additional level of *transpolar* strategic significance. The decline of Arctic sea ice provides a new perspective on strategic geography in the region.

The GIUK Gap as the gateway to the Arctic

Historically, the GIUK gap has been important because it sits astride transatlantic SLOCs connecting Europe and North America. But the GIUK–N region also straddles trans-Arctic routes connecting Asia to Europe and North America. While the transatlantic importance of the region is indexed to the threat level in Europe, the emerging trans-Arctic importance is primarily economic in nature. The decline in Arctic sea ice points to a future in which the GIUK–N region will assume a different role in maritime and naval strategy.

Until this point, sea ice has blocked regular use of the Arctic Ocean by outsiders – although the Indigenous Arctic communities have practiced subsistence hunting and fishing across sea ice for millennia. Whaling and fishing in marginal waters, limited coastal shipping, icebreaking, scientific research, and submarine activity have comprised the bulk of the fairly limited, intermittent, and low levels of outside activity in the maritime Arctic.

As the sea ice declines, its blocking function will diminish and the Arctic Ocean will be increasingly integrated into the global ocean transportation system. The established shipping lanes that are used to move goods around the globe will be reshuffled, as the Arctic shipping lanes divert some traffic from its current routes.¹² The Arctic Ocean will increasingly be used as a passage between other parts of the world, in particular parts of Asia and Europe.¹³ As the recent Department of Defense Arctic Strategy acknowledges, the Arctic Ocean is becoming an emerging strategic corridor. The strategy describes the

GIUK–N gap as ‘a strategic corridor ... for competition’, and notes that ‘the Arctic is a potential avenue for expanded great power competition and aggression spanning between two key regions of ongoing competition ... the Indo-Pacific and Europe – and the U.S. homeland’.¹⁴

Emerging shipping routes across the Arctic will face many challenges, including hazardous weather and sparse infrastructure.¹⁵ However, the eventual arrival of trans-Arctic shipping will have commercial and strategic ramifications for the global economy. It is not yet clear how much traffic will be diverted to Arctic routes in the coming decades as the sea ice continues to decline. Many factors will affect the ultimate volume of Arctic shipping, including economic factors like commodity prices and insurance premiums, as well as regulatory requirements.¹⁶

Arctic shipping routes also offer an important strategic alternative for China’s dependence on the Straits of Malacca. By potentially enabling Chinese resource imports to bypass the American presence in Singapore – and providing an entirely different source of oil (Russia’s Arctic zone) and supply route – the Arctic region may be an emerging and attractive solution to China’s ‘Malacca Dilemma’.¹⁷ From this perspective, Arctic shipping takes on greater strategic and military significance for both China and the US in the context of great power competition.¹⁸

While considerable uncertainty remains regarding the future development of Arctic shipping and industry, the potential is clearly enormous. The opportunities provided by an opening Arctic region are desirable on grand strategic terms, for China’s desire to find a solution to the Malacca Dilemma, and for Russia’s ambition to build economic strength and regain great power status. In other words, both Moscow and Beijing have motivations to develop Arctic industry and shipping beyond cost terms.¹⁹ As a result, both may seek to shape the future course of Arctic development and governance, as well as influence the GIUK region’s small and quasi-states.²⁰ The importance of the Arctic to its acknowledged great power competitors means that the US must also re-evaluate its strategy towards the region.

A new transpolar perspective

A shift in geostrategic thinking is required to see the Arctic as a future corridor for maritime activity. For thousands of years, Arctic sea ice has been the dominant organizing characteristic of the Northern Hemisphere, and has played a major role in global weather and climate. However, it has been in unmistakable and accelerating decline since the 1980s.²¹ As the region opens

up, both the Bering Strait and the GIUK–N gap will become important gateways to access and transit through the strategic Arctic corridor.

The Bering Strait is the major chokepoint controlling access to the Arctic from the northern Pacific. A narrow waterway between the US and Russia, the Bering Strait is strategically inflexible. However, the GIUK region, on the Atlantic side of the Arctic Ocean, is far more complex and subject to power politics.

From a geostrategic perspective, there are far more states present in the GIUK–N sub-region. There are also places with unusual or evolving sovereignty. Iceland has perhaps the least complicated and most central position. Norway lies on the eastern side of the GIUK–N region, and the Norwegian islands of Jan Mayen and the Svalbard archipelago (including Bear Island) are central. The Svalbard archipelago is Norwegian, although under the terms of the 1920 treaty, Norway enjoys only limited sovereignty – it cannot, for example, use the islands for military purposes or exclude parties to the treaty. On the western side, while Greenland is a part of the Kingdom of Denmark, it is moving gradually towards independence, and the Greenlandic government shares authority with Copenhagen. The future relationship between Greenland and Denmark is unclear. The Faroe Islands are also part of the Kingdom of Denmark, and enjoy limited self-rule as well – although, as with Greenland, there is an active independence movement.

Evolving small-state and quasi-state political relationships in the GIUK region, combined with its new geographical position as a gateway to the Arctic, make it ripe for interference from major powers. In particular, as China pursues its Arctic strategy, which includes gaining influence in Arctic decision-making, the GIUK region may be an appealing area for Beijing. It may seek a position that would enable it to balance against the dominant position that the US and Russia have in the Bering Strait.²² China and Russia also appear to be developing a strategic alignment in the Arctic, although this is a fractured relationship with powerful opposing forces.²³

Climate change is changing the longstanding strategic paradigm that emphasizes the role of the GIUK region in the event of conflict with an opponent in Northern Europe. Rather than the latitudinal transatlantic context, the new axis will be transpolar and longitudinal. Freer surface access to the Arctic Ocean will permit the reshaping of the maritime and naval relations between Asia and Europe. A new strategic priority will be to ensure the free flow of trade through the Arctic and the development of maritime routes in the region. The posture and considerations of the NATO alliance may also be affected.

A shift in naval strategy should result. For many decades, the GIUK–N gap has been understood in a transatlantic context. It has been a critical area for sea control in the North Atlantic, and also key to NATO strategy for the Soviet Union and Russia. While this role will remain important, the GIUK–N gap will gain additional significance as a gateway to the Arctic.

The Arctic is unique in that it is an emerging region of importance: it already has high political and strategic military importance, and will continue to grow in economic and military value throughout the century. The Arctic contains a convenient reserve of resources, some of the US's closest allies, a large and valuable chunk of Russian territory, and a region of clear interest to China.

The Arctic is therefore ripe for a naval presence mission, as the future of the region revolves around its emerging role in the world economy. The aim of such a mission would be to establish US naval presence, reassure allies, deter adversaries, and, importantly, maintain operational familiarity with the geography and conditions of the region.

The naval presence would also alter the temporal calculations. Like strategic deterrence, naval presence is an enduring mission with decadal timelines. The long-term effects of a sustained naval presence are capable of setting the rules of the road for state activity in a region. A naval presence supports and is closely linked to naval diplomacy. As J.J. Widen explains, 'in naval diplomacy, the aim is political influence and the target is the minds and perceptions of policy-makers in hostile and friendly Powers'.²⁴ As the Arctic Ocean undergoes drastic change, naval diplomacy is needed to stabilize and bound the political dislocations associated with that change.

Conclusion

The GIUK region is rapidly taking on a new significance, which will differ in important ways from the past. While transatlantic sea control objectives will remain important, waxing and waning with the balance of power in Europe, a new transpolar strategic paradigm will gain priority. As the Arctic grows in global economic importance, naval presence will be an increasingly important objective to ensure stability, freedom, and the rule of law.

Until now, the emphasis has been on the SLOCs and lines of latitude running from east to west between North America and Europe. As the Arctic opens, the centre of gravity will shift to the transpolar paradigm, and the longitudinal lines that run between the North Pacific and North Atlantic. Such a paradigmatic shift necessitates fresh strategic approaches and a longer, broader

vision for the role of naval presence in the GIUK region throughout the rest of the century.

Notes

This chapter is an abridged version of an article originally published as R. Pincus, "Towards a New Arctic: Changing Strategic Geography in the GIUK GAP," *The RUSI Journal* 165, no. 3 (2020): 50-58. The author is grateful to the editor of *The RUSI Journal* for the permission to reprint an abridged version.

¹ The GIUK gap lies at the edge of the Eastern Arctic, a region which is most often defined as the circle within 66° 34' N (although under the 1984 US Arctic Research and Policy Act (https://www.nsf.gov/geo/opp/arctic/iarpc/arc_res_pol_act.jsp, accessed 2 April 2020), the Arctic region includes the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands). The Arctic region therefore includes the Arctic Ocean proper, as well as the land territories of the US (Alaska), Canada, Denmark (Greenland), Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and Finland. The Arctic Circle runs through the Norwegian Sea, skimming the GIUK-N line.

² Magnus Nordenman uses a similar point in arguing about the importance of the North Atlantic to NATO. See the introduction to Magnus Nordenman, *The New Battle for the Atlantic: Emerging Naval Competition with Russia in the Far North* (Annapolis, MA: Naval Institute Press, 2019).

³ The National Week, 'Iceland: Key Point in Nation's Defense', 18 July 1941.

⁴ *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS), 1948, Vol. III, p. 159.

⁵ Naval Media Center Broadcasting Detachment Keflavik, 'Naval Air Station Keflavik Disestablishes After 45 Years', US Navy, 9 September 2006, <https://www.navy.mil/submit/display.asp?story_id=25499>, accessed 2 April 2020.

⁶ Vladimir Putin, 'Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy', *WikiSource*, 10 February 2007, <<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034>>, accessed 30 March 2020.

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⁸ Vala Hafstað, 'US Military to Invest Billions of ISK in Keflavik', *Iceland Monitor*, 24 June 2019, <https://icelandmonitor.mbl.is/news/politics_and_society/2019/06/24/us_military_to_invest_billions_of_isk_in_keflavik/>, accessed 2 April 2020.

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¹⁰ Vice Admiral James Foggo III and Alarik Fritz, 'The Fourth Battle of the Atlantic', *Proceedings*, US Naval Institute (Vol. 142, No. 6, June 2016).

¹¹ Nordenman, *The New Battle for the Atlantic*, Introduction.

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¹³ For a comprehensive discussion, see W. Østreg et al., *Shipping in Arctic Waters: A Comparison of the Northeast, Northwest and Trans Polar Passages* (London: Springer, 2013).

¹⁴ US Department of Defense, 'Report to Congress: Department of Defense Arctic Strategy', June 2019, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy, <<https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jun/06/2002141657/-1/-1/2019-DOD-ARCTIC-STRATEGY.PDF>>, accessed 2 April 2020.

¹⁵ See Protection of the Arctic Marine Environment (PAME), *Arctic Marine Shipping Assessment 2009 Report*, <https://oaarchive.arctic-council.org/handle/11374/54>.

¹⁶ Scott R. Stephenson and Laurence C. Smith, 'Influence of Climate Model Variability on Projected Arctic Shipping Futures', *Earth's Future* (Vol. 3, No. 11, October 2015), pp. 331–43.

¹⁷ For more discussion, see Li Xing and Rasmus Gjedssø Bertelsen, 'The Drivers of Chinese Arctic Interests: Political Stability and Energy and Transportation Security', *Arctic Yearbook*, 2013, <<https://arcticyearbook.com/arctic-yearbook/2013/2013-scholarly-papers/33-the-drivers-of-chinese-arctic-interests-political-stability-and-energy-and-transportation-security>>, accessed 2 April 2020.

¹⁸ For more on the Malacca Dilemma, see John J. Mearsheimer, 'The Gathering Storm: China's Challenge to US Power in Asia', *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* (Vol. 3, No. 4, Winter 2010), pp. 381–96.

¹⁹ See also Yun Sun, 'The Northern Sea Route: The Myth of Sino-Russian Cooperation', Stimson Center, December 2018, <<https://www.stimson.org/content/northern-sea-route>>, accessed 2 April 2020.

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²² See the State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 'China's Arctic Policy', January 2018, <http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-01/26/c_136926498.htm>, accessed 2 April 2020. For analysis of China's Arctic strategy, see Yun Sun, 'The Intricacy of China's Arctic Policy', Stimson Center, August 2018, <<https://www.stimson.org/content/intricacy-chinas-arctic-policy>>, accessed 2 April 2020.

²³ See Rebecca Pincus, 'Three-Way Power Dynamics in the Arctic', *Strategic Studies Quarterly* (Vol. 14, No. 1, Spring 2020), pp. 40-63.

²⁴ J.J. Widen, 'Naval Diplomacy – A Theoretical Approach', *Diplomacy and Statecraft* (Vol. 22, No. 4, December 2011), p. 717.

15

The UK's Arctic Defence Strategy and the Wider North

Duncan Depledge, Caroline Kennedy-Pipe, and James Rogers

The UK has increased its military activity in the Arctic. Indeed, it has pushed its Armed Forces deeper into the region. In 2020, the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force conducted operations close to Russia's Arctic Zone. The message to potential adversaries is clear: as the Arctic is transformed by climate change, the UK is ready and able to defend its interests, in concert with NATO and other close allies.

The UK Ministry of Defence's renewed focus on the Arctic represents a significant pivot in both awareness and posture. The genesis of this new attitude can be dated to eleven years ago, when Dr. Liam Fox, MP, the then-newly appointed Secretary of State for Defence (2010-2011) declared that:

We cannot forget that geographically the United Kingdom is a northern European country. Let me be clear, this is not about carving out spheres of influence: this is about working together on mutual interests. For too long, Britain has looked in every direction except its own backyard.¹

After nearly a decade of contentious expeditionary campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as escalating requirements for counterterrorism at home, perhaps the local neighbourhood had indeed been rather neglected. This was understandable to some degree, given the prevailing view that the Arctic was essentially a zone of peace and that, in the post-Cold War period, the Russian threat generally had receded. That was until the 2008 Russian incursion into Georgia. This signalled a renewed intent by Moscow to protect the 'near abroad', whether in the Caucasus or in more Northern domains. Consternation and controversy have, post-Georgia, also been stirred up by a combination of other factors. These include the so-called 'Gerasimov Doctrine', the overt modernization of the Russian Armed Forces, energy 'blackmail', as well as the 'success' of Russian policy in Syria. Western actions to remove the Syrian leader and Russian ally, Bashar al-Assad, were met with determination by President Putin. Special forces, air power, and mercenaries have all played a role in

ensuring the survival of the Syrian autocrat, and provide a powerful base for Russia in the Middle East. So it was not unexpected that even while a small contingent of British forces continued training for 'Arctic warfare' in Northern Norway (as British forces had done in larger numbers throughout much of the Cold War), and indeed still turned up for large-scale military exercises such as the Norwegian-led *Cold Response*, London's 2010 Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR) barely acknowledged, let alone prioritized, emerging strategic interests in the North Atlantic. This silence also applied to the Arctic, Scandinavia, and the Baltic. This area we have elsewhere termed the 'Wider North' to reflect UK defence interests.²

The 2015 SDSR delivered a similar lackadaisical approach to the region, even though British interests in the Arctic and throughout the Wider North had clearly grown since that 2010 iteration. The UK had published its first ever 'Arctic Policy Framework' (APF) in 2013, and was expressing greater unease about Russia's intent and ambition in its foreign and defence policy. The UK also signed several agreements with Oslo (its long-standing ally) to enhance defence cooperation, including in the High North. The Northern Group of Defence Ministers (NG) and the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF), both British initiatives, were established, and their memberships included almost all the Nordic and Baltic countries.³ Meanwhile, British forces joined two new military exercises in the Wider North: NATO's *Dynamic Mongoose* (from 2012) and the Nordic-led air exercise *Arctic Challenge* (from 2013).

Despite all this activity, London continued to downplay its defence interests in the High North and Arctic. A second APF, published in 2018, was emblematic of this. In the forty-page document, just one paragraph discussed defence and security issues. While this, on the face of it, seems somewhat surprising, one must recognize that the APF was essentially drafted by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's (now the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's) Polar Regions Department (PRD). Before 2013, the PRD was reluctant even to produce a detailed paper on British interest in the Arctic because of political concerns that London might be accused of overreaching into areas where Arctic countries had long claimed primacy.

Under pressure from Parliament's Environmental Audit Committee, as well as other stakeholders, the PRD eventually acquiesced. However, even then, the PRD preferred to highlight and push British soft power in the Arctic, with a specific focus on UK scientific and economic interests. This approach chimed with the mainstream understanding of the international context of Arctic politics and the generally cooperative spirit of inter-state relations. Responding to this mood music, the PRD sought to promote a benign image of the UK as a

friend to the whole Arctic: this included Russia. By skirting around emerging defence concerns, the UK hoped to avoid antagonizing the Arctic states in general, but Russia in particular. During what was a particularly turbulent period in the Ministry of Defence's finances, the scientific and economic approach also avoided heaping yet further expectations and demand on the Armed Forces.

Since 2018, however, the conversation in London has shifted. British defence ministers and military chiefs have discussed, with greater openness, anxieties about the situation in the Wider North. This was prompted, in no small part, by the House of Commons Defence Committee inquiries on 'Defence in the Arctic', which took place between 2016 and 2018. As the Committee concluded, "although the region [the Arctic] is characterised by low tension, it cannot be taken for granted that it will remain this way".⁴ That regional warning was connected to the global; the Committee reminded the Government that if the UK was to continue with the claim that it was a leading defence nation, able to deploy anywhere in the world, then it must maintain the capability to operate in the Arctic and in the High North.

The Government responded by agreeing to publish a 'Defence Arctic Strategy', which would, it was claimed, "put the Arctic and the High North central to the security of the United Kingdom".⁵ The strategy emphasized four key elements. These were a Royal Marines presence in Norway, a standing commitment to support air policing over Iceland, maritime patrol over the North Atlantic and High North, and regular under-ice submarine deployments.

In the same period, Britain's military activity across the Wider North also escalated. Understandably, the initial focus was placed on the defence of the Baltic states in the aftermath of 2014 and Russia's aggressive actions in eastern Ukraine, as well as the annexation of Crimea. In 2016, the UK agreed to lead NATO's enhanced forward presence operation in Estonia. A major UK-led JEF exercise (*Baltic Protector*) in the Baltic Sea followed in May 2019.

Since the announcement of the Defence Arctic Strategy – which was later renamed the "UK Defence Contribution in the High North" – there has been a similar uptick in activities across the High North. Notable amongst these activities was the decision taken in 2018 to commit the Royal Marines to undertaking cold weather training in Norway for the next ten years. This was of some significance in planning terms. Prior to 2018, neither London nor Oslo could ever be completely certain that the Royal Marines would return twelve months later. Indeed, there have been suggestions that earlier cold weather training was cancelled precisely to claw back some of the money that was lost when the value of the pound plummeted after Britain voted to leave the European Union. That ten-year commitment also meant that the UK and

Norwegian forces are better able to plan joint training. As defence officials in both London and Oslo have been keen to emphasize, the UK is now not only training in Norway, but also ‘with’ Norway.

When announcing the Defence Arctic Strategy, the then Defence Secretary, Gavin Williamson, also highlighted the central role that Britain’s new fleet of P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft, based out of RAF Lossiemouth in Scotland, would play in the High North. The RAF has so far received four aircraft, with a further five due to be delivered by the close of 2021. With Oslo deciding to procure the same aircraft in 2016, British and Norwegian defence officials have, for several years now, been exploring opportunities for sharing logistics and support bases. This is to reduce costs and increase operational effectiveness. Such cooperation builds upon the existing air force collaboration that was established in 2013 for operating F-35s. In conjunction with the United States, which operates P-8s from Keflavík in Iceland, something of a P-8 ‘club’ has emerged, coalesced around a shared ambition to enhance maritime security both in the North Atlantic and across the High North.

Another notable development is the recent activity that occurred both at sea and in the air over the course of 2020. In March, a British Type 23 frigate (HMS *Kent*) was part of a combined US and UK task group, which undertook an anti-submarine exercise in the Barents Sea. Another Royal Navy Type 23 (HMS *Sutherland*) sailed the Barents Sea in September, this time supported by two RAF Typhoons, whilst leading a multinational task group that again included US warships, as well as the Norwegian *Fridtjof Nansen*-class frigate HNoMS *Thor Heyerdahl*. The task group was also supported by American, Norwegian, and Danish aircraft.

Both exercises were described by the Royal Navy as illustrative of the UK’s commitment to vital strategic interests in the High North. Such interests include the need to uphold freedom of access and navigation in the region. Indeed, as the current Defence Secretary, Ben Wallace, has phrased it:

[It is] vital to preserve freedom of navigation when melting ice caps are creating new shipping lanes and increasing the risk of states looking to militarize and monopolize international borders.⁶

These exercises occurred against a backdrop of increasing anxiety, amongst the UK and its allies, about Russia’s designs for the region. Concern focused on both the militarization (or remilitarization) of the Russian Arctic, and the Kremlin’s mooted plan to impose restrictions on foreign warships sailing through the Northern Sea Route, in contravention of the UN Law of the Sea

Convention. More broadly, the joint military exercises suggest that the current British government has come to perceive the Arctic as a space in which it can signal its displeasure about Moscow's activities across the Wider North, behaviour which has included increased submarine activity and air patrols near UK sovereign territory. But there is also a strong desire to deter any further aggression from Russia. Thus, British involvement in these exercises should also be understood as part of a broader strategy pushing back against a range of malign actions by the Kremlin against the UK. This would of course include the infamous use of outlawed chemicals during the 2018 Salisbury poisonings.

At the opening of the twenty-first century, it would have been difficult to imagine the Ministry of Defence devising an Arctic strategy, let alone envisage British forces operating so near to Russia's Arctic approaches. While elements of the British Armed Forces continued with their annual 'Arctic warfare' training and exercises such as *Cold Response*, there was a strong sense within the UK defence community that they did so more to retain core capabilities, enhance interoperability with NATO allies, and offer Norway reassurance that after years of fighting in hot and dusty places, Britain was still a more than capable stakeholder in the High North. From Oslo's perspective, with mounting unease about Russia's geopolitical resurgence, convincing key allies like the UK (named by Prime Minister Erna Solberg as Norway's "most important ally in Europe") that the High North mattered was an important part of its effort to bring NATO's attention back to its core task: that of territorial defence in Europe.

Today, Britain's enhanced military presence in the High North and Baltic tells a very different story to that of the Arctic as a place of unalloyed harmony. When Russia invaded Crimea in 2014, it undoubtedly reshaped thinking about the vulnerabilities of the Wider North. The Ministry of Defence has demonstrated greater willingness to publicly discuss and challenge Russia's destabilizing moves across the area. More recently, figures such as Tobias Ellwood, MP, the chair of the House of Commons Defence Committee, and First Sea Lord Admiral Tony Radakin have also expressed mounting concern (which is shared by other NATO allies and partners) about ongoing Chinese activity in the Arctic, although the precise nature of any military threat posed by Beijing remains hazy. Rather it is Chinese commercial interests, its strategic alliance with Moscow on energy, and its economic penetration of assets in places such as Iceland that all give cause for wariness as to longer-term ambitions.

Perhaps the most important question now is whether the UK's military presence in the Arctic can be sustained. It is certainly no secret that the UK is facing a period of turbulence as it ponders its post-Brexit future. There is also

the future of the United Kingdom to consider as Scottish nationalists pursue a second referendum on independence. There has been a spirited campaign by the Scottish government to present the country as the predominant near-neighbour to the Arctic. Scottish pretensions to cultural, economic, and energy synergies with Arctic states suggest a very different agenda to that of Westminster. As the Scottish First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, has quipped, “is the nation of Scotland not geographically closer to the Arctic than it is to London”? If Scotland does achieve independence in the coming years, Westminster will undoubtedly have to adjust its strategic vision for the Arctic to account for the presence of a new sovereign state in what was previously considered its own backyard. However, most importantly of all, no one has yet been able to grasp fully the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic for defence and security. Even having embarked on an ‘Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy’, with a view to determining the future focus and shape of the Armed Forces, what Britain (or any other country) will be willing to do, let alone able to do, in defence and security terms over the longer term in a post-COVID world is likely to remain an open question for some time yet.

That said, whatever comes out of the Integrated Review is likely to result in the UK Armed Forces placing a greater focus on the development of high-tech capabilities, especially those that seek to exploit recent advances in remotely operated systems and artificial intelligence (AI). Although seemingly futuristic in character, technologies, such as military drones, are already becoming common in parts of the Arctic and Wider North. Russia has led the way with drone deployments in the Arctic. The US military recently began operating Global Hawks from Alaska. Iceland’s leasing of Israeli Hermes unmanned aircraft systems (UAS) and the Danish military’s experimentation with surveillance UAS to secure Greenland are also representative of a shift towards autonomous drone systems. In line with these developments, the RAF is expected to deploy its new fleet of advanced Protector military drones to fulfill Arctic missions (for example, for surveillance in the GIUK-N Gap) in partnership with key allies, such as Norway. These drones could be flown from RAF Lossiemouth in Scotland, Keflavík in Iceland, Bodø in Norway, or perhaps even Thule in Greenland to ensure that the UK fulfills its security obligations, safeguards its national interests, and strengthens defence cooperation with its regional allies in the High North.

It is indisputable that the return of great power competition between NATO and Russia in Europe, together with China's emergence as a (and perhaps the) strategic competitor to the West and Britain's withdrawal from the EU, has encouraged London to re-evaluate the challenges it faces in its neighbourhood. This has fostered a material increase in the size of the military activity in the Wider North, and there is ambition to, at the very least, sustain this. Some experts have even raised the possibility of deploying the UK's *Queen Elizabeth*-class aircraft carriers for operations in the High North. Therefore, despite the challenges presented by COVID-19 and Brexit, it should not come as a surprise if the High North, as part of an arc of concern throughout the Wider North, remains a more prominent feature of UK defence strategy in the years ahead.

Notes

This chapter is a revised version of an article by Duncan Depledge originally published in *Luftled*, accessible at https://issuu.com/konsis/docs/luftled_nr_3_2020. The authors are grateful to the editor of *Luftled* for the permission to reprint a revised and updated version.

¹ GOV.UK, "Defence Secretary launches new forum of northern European countries," 10 November 2010, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/defence-secretary-launches-new-forum-of-northern-european-countries> (last accessed 4 March 2021).

² Duncan Depledge, Caroline Kennedy-Pipe and James Rogers, "The UK and the Arctic: Forward Defence," in L. Heininen, H. Exner-Pirot and J. Barnes (eds.), *Arctic Yearbook 2019* (Northern Research Forum: Online, 2019).

³ The NG was a forum created in 2010 for Northern European countries to discuss shared security concerns, including in the High North. The JEF was established in 2014 to act as a UK-led multinational rapid reaction force. The JEF stressed interoperability and had a strong focus on Northeast Europe (although it also sought the capability to project power globally).

⁴ House of Commons Defence Committee, *On Thin Ice: UK Defence in the Arctic*, <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmdfence/388/38802.htm> (last accessed 4 March 2021).

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16

The Great Illusion Revisited: The Future of the European Union's Arctic Engagement

Andreas Raspotnik

Connoisseurs of the EU's past Arctic endeavours are well aware of the region's marginal importance in day-to-day EU-uropean political life. Although a dedicated set of Arctic-related documents has been developed by the EU's main institutions since 2007-2008, the region has not yet gained a prominent place in the hallways of Brussels.¹ But the Union's geographic and strategic blind spot is in a state of flux – literally, due to global climate change, but also figuratively, due to increased global awareness. As once famously put by former Norwegian foreign minister Jonas Gahr Støre, “Geography is changing – even though we cannot change geography.”²

However, change is not only inherent in any system. It is also in the eye of the beholder, not only with regard to what is changing, but also in how one distinguishes minor change from fundamental change, trends from transformations, and perceived change from real change. This holds particularly true for the Arctic region and the European Union's perception of it. A key value of the EU's Arctic policy and its several updates is the Union's chance to regularly reflect on its Arctic commitment, engage with regional and Arctic-relevant stakeholders, and re-think its influence, presence, and interests. The first signals that another recalibration of the EU's Arctic policy is in motion. A new Special Envoy for Arctic matters has started his work in April 2020; a public consultation on *the way forward for the European Union's Arctic policy* has been launched by the European Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) in July 2020; a study assessing the EU's regional ecological and economic impact is currently underway; and the European Parliament (EP) has released an analysis on *a balanced Arctic policy for the EU*. Most importantly, the European Council invited the Commission and the High Representative to update the EU's Arctic policy in light of (perceived) shifts in Arctic geopolitics and economics. We should also not forget that

Ursula von der Leyen initially branded her Commission a *geopolitical* one, which might suggest mobilizing the EU's soft power instruments for harder power projection on a changing world stage.³

An update is the act of making something more suitable for use by adding new information or changing its design. Yet, what does that mean for the future of the EU's Arctic policy? In answering this question, three aspects should be highlighted. First, a lack of internal attractiveness and external recognition continues to impede the EU's Arctic engagement. Second, providing new information needs to reflect the changing geopolitical realities of and in the Arctic, perceived or real. Third, the European Parliament can give direction to a new Arctic policy document with a geopolitical touch.

The Brand Image Problem of the EU's Arctic Engagement

The EU is an Arctic actor. Its Arctic policy documents have convincingly demonstrated the EU's very own *Arcticness* – from the Union's geographical and functional Arctic presence, to a monetarized (= funding for regional development and research) and ecological (= EU-ropes' Arctic footprint) presence, to highlight a few. There is currently also a good awareness of Arctic realities and sensitivities among the handful of EU officials who are directly involved in Arctic affairs. Moreover, and probably most importantly, the EU has followed its own Arctic instructions by making strong commitments in areas that are essential to the EU's Arctic policy. The European Green Deal might cross one's mind first. However, the EU's budget has also seen specific items aimed at the development of Northern regions, and Horizon Europe, the EU's next funding programme for research and innovation (2021-2027), is shaped to comprehensively cover Arctic (research) needs. Ever since the last policy document on the Arctic from 2016, the EU has continuously re-confirmed itself as an Arctic actor, making space now for a new policy statement in 2021.

And yet, the EU's Arctic engagement has a serious brand image problem, both internally and externally. Internally, the Arctic and everything involved remains a marginal topic, despite the broad array of decision-making powers and autonomy that the EU holds in Arctic matters. Although the EU has in fact greatly contributed to the production (via research funding) and aggregation (via various assessments, reports, and coordination) of knowledge about the region, this information is not necessarily absorbed by all relevant policymakers and does not facilitate any kind of broader attention in Brussels. Externally, a lack of regional recognition still undermines the EU's Arctic appearance. This might be inherent in the EU's multi-level institutional set-up and the related complexity in the interplay between the supranational and the

intergovernmental levels. The special nature of the EU as a political animal *sui generis* and the complicated division of competences between the EU and its Member States are not only difficult to grasp publicly, but are also challenging to integrate into – for example – the Arctic Council’s modus operandi.

On top of that, actorness requires conditions that are favourable for the attainment of a goal – an opportunity, the necessity to act, or even a certain attractiveness that goes beyond simple recognition. Apparently, it is difficult for the EU to convince both a broader EU-ropean and Arctic audience on why and how enhanced involvement in Arctic affairs is required, and what role the EU could play for the future of the region.

Which Arctic are we talking about?

In a similar brief from September 2019, Adam Stępień and I argued that “an update of the EU’s Arctic policy has to be based on realistic foresights and the acknowledgement of the actual role of the EU in the region and its capability to make a difference.”⁴ Here, I want to provide some food for reflection on the EU’s Arctic capabilities, considering recent developments.

A recurring topic of the EU’s Arctic policy, and analyses thereof, concerns the geographical reach of such policy. Should it predominantly focus on the European Arctic, cover the entire Circumpolar North, or be a mixture of both? Inevitably, arguments can be found for all three perspectives. Given the complexity of the Arctic, one wonders though if a single Arctic policy is simply too small for an area of 14.5 million km². In the end, the EU holds its strongest presence in, and is most closely connected to, the European Arctic.⁵ In many ways, the European Arctic is the most significant region in the Arctic. Its eastern part – the Barents region – covers Northern Norway, the two Member States of Sweden and Finland, as well as northwest Russia; inhabits about 5.5 million people; and holds solid economic prospects with respect to the exploitation of resources (oil, gas, mining, forestry, etc.), maritime transportation, and tourism. As home to the Northern Dimension and the Barents Cooperation, it also has a long, and rather successful, history of cooperation efforts and policies with Russia. The European Arctic’s western part comprises Norway, the Faroe Islands, Iceland, and Greenland, and is often illustrated as EU-rope’s gate to the Arctic Ocean, with rich (and sustainable) fish stocks, and a high potential in the aquaculture and mining industries.

So far so good; however, a truly geopolitical European Union might consider the entire Arctic as a region in which to advance and meet its global

strategic objectives, from ensuring the security of its citizens and territory, to targeting governmental, economic, societal, and climate/energy fragility, and to supporting cooperative regional orders based on international law. Or in the words of the 2016 Global Strategy:

...the EU has a strategic interest in the Arctic remaining a low-tension area, with ongoing cooperation ensured by the Arctic Council, a well-functioning legal framework, and solid political and security cooperation. The EU will contribute to this through enhanced work on climate action and environmental research, sustainable development, telecommunications, and search & rescue, as well as concrete cooperation with Arctic states, institutions, indigenous peoples and local communities.⁶

One can assume that an updated EU Arctic policy will remind an international audience of the Union's Arctic objectives and competences, and will be built around the three familiar themes of climate change, sustainable development, and international cooperation. This will involve a mixture that covers challenges in both the European and broader Circumpolar Arctic, with a sustainable and low-tension Arctic as the Union's key priority.⁷ The public consultation process, as well as the new footprint assessment, will further provide updated, and maybe also new, information on the EU's comprehensive engagement in and with the region. So, what is new on the EU's Northern front?

A Changing European Union in a Changing Arctic

The Arctic has changed since the EU's last policy document was issued in 2016, and frankly, so has the European Union. The Arctic remains the ground zero of climate change, and fairy tales about an Arctic economic boom resurface every few months. Arctic cooperation is still considered a successful, international example of cooperation efforts between stakeholders who all share the basic interests to preserve and protect the Arctic environment and to promote sustainable regional development. Arctic security challenges tackle questions of climate change and environmental protection, and are not primarily discussed in terms of overlapping territorial claims and spheres of influence. And yet, Arctic high politics exists and the region is increasingly becoming a focal point of great power competition, or at least the perception thereof. This does not concern rivalries *over* the Arctic region itself, but increased global geopolitical tensions between the US and China, and Russia and the 'West', all with specific Arctic references. This competition was most prominently expressed by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and his concerns

regarding Chinese regional activities and Russia's constraints on freedom of navigation along the Northern Sea Route. Moreover, we also observe an increasing military rearmament, large-scale military exercises by both Russia and NATO, and incidents of GPS jamming in Northern Norway or the hacking of the e-mails of Members of the Norwegian Parliament. The world is about to get less multilateral and more multipolar, and the Arctic is in the thick of it.

The last five years have also brought substantial change to the European Union. Brexit might be the most tangible one, with yet to be defined implications for the EU's Arctic presence. But the EU has also felt the need to gradually adapt its posture on the increasingly conflicted world stage, be it because of the emerging great power rivalry, a changing transatlantic relationship, a more assertive China, or its continuous clashes with Russia. EU Member States have become more skeptical about China's global intentions, leading to a new convergence of EU-rope's assessment of the challenges that China poses to the Union. In a post-Crimea world, EU-Russia relations have shifted from fostering interdependence to managing vulnerabilities. The Ukraine crisis has affected the EU's understanding of its role in international relations, with diplomats in Brussels and EU-ropean capitals having started to embrace the idea that the EU must have a more strategic and geopolitical approach in its foreign policy. Ursula von der Leyen spoke of a geopolitical Commission, and French President Emmanuel Macron argued for a more decisive European Union with geopolitical awareness.

Geopolitics is nothing new to the European Union. Over the last years, the EU has steadily developed a tacit geopolitical discourse, exhibiting international ambitions alongside its own conceptualization of world order, core values, the rule of law, and good governance.⁸ From civilian to regulatory or market power, the labels of such *geopoliticized* European Union are plentiful. As such, the Global Strategy also changed the EU's perception of itself to that of a power broker, keen on defending its own interests, insisting on principled pragmatism in foreign policy and strengthening third countries' resilience.⁹ Thus, von der Leyen's geopolitical Commission did not come as a surprise, despite critics rightly pointing to the internal weaknesses and lacking competences that continuously affect the international effectiveness or enforcement of truly EU-ropean actions in cases of crisis – Libya, Ukraine, Belarus, and Nagorno-Karabakh, to just name a few.

In an Arctic context, considerations on matters of (soft) security have a long history in the EU. Both the establishment of the Barents Euro-Arctic

Council back in 1993 and the introduction of the Northern Dimension were aimed to foster relations with Russia in order to mutually tackle a broad range of security challenges in the European Arctic. Yet, over the last few years, hard security issues have only been mentioned in a general, implicit way: the strengthening of low-level regional and multilateral cooperation, the allegiance to international legal order, and the vision of a cooperative Arctic that is not affected by any spill-over effects.¹⁰ The Global Strategy took the same line, highlighting the Arctic as one potential venue of selectively engaging with Russia. Yet, the European Union is increasingly aware of the Arctic's changing geopolitical dynamics and the need to address those in light of regional and global security considerations.¹¹ Also, both Germany's updated Arctic policy (August 2019) and France's Defence Policy for the Arctic (October 2019) specifically respond to the changing security aspects of the Arctic.

Given the notion of a geostrategically changing Arctic, coupled with great power politics, one wonders about the European Union's related reaction in its next policy update. And what could the European Parliament's specific role be in this respect, as an institution that has often been bolder (or more naïve) in its Arctic statements as compared to its institutional counterparts? Could the EP be of help in mobilizing the EU's existing soft power instruments to further promote Arctic stability?

What role for the European Parliament?

Generally speaking, the EP's Arctic voices tend to yield more controversies and are less coherent than policy statements issued by the Commission/EEAS and the Council.¹² Especially in the early years of the EU's Arctic policy process, considerations from the European Parliament and those of its Members have often raised eyebrows among Arctic stakeholders – be it the push for the infamous seal ban, or discussions on an Arctic Treaty and moratoria on hydrocarbon exploitation. Yet, the EP has often pushed the EU's Arctic policy to move forward, and, for example, continuously called for the development of a comprehensive Arctic 'strategy'.

Raising its Arctic voice is of key importance to the EP. On an individual level, the Arctic, and related matters of combatting climate change or environmental and animal protection, is a relatively low-hanging fruit for some Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) to gain votes within their electorate. Moreover, as knowledge on Arctic matters is rather limited, those MEPs are easily considered opinion makers, offering an often unique chance to influence and define policy. On a broader level, the declaratory and political nature of EP resolutions allows for its representatives to take more ambitious, outspoken,

and at times controversial or confrontational stances, as compared to other EU institutions. Thus, the continuous engagement with Arctic issues is not only important for the European Parliament and some of its MEPs to continuously re-define its regional voice; it is also essential to acknowledge the Union's normative and decisional supranationalism. This relates in particular to the Arctic, as its policy touches many aspects of both internal and external relevance/competence for the EU.

Accordingly, one wonders if the EP could not sow the seeds for a more ambitious geopolitical European Union, using the Arctic as a case study and test ground to frame an EU-ropian narrative fit for tomorrow's power politics. This would start with specific discussions on localization tactics in Greenland,¹³ move to the EP asking the Commission/EEAS for a comprehensive security analysis of the Arctic, and end with a future- and goal-oriented, honest assessment of what the EU can and wants to achieve in the Circumpolar North. There are good reasons for the rather timid coverage of the security angle in the last policy statements. Yet, a policy that aims to fully integrate all Arctic concerns should explicitly recognize the *strategic* importance of the Arctic, examine the new geopolitical realities, and present clear and ambitious EU-ropian goals – despite that this might give rise to negative responses from Arctic states.

As such, the EU could also convincingly tackle matters of key importance, such as an Arctic-based selective engagement with Russia. Could the European Arctic be an area where the EU could seek talks with Russia based on its continuing northern cross-border bond and a potential willingness on the part of Russia? The peripheral Arctic might be the venue where the EU and Russia find common ground again, not only improving their relationship, but also promoting Arctic stability. Using the Arctic as an arena for renewed relations, or at least talks thereof, might have positive spill-over effects on other areas of dispute. As such, the Conference of Arctic Parliamentarians and the active engagement of the European Parliament might offer an opportunity to promote and actively engage in related, behind-the-door-talks. Given the current world situation and the EU's Arctic history, this might be naïve, but a policy that separates regional from systemic components, sustainable development, and environmental protection from questions of hard security, offers the opportunity to delineate clear and ambitious goals for the EU's Arctic involvement. The European Parliament could complement the other institutions to adopt a more strategic mindset and break down policy silos, starting with the Arctic region.

Arctic Geopolitics the EU-ropean Way

If the European Union aims to become a truly *geopolitical* Union, it needs to learn the language of power by translating its economic and soft power into strategic leverage. In an Arctic context, this means, among others, a concrete understanding of the security concerns that (some) Member States have, the definition of strategic goals, and an assessment of how the Union's economic and soft power could address and tackle future security challenges. A security analysis of the Arctic might also reveal the potential for the EU to be at the forefront of developing new regional means of 'geopolitical cooperation.' This could provide the impetus to properly manage the growing global interest in Arctic matters, and counteract the emerging global geopolitical competition that also affects the Arctic. Over the last ten years, we have seen a European Union that has fulfilled its Arctic commitments, from funding research to fostering ocean governance, from supporting sustainable development to promoting international cooperation. This European Union seems to be satisfied with its Arctic status quo. However, if change is indeed inherent in any system, we might also see a European Union that aims to leave its Arctic comfort zone and frame its geopolitical strategy the EU-ropean way – whether Arctic states like it or not.

Notes

This chapter was originally published as a report by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Regional Programme Nordic Countries on 26 October 2020, available at <https://www.kas.de/en/web/nordische/single-title/-/content/the-great-illusion-revisited-the-future-of-the-european-union-s-arctic-engagement>. The author is grateful to the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Regional Programme Nordic Countries for the permission to reprint. For the sake of accuracy, some details have been updated in this version of the article.

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17

Recent Changes to Swedish Security Policy – An Arctic Turn?

Niklas Eklund

The country of Sweden straddles different geopolitical and security-related contexts. In the longer historic perspective, the waxing and waning of security alliances, warfare, and trade in Northern and continental Europe have been the primary drivers of its strategic culture. The Arctic, which is the other significant strategic context to which Sweden belongs, has played a far less significant role in terms of security. The vast northern parts of Sweden, which in purely geographical terms belong to the Arctic, were long seen simply as a resource-rich, successfully exploited periphery. During the Cold War, Sweden adapted to the emergent concerns about Arctic security, primarily through the build-up of what was still, in the mid-1980s, the most significant air force in Northern Europe. In the 1990s, Sweden joined the widespread European decommissioning wave. While continually developing the globally significant extraction and forestry industries of the Swedish North, and developing modern infrastructure and connectivity at par with the rest of the country, a manifest Swedish strategic interest in Arctic security only began to re-emerge in the early 2000s. In economic terms, Sweden today shares the high levels of development and connectivity in its Arctic territories with its Fennoscandian neighbours. Politically, however, Sweden is a latecomer to Arctic security, suddenly and seemingly throwing a lot of weight behind its newfound engagement, adding Arctic concerns to its historically manifest security interest in the Baltic Sea Area.

Is there, then, what might be called an Arctic turn in Swedish security policy? If so, does it have military underpinnings? The Swedish security debate continues to be deadlocked along the neutrality vs. NATO-membership fault line. For all security-related intents and purposes, it is a dated discussion which, if studied more closely, hides some real and significant changes to Swedish security policy over time. For most of its more than 200-year history, Sweden's policy of self-imposed neutrality has been instrumental to the military flexibility and adaptability of the country. For example, Sweden was able to move quickly from sizeable territorial defence during the Cold War, to slim expeditionary capabilities in its aftermath. Primarily due to Russia's territorial interference

and expansion in Eastern Europe, Sweden has reinstated territoriality at the top of its security agenda. In less than a decade, Sweden has begun yet another flexible move, and shifted its primary security outlook back to geostrategic change in the increasingly complex European Arctic. The following text represents a tracing, outlining, and discussion of the current Swedish strategies for the Arctic and for military defence.

Arctic drivers of policy change

At the end of 2020, it seems as if the environmental, developmental, and security-related aspects of change in the Arctic have become less media-friendly than they were ten to fifteen years ago. This is perhaps not surprising given the way the COVID-19 pandemic has ravaged economies and living conditions across the globe. Arctic security nevertheless started deteriorating before that. For many years, particularly after the creation of the Arctic Council in 1996, the Arctic was generally regarded as a transformational political arena, in which environmental, economic, and social concerns could be dealt with peacefully under the institutional umbrellas of international law and diplomacy. Accordingly, when US President Donald Trump suggested in August 2019 that his administration was considering a purchase of Greenland, the idea was met with equal measures of surprise and derision.¹ Despite all its legal and political ramifications, however, this transactional and state-centric idea about how to move forward in the Arctic only represents the tip of the proverbial iceberg. Over the past decade, transactional perspectives have been resurgent among nations. A potent force in this development is the increasing presence and activity in the Arctic of non-Arctic states, particularly China, not only changing the shape of Arctic security, but also further integrating it with global security interests and structures.² In the Arctic, the policies of governments and international organizations are becoming increasingly prismatic and fractious.³

The pressure on small-state adaptability in the European Arctic is increasing. As observed by Björn Bjarnarson, governments and peoples outside of the Nordic countries tend to see them “as one international entity.”⁴ The long history of the European North, however, has produced different strategic cultures and security outlooks among these small states.⁵ Nordic governments increasingly recognize commonalities in threat imagery, climate issues, China moving forward in the Arctic, military hybrid threats, and cyber threats. The relationship between what can be termed Nordic security on the one hand and Arctic security on the other nevertheless remains tenuous:

The Nordic countries have made great progress in the field of security and defence, both as a group (Nordic Defence

Cooperation/NORDEFECO) and bilaterally, responding to the changes in the security environment in our region. ... Three are members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO); three are European Union (EU) member states, and all are members of the Arctic Council.⁶

In terms of Arctic security, Sweden is arguably the most reluctant ‘arctifier’ among the Nordics. Whereas security policy in Denmark, Norway, and Iceland has an Arctic dimension inherent in their geography and military alliance (NATO), it does not in Sweden. An altogether different history of geography and security guides the policy choices of Finland, although the country has clearly specified its modern identity primarily as an Arctic nation. Prior to 2011, Sweden did not even have a specific Arctic policy, despite being a member of the Arctic Council. One had to be cobbled together before Sweden assumed its leadership of the organization in 2011-2013. As Arctic Council Chair, the Swedish government took its role very seriously, and managed to move the Council forward on a number of lagging organizational issues.⁷ It has been argued, however, that the Swedish chair simply enjoyed a favourable turn in the international political situation. The Swedish government was able to promote a soft diplomatic agenda successfully because of the relative *détente* among the great powers. There was a surge in international interest in the effects of global warming in the Arctic, and the European Union was signalling a fresh interest in Arctic affairs.⁸

In the fall of 2020, the Swedish government published its second Arctic policy. In contrast to the preceding policy document (2011), this one flows from a deceptively simple statement: “Sweden is an Arctic country.”⁹ The document actually presents completely new and different security perceptions, and devotes a separate section to issues of Arctic security. Dwelling not least on issues of hard security, the Swedish government particularly makes note of “new geostrategic realities in the region,” which reinforces the linkage between Sweden’s new Arctic policy and its security policy.¹⁰

Flexibility: Sweden’s new Arctic strategy

Sweden’s 2020 Arctic strategy is firmly rooted in the idea that international cooperation and confidence-building measures contribute to collective security and stability. This is more or less a carry-over from the first Swedish Arctic strategy in 2011, as are the multiple emphases put on development in a number of soft policy areas, viz. international collaboration, climate and the environment, polar research and monitoring, sustainable economic development, and generally safeguarding good living conditions. What is new,

however, is a whole section devoted to hard security in which the Swedish government declares its intention to “work for the further development and deepening of Nordic and Euro-Atlantic security and defence policy cooperation focusing on the European part of the Arctic, the Cap of the North and the North Atlantic region.” Climate change is seen as a driver of insecurity and potential instability in the Arctic, and the policy clearly stipulates that Sweden is ready to counter such tendencies. “The full range of security policy instruments – political, diplomatic, economic and military – should be able be [*sic*] used in an integrated way to achieve our objectives.”¹¹

As mentioned, there is a carry-over from Sweden’s previous Arctic strategy in how the majority of sections in the policy document focus upon non-military affairs and international organizations. The added section on security and stability, however, adds not only a new dimension to Swedish outlooks in the Arctic, but also aligns the Swedish security interests with those of nations supporting “the rules-based world order.” It also pits the Swedish interest against particular other actors in the Arctic context. Rapid climate change, a new military dynamic, and non-Arctic state interests in the region are drivers of the Swedish perception. The Swedish government is also specific when it depicts the Arctic as the divider between Western (the United States and NATO) and Eastern (Russian) interests, “as in the Cold War.” In addition, China is pointed out as a threat to security and stability in the Arctic, as it “expresses general support for international law, but acts selectively, especially concerning issues that China regards as its core interests.” The Swedish government concludes that military cooperation between Russia and China merits further attention, particularly with regard to the Arctic, and wishes to encourage “like-minded countries and the EU to cooperate and act together regarding challenges and opportunities resulting from the increase in China’s global influence.”¹² This is very different from the careful and soft security-oriented stance taken by the Swedish government in its 2011 Arctic strategy. For all the credence the 2020 strategy continues to give to cooperation in non-military areas via international organization, it re-enacts a state-centric hard security perspective, which has been more or less absent from Swedish security policy in the post-Cold War era.

Seemingly for emphasis, the Swedish government devotes the final part of the section on security and stability in the Arctic to national capability and the “emerging Swedish strategic defence policy interests in the Arctic.” In this part, the document makes reference to the 2019 Swedish Defence Commission, saying that the country for too long has “taken far too little account of security policy and military developments in the Arctic and how they can affect Sweden.” It goes on to identify the North Sea and the Baltic Sea Area as the

traditional areas of geopolitical interest for Sweden, but which must now be complemented with “a particular centre of gravity in the area around the Barents Sea and the North Atlantic.” To achieve threshold effects, Swedish capabilities should be strengthened, particularly in the northern parts of the country. Joint military exercises with NATO and the other Nordic countries should continue, as “transatlantic cooperation is fundamental to both American and European security.” Firmly planting any Swedish military capabilities in an East-West geostrategic perspective, the Swedish Arctic policy stipulates that “the North Atlantic will play an important role as a link for military support to Europe from North America in the event of a crisis.”¹³ In sum, the Swedish Arctic strategy 2020 represents a significant declaration of security intent and geostrategic positioning. Yet again, Swedish neutrality comes across as a highly flexible policy instrument that allows a country firmly rooted in a tradition of democracy, the rule of law, and free trade to adapt to perceived changes in its geostrategic reality. Adaptation, nevertheless, intimately connects with capability, which brings current military changes in Sweden to the fore.

Adaptability: Sweden’s envisaged military changes 2021-2030

In a summary of the government bill ‘Totalförsvaret 2021-2025’, the Swedish government spells out a significant increase in defence spending over the next five years. An annual increase of “approximately EUR 2.7 billion totalling EUR 8.9 billion by 2025” is envisaged, representing “an increase of around 45% compared with 2020 and 95% compared with 2015.”¹⁴ In what amounts to a tone of self-criticism, the government says that although total defence planning has resumed in Sweden, it is only beginning:

...military defence was, for a long period, neither designed nor dimensioned to defend Sweden against an armed attack. Similarly, defence planning and preparations were not conducted for many years. The initiated transition therefore needs to continue and total defence capability to respond to an armed attack be strengthened.¹⁵

The document reiterates the cornerstones of current Swedish security policy – the country does not envisage going it alone militarily or initiating any military campaigns. Sweden enhances its military capabilities in adaptation to changes in the country’s geostrategic context. Multi- and bilateral defence partnerships will decide the dimensioning of Sweden’s military adaptation. It is pointed out that no such partnership, whether it be with NATO or any of the Nordic or Baltic countries, “entail[s] any mutually binding defence obligations.” The Swedish government also declares that dimensioning will be

guided by the country's ability to give and receive support from partners. Sweden should therefore, "as far as possible, develop joint operational planning with Finland and co-ordinate operational planning with Denmark, Norway, the United Kingdom, the United States and NATO."¹⁶

The development of the new Swedish military structure began on 1 January 2021. The government envisages full operability, i.e., full staffing and equipment, by 2030.¹⁷ *The army* is expected to retain its two brigades and begin organizing a third mechanized brigade in 2021-2025. A reduced motorized brigade is envisaged for the Stockholm area, alongside an enhancement of the mechanized battalion on the island of Gotland, while divisional-level leadership structures, including artillery, are reinstated for the whole country. *For the navy*, the government proposes an increase in submarine capability from four to five units, that the *Visby*-class corvettes be modified while two new surface combat vessels are procured in 2026-2030, and that an additional amphibious battalion be based in Gothenburg while two naval base battalions are prospected in other locations. *The air force* should retain its six fighter squadrons in 2021-2025 based on the JAS 39 C/D combat system, parallel with the introduction of the JAS 39E system aimed at operability beyond 2030, alongside the significant procurement of additional air-to-air, anti-ship, and air-to-surface missile systems and electronic warfare systems throughout the period. For 2026-2030, the government envisages an enhancement of the Swedish Air Force's long-range air-to-surface capability. *The home guard* is expected to move up from 60,000 peacetime personnel positions in 2020 to 90,000 positions by the end of the period, while operational logistics resources are developed and further coordinated with the other branches of the Swedish total defence.

Generally, the Swedish government foresees an expansion of the Swedish peacetime deployment. Of particular interest is the peacetime military organization and deployment in the north of Sweden. As witnessed by the defence policy, the idea is that military cooperation with partners and efficient territorial defence demand a northward drift:

In line with this, the Government proposes the re-establishment of the Norrland Dragoon Regiment (K4) in Arvidsjaur, the Älvsborg Amphibious Regiment (Amf 4) in Gothenburg, the Uppland Air Wing (F16) in Uppsala, the Dalarna Regiment (I13) in Falun, the Västernorrland Regiment (I21) in Sollefteå, with a training detachment in Östersund, and the Bergslagen Artillery Regiment (A9) in Kristinehamn.¹⁸

Cyber and hybrid warfare also receive considerable attention, as does the blurring of the line between military and civilian defence in modern warfare.¹⁹ In Swedish security policy, these phenomena are subsumed by the concept of total defence. The government expects Swedish citizens to prepare for their subsistence without the normal functioning of society (logistics, food, water, heating, etc.) for up to a week. Conscription to the armed forces has been reintroduced, this time including women, albeit limited to one-third of each new age cohort. The ramifications of the total defence concept are still unclear in Sweden, however, and exactly where the new fault lines between military and civil preparedness for crisis and war will run remains an open issue.

The considerable attention that both of the Swedish policies under scrutiny here give to strategic partnerships and joint operability merits special mention. Sweden's strategic turn towards interoperability with its Nordic neighbours, particularly Finland and Norway, was clearly spelled out in a keynote address to the Chatham House Security and Defence Conference in March 2020. Swedish Minister for Defence Peter Hultqvist declared that, in his view, the way for Sweden to meet Arctic security complexity in the European High North is to increase cooperation and joint operability with Sweden's Nordic neighbours, with NATO, and with partners in the EU. Following the outline of what has jokingly been called 'the Hultqvist doctrine' in Sweden, he promised to deliver on close bilateral and trilateral defence cooperation, further positing Sweden in a new security environment.²⁰ The ensuing political process was quick, resulting in two major agreements contributing to radical change in the Nordic military context. First, on 8 September, the Swedish parliament voted in favour of closer military cooperation with Finland, in effect allowing the Swedish government henceforth to:

1. deploy Swedish armed forces to assist Finland in preventing violations of Finnish territory, and
2. receive military support in the form of military forces from Finland, in part to prevent violations of Swedish territory and in part to respond to an armed attack against Sweden.²¹

On 23 September, the Swedish government published a joint statement from the defence ministers of Norway, Sweden, and Finland.²² The three ministers signalled the advent of closer military cooperation between the three countries moving beyond their previously instated, legally-binding cooperation in defence materiel supply and logistics. They particularly held out the need to coordinate military operational planning "in areas of common concern, for example the northern parts of Finland, Norway and Sweden." The ministerial statement concludes:

We have over the years always found pragmatic and flexible ways to cooperate, allowing our defence cooperation to emerge and evolve despite our different security affiliations. We have cooperated successfully in exercises such as Arctic Challenge Exercise, Cold Response, Cross Border Training, Northern Wind and Trident Juncture. We will now build upon experiences gained from these exercises when enhancing our operational cooperation.²³

Summary and discussion

Historically, Sweden is a sea-faring nation. While the Baltic and East Atlantic waterways were always crucial to the development of the nation, Swedish security perceptions have tended to prioritize the Baltic Sea Area strategically. Academics have argued before that security deliberation in Sweden is marred by a North-South dichotomy. While Sweden's emergent security interests over the past decade have been drawn to the North, the history and heart of the nation have continued to veer to the South.²⁴ By extension, it has been argued by academics and politicians alike that only full-on membership in NATO could bring real change to Sweden's security policy. Based on the two current policies traced and outlined above, it may be concluded that radical policy change has been achieved anyway. The flexibility and adaptability of Swedish neutrality have taken another turn. The major changes can be summarized as follows:

- Sweden defines itself as an Arctic nation.
- A distinct reaction to environmental- and security-related deterioration in the Arctic context is called for.
- Primarily Russian and Chinese interests are threatening the future of stability in the Arctic.
- Sweden is prepared to use, as it were, the full spectrum of its capabilities to counter instability in the Arctic.
- The geostrategic areas of interest to Sweden remain the Baltic Sea and North Sea areas, but now extend into the Barents Sea and North Atlantic areas.
- Swedish security stands on two pillars: national military capability and joint operability with partners.
- Cooperation with the EU and NATO is envisaged, as these international organizations represent other nations with a firm interest in a rules-based world order.
- Sweden has entered legally binding military cooperation with Finland.

- Sweden is exploring its interoperability with Norway, while keeping Denmark and Iceland apprised of steps taken in the process.
- Sweden has started to shift and enhance its military resources to fit the new geostrategic positioning of the country.

Returning to the original question, however, is it possible to conclude that Swedish security policy has taken an Arctic turn? Yes and no. From the policy documents studied here, it is clear that Sweden will be increasingly concerned with Arctic security issues in the future. The security dimension of Sweden's strategies for the Arctic and for national defence now includes Arctic geopolitics. Considering the high level of economic and social development in the Swedish North, there are also significant territorial interests to defend. Concrete measures to ensure interoperability with neighbouring countries and relevant international organizations indeed seem indicative of an element of 'arctification' in Swedish security policy. Nevertheless, how deeply this recent and rapid policy change actually cuts into Swedish strategic culture remains to be seen as the reinvented model of total defence begins to roll out.

Notes

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18

Iceland and Arctic Security: US Dependency and the Search for an Arctic Identity

Pia Elisabeth Hansson and Guðbjörg Ríkey Th. Hauksdóttir

The Arctic ice sheet is melting faster than ever before, while the Arctic region is attracting renewed attention from larger powers. To a small island state in the North Atlantic, this growing interest is welcomed. As a founding member of NATO, albeit without its own military, Iceland relies on its membership within the organization for its protection, complemented by a bilateral defence agreement with the United States. Iceland is concerned about the effects of climate change in the region and their consequences, but at the same time remains hopeful about the possible economic gains associated with the opening of Arctic shipping lanes. The emphasis on Arctic security in Iceland's National Security Policy highlights the region's importance and the country's concerns about its further militarization by larger powers. In addition, the incredibly vast area for which Iceland bears responsibility in terms of search and rescue (SAR) represents an enormous challenge that rests with the Icelandic Coast Guard. The Coast Guard does not have the capacity to fulfill its duties in this area,¹ which negatively affects Iceland's reaction capability and security.

This chapter explores the changed security environment in the Arctic in the face of renewed large power interest in Iceland, the emergence of Iceland's Arctic identity following the departure of the US from Iceland in 2006, as well as the recent US pressure on Iceland not to cooperate with China and Russia in the Arctic. Finally, we propose policy recommendations to the Icelandic government regarding security issues in the Arctic.

How the US departure from Iceland forced the political elite to look elsewhere

Following its independence, Iceland had successfully outsourced its national security concerns to the United States and NATO. When the US military left Iceland in 2006, it signalled the end of an era. After the Cold War,

Iceland had been preoccupied with trying to keep the US naval air station in Keflavík open at all cost, hanging onto the premise of a minimum presence of US fighter jets. Times were changing, however, and despite Iceland's diligent diplomatic efforts, the US withdrew its permanent presence in Iceland. The bilateral defence agreement with the US from 1951 remains intact, however, and NATO membership remains the cornerstone of Iceland's national security policy.

Iceland is a country without a military, and that emphasizes a comprehensive and multilateral approach in security affairs. It is a member of key organizations, such as the United Nations, NATO, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). Structural reliance on Europe and the US remains central to Iceland's national security. Nonetheless, when the US left Keflavík in 2006, Icelanders felt a real sense of abandonment, and the need for a new strategy emerged. As the Keflavík base was shut down, and the protective wing of the US was lifted, the Icelandic political elite was forced to look elsewhere. Strengthening existing ties was one of the priorities, and new agreements with old friends were forged, including with Norway, Denmark, the United Kingdom, and Canada.²

The emergence of an Arctic identity

Since the end of the Cold War, the Arctic region has been a zone of diplomatic and scientific cooperation. The Arctic states have managed to keep conflicts in other parts of the world mostly away from the region, while climate change has dramatically altered the Arctic over the last few decades, with the Arctic heating up twice as fast as other regions in the world.

Recently, Iceland has developed a stronger Arctic identity as the region's geopolitical importance has grown. Iceland was late in discovering how an Arctic dimension to its foreign policy could raise international interest in the country. Nonetheless, after including the Arctic dimension, the country has embraced a new identity as an Arctic state.³

As Ingimundarson points out,⁴ the Icelandic political elite was slow to identify with the Arctic when it re-emerged as a geopolitical space following the end of the Cold War. In the wake of the US departure and the unprecedented bank collapse in Iceland in 2008, it became clear to the political elite that geopolitical attention was returning to the North. Although Icelanders had no illusions about recapturing their former role as a Cold War prize, the country's approach was based on strategic location, material rewards, and Arctic identity politics.⁵

The Alþingi passed a resolution on Iceland's Arctic policy⁶ in March 2011, containing eleven priority areas. These covered a wide range of interests in the Arctic region, including Iceland's position as a coastal state, the prevention of human-induced climate change, the sustainable use of natural resources, the improvement of the well-being of Arctic residents, and the importance of safeguarding broadly defined security interests. The resolution focused strongly on the importance of international cooperation on sub-regional, regional, and global levels, including cooperation with Greenland and the Faroe Islands, strengthening the Arctic Council, and solving disagreements using the framework of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. The language of the strategy demonstrates the government's clear emphasis on Iceland's position as an Arctic state. It references the uniqueness of Iceland's geographic location, stating that the whole country and a large part of its territorial waters lie within the boundaries of the Arctic region. It also emphasizes that Arctic issues touch nearly every aspect of Icelandic society and are a key foreign policy priority.

Iceland's National Security Policy and the Icelandic Coast Guard

Iceland was a latecomer to discussions about how to conceptualize Arctic security. The nation's first risk assessment was not released until 2009, and interestingly, the Arctic and Arctic security were not specified as priorities in the assessment.⁷ Iceland's National Security Council was only established in 2016,⁸ followed soon thereafter by Iceland's first National Security Policy. The policy identifies "environmental and security interests in the Arctic through international cooperation and domestic preparedness" as a security priority.⁹ It is therefore evident that the Arctic – and Arctic security – has emerged as a higher priority in Iceland, and a more central part of the nation's identity, in recent years.

Although 'security' is not directly defined in Iceland's National Security Policy, it notes that the policy "extends to global, societal, and military risks and entails active foreign affairs policy, civil security, and defence cooperation with other countries."¹⁰ Moreover, the policy is based on the UN Charter commitments regarding democracy, human rights, and disarmament, as well as the peaceful resolution of conflicts.¹¹

Iceland's size is specifically addressed within the policy paper. Due to its smallness, Iceland cannot maintain an army, as it has "neither the resources nor the desire." Therefore, the nation's security and defence are provided via "active cooperation, both with other countries and within international organisations."¹² This is in line with Ómarsdóttir's research on Icelanders' views

on security.¹³ According to her research, when asked what the greatest factor was in maintaining Iceland's security, 41% of respondents considered Iceland's peaceful relations with its neighbouring countries as the main factor. Three factors were almost equal in second place: Iceland's smallness, the fact that Iceland has no military, and Iceland's membership in NATO.¹⁴

Although Iceland does not have an army, it does have an active Coast Guard. The US military assisted the Coast Guard during SAR missions until 2006, but after fully departing from Iceland, the Coast Guard became wholly responsible for SAR while still conducting exercises with NATO members.¹⁵ In a report on SAR in the polar seas conducted by the Ministry of the Interior in 2016, SAR is considered an integral part of maintaining Iceland's security.¹⁶ The Icelandic Coast Guard administers SAR around Iceland and is responsible for SAR in the expansive area of 1.9 million km².¹⁷ The natural conditions in the Arctic make responding to emergencies especially challenging, and the Icelandic Coast Guard's reaction capability has been assessed as "unsatisfactory."¹⁸ Furthermore, policy suggestions include the enhancement of infrastructure for SAR missions and the establishment of more bilateral agreements with neighbouring countries.¹⁹ It is clear that, in order to ensure Iceland's security in the Arctic and enhance Iceland's reaction capability, it is imperative to provide the Coast Guard with the necessary funding. At the same time, the Icelandic government has increased its emphasis on defence and security, as demonstrated by a 37% increase in funding for Iceland's defence from 2017-2019.²⁰

US interest in Iceland as an Arctic player

Iceland's membership within NATO is a core element of Iceland's National Security Policy. Indeed, it is identified as a "key pillar in its [Iceland's] defence and the main forum for Western cooperation in which Iceland participates on civil premises, in order to strengthen its own security and that of other NATO members."²¹ In short, Iceland largely depends on NATO for its security, as it has done for decades.

Two high-level visits from the US in 2019 sparked much discussion in Iceland, not least due to controversial comments by Vice President Mike Pence. During his visits to Iceland, Pence stated to the local media that the US was "grateful for the stance Iceland took, rejecting China's *Belt and Road* financial investment in Iceland."²² The Vice President emphasized the importance of strengthening security cooperation between Iceland and the US to balance against the increased Chinese and Russian presence in the Arctic region.²³ Later in the day, Vice President Pence held a joint press conference with Icelandic

Prime Minister Katrín Jakobsdóttir in which he reiterated his controversial statement about Iceland's rejection of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Iceland's prime minister corrected Pence, however, explaining that Iceland had not rejected participation in the program – just not yet “opened up for it.”²⁴ Furthermore, the Icelandic Minister for Foreign Affairs, Guðlaugur Þór Þórðarson, stated in Icelandic media that Pence's statements “were not exactly accurate.”²⁵ The Chinese Ambassador to Iceland, Jin Zhijian, consequently stated in Icelandic media that the US Vice President wished to damage the relations between China and Iceland, and that Pence's statements were “fake news.”²⁶

Earlier in 2019, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo had visited Iceland, and similar to Vice President Pence, Pompeo had emphasized the importance of strengthening the two countries' security cooperation, given that Iceland “sits in a strategic place in the world.”²⁷ He had also stated that increased Chinese and Russian presence in the region would be specifically addressed through enhanced cooperation.²⁸ Thus, the US's renewed interest in Iceland as an Arctic player – as well as its importance when it comes to NATO cooperation – is directly related to the increased Chinese interest and presence in the Arctic.

China and Russia

The US government has specifically identified China and Russia as threats in the Arctic. While Russia is a key actor in the region, as the largest Arctic state with a long history of regional engagement, China is a newcomer. Russia's coastline in the Arctic is massive, whereas China's northernmost point lies 1,500 km south of the Arctic Circle. Nonetheless, China claims to be a “Near-Arctic State” [进北极国家] in its 2018 Arctic Policy.²⁹ The term sparked controversy, as Secretary of State Pompeo's statements during the 2019 Arctic Council meeting made clear when he noted that “Beijing claims to be a ‘Near-Arctic State,’ yet the shortest distance between China and the Arctic is 900 miles. There are only Arctic States and Non-Arctic States. No third category exists and claiming otherwise entitles China to exactly nothing.”³⁰ For its part, Iceland has enjoyed generally stable relations with both states.

As Thorhallsson and Gunnarsson observe, Iceland's relationship with Russia also remains solid despite disagreement “on important matters such as democracy and human rights, and not least on Ukraine.”³¹ Moreover, the two states work closely in regional organizations, e.g., the Council of the Baltic Sea States and the Arctic Council.³² Nevertheless, Iceland participates in the sanctions imposed on Russia after the annexation of Crimea in 2014, and is under countersanctions by Russia.³³

Meanwhile, Iceland and China have strong economic relations. Iceland was the first Western European state to acknowledge China as a fully developed market economy in 2005,³⁴ as well as the first European state to sign a free trade agreement (FTA) with China.³⁵ Furthermore, Iceland supported China's application for Observer status within the Arctic Council. Nonetheless, Nielsson and Hauksdóttir maintain that, despite widespread international discourse on China's geopolitical influence in Iceland from Chinese investments, China only has one active foreign direct investment (FDI) in the country.³⁶

A report conducted by Iceland's former Minister of Justice Björn Bjarnason on behalf of the Nordic Foreign Ministers, however, specifically identifies China as a possible threat: "China's presence and strategic interest in the Arctic will have security policy implications," it anticipates. "So far, Chinese military activity in the Arctic has been very limited. However, the Chinese military has now begun to strengthen its knowledge of the Arctic."³⁷ Furthermore, China's actions in the South China Sea are identified as a possible threat to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) regime, and the report encourages a common Nordic policy on China in the Arctic.³⁸

Conclusion

The recent political pressure by high-level US leaders on Icelandic authorities to not engage in further cooperation with China has put Iceland in a rather tricky position. Iceland depends on the United States for its security, and the two states have strong political ties and history. Nonetheless, economic interests, the FTA with China, and Iceland's willingness to support China's role as an observer within the Arctic Council all demonstrate that Iceland enjoys a robust relationship with China as well. Future challenges for Iceland's Arctic security will therefore include navigating the relationship with Iceland's main security provider, the United States, while still maintaining strong economic ties with China.

There are, however, other pressing issues that must be addressed to enhance Iceland's security in the Arctic. We offer the following recommendations:

- A comprehensive and holistic analysis of Iceland's Arctic security interests is imperative for securing the future stability of the country;
- The government should react to the pressing needs of the Coast Guard to ensure the necessary infrastructure for SAR missions, e.g., establishing a centre for SAR missions in the Arctic; and

- The Icelandic government should ensure that Iceland has well-trained security analysts who actively work on examining and updating Iceland's security interests in the Arctic.

Notes

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19 Climate Change, Geopolitics, and Arctic Security

Wilfrid Greaves

Despite the enthusiasm for new institutions and inter-state cooperation that has surrounded the Arctic since the end of the Cold War, the Circumpolar Arctic is undergoing the second fundamental change in its security dynamics in 30 years. The first was the change away from Cold War hostility, towards a peaceful region of dynamic inter-state cooperation. The second is the current change away from an integrated security region, towards a fragmented Arctic comprising three distinct sub-regions, in which conditions of security are principally shaped by geopolitical factors related to North America, Europe, and Eurasia, respectively. While the post-Cold War period was defined by Arctic actors coming together to improve their security, the question now is whether the Arctic security region is breaking up owing to climate change and resurgent geopolitical competition, including a reassertive Russia, newly assertive China, and divisions among the Western powers.

This short chapter examines the transformation of the Arctic *security* region or regional security complex (RSC), namely an area in which relations of security between state and non-state actors are determined. First, I outline the theory of regional security complexes and the post-Cold War context of Arctic institution-building and cooperation. Second, I explain how the Arctic RSC is fragmenting due to climate change and geopolitics, resulting in the emergence of North American, European, and Eurasian sub-regions. I conclude with brief reflections on what this fragmentation may mean for the future of geopolitics and security in the Circumpolar Arctic.

The Arctic Regional Security Complex (RSC)

Building on discussions of the Arctic as a distinct geopolitical region, some scholars have examined the Arctic as a distinct *security* region.¹ According to Buzan and Wæver, regions are the most generally relevant level of security analysis because geographic proximity has typically determined inter-state interactions (ranging from alliance and cooperation, to rivalry, hostility, and war). Otherwise stated, for most people and states, one's neighbours affect conditions of security and insecurity far more than global factors. A regional

security complex (RSC) is defined as “a group of states or other entities [that] must possess a degree of security interdependence sufficient both to establish them as a linked set and to differentiate them from surrounding security regions.” Historically, the Arctic has *not* formed its own RSC, but was either an “unstructured security region” or an “insulator” between separate North American, European, and Soviet and post-Soviet RSCs.² In particular, the Cold War prevented an Arctic RSC from emerging, because regional security relations were secondary to the global strategic considerations of the dominant superpowers. While security relations primarily reflected broader Cold War dynamics, the Arctic could not comprise a regional security complex of its own.

The Arctic RSC emerged as a result of the desecuritization of superpower relations in the late 1980s, and from the unique opportunities and challenges afforded to circumpolar states because of the Arctic environment. Heather Exner-Pirot observes that the Arctic RSC was centred around its historically frozen ocean; political and institutional underdevelopment related to territorial boundaries, sovereignty claims, and economic activity; and the incorporation of Indigenous peoples into regional governance. However, “the Arctic is exceptional in that the environmental sector dominates circumpolar relations,” making it, in effect, a regional *environmental* security complex.³ This means that security for Arctic states and peoples has been linked, both positively and negatively, through factors related to the natural environment.

Environmental issues such as transnational pollution, marine risks and ocean management, and climate change influence and shape Arctic politics and security. Environmental factors also mediate the emergence and severity of other security issues, including in the military and political sectors. For instance, Arctic environments provided unique natural systems that supported human subsistence and flourishing across the region, producing conditions of human security that are being disrupted by climate change.⁴ Inaccessible terrain, vast distances, cold weather, and sea ice also helped deter military aggression and prevent inter-state conflicts (such as allaying concerns of a Soviet ground invasion of Northern Canada during the Cold War),⁵ and the deterrent effect of the harsh Northern climate remains relevant to national security.⁶

While observers emphasize how issues such as environmental monitoring, wildlife protection, ecosystem conservation, and the decommissioning of Soviet/Russian nuclear reactors have influenced regional cooperation and produced new regional security issues, most view the need for environmental cooperation as the core driver for closer regional political integration.⁷ Whereas some commentators argue that climate change will lead to a “polar Mediterranean,” facilitate Arctic integration through economic activity and political normalization, or even lead to a transformative political renaissance

akin to the revolutions in post-communist Europe,⁸ I suggest that the Arctic's environmental transformation due to climate change is *undermining* the material basis for considering security in the Arctic at the pan-regional level. If the natural environment provided a shared foundation for Arctic security in the post-Cold War period, it follows that environmental changes will also alter regional security conditions and dynamics.

Climate change and the fragmenting Arctic RSC

The Arctic RSC is fragmenting into three distinct security sub-regions. The primary catalyst for this change is human-caused climate change, most specifically the warming of the Arctic Ocean, which has increased maritime navigability and opened new opportunities to profit from non-renewable resource extraction. Dramatic changes include more extreme seasonal variation, reduced sea ice, receding glaciers, diminished snow cover, thawing permafrost, changing terrestrial water systems, invasive species, temperatures increasing at twice the global average, and other stressors on plant and animal populations.⁹

The most geopolitically significant of these climate impacts is the increasing navigability and accessibility of historically ice-covered Arctic waters. As sea ice has receded, states have paid greater attention to their Arctic territories and resolving outstanding boundary disputes. In addition to the symbolic and popular value of specific Arctic geographies (notably the North Pole), states' renewed assertions of Arctic sovereignty are informed by their desire to maximize the economic benefits from Arctic resources. At stake are shipping lanes, fisheries, minerals, and an estimated 13-30% of global undiscovered hydrocarbons,¹⁰ which coincides with the need for Arctic states to submit claims to their extended continental shelves pursuant to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Concurrently, global warming changes the conditions of possibility for human activity in the region in ways that invite the involvement of a wider range of actors with distinct (and sometimes conflicting) interests. Accordingly, climate change has facilitated a resurgence of geopolitical competition as Arctic and non-Arctic states seek to maximize their interests in the region.

Some climate researchers describe the physical effects of climate change on the Arctic Ocean as 'Atlantification' and 'Pacification', referring to the northward intrusion of warm water, nutrients, and fish and animal species from neighbouring oceans. While researchers are struggling to keep up with the pace of climate change in the region, it is clear that "the Atlantification and Pacification of the Arctic Ocean will only intensify in the coming decades as the world continues to warm and the Arctic becomes increasingly ice-free."¹¹ These

trends anticipate that, over the next century, the Circumpolar Arctic will increasingly resemble other ecosystems.

This ecological phenomenon is also occurring geopolitically as climate change transforms Arctic security dynamics. Atlantification and Pacification thus serve as appropriate descriptions for the fragmentation of the Arctic from a single regional security complex into distinct security sub-regions, or regional security subcomplexes. This does not mean that these sub-regions or the actors within them have nothing to do with each other, or that conditions of security in each region are entirely distinct. Instead, the practices and relations of amity and enmity that produce RSCs as either cooperative or conflictual spaces are principally occurring at the sub-regional level, involving sub-regional actors. Increasingly, security within these three sub-regions is likely to be determined by their incorporation into the security dynamics of the broader North American, European, and Eurasian RSCs, portending the end of the Arctic as a distinct security region.

Atlantification

Geopolitically, the Atlantification of the Arctic RSC is somewhat misleading, as it refers to its fragmentation into two sub-regions that reflect distinct North American and Northern European security subcomplexes. These sub-regions have distinct ecological and socioeconomic conditions, as well as different relationships to the neighbouring Eurasian sub-region. Two political dynamics account for the emergence of separate European and North American Arctic sub-regions: first is the renewed tensions since 2007 between Russia and the other Arctic states; second is their different relationships towards Russia and climate change. Both dynamics demonstrate the extent to which non-Arctic events, and the decisions of Arctic actors based on their non-Arctic interests, affect Arctic politics and security.

Western-Russian relations in the Arctic began to deteriorate in 2007, when an expedition planted a Russian flag on the Arctic Ocean floor at the geographic North Pole. The remilitarization of Arctic states' policies and practices has ensued, with military investments contributing to a dominant narrative of a militarized race for Arctic territory and resources.¹² The diplomatic relationship between Russia and its Arctic neighbours has become increasingly strained since 2014, with Western states imposing sanctions on Russian individuals, companies, and officials owing to Russian aggression in Ukraine, and Russia retaliating in kind. Subsequently, Russia, NATO, and the European Union have increased their military activities in Northern Europe (a dynamic discussed in other chapters in this volume).

The rise of military tensions and activity in Northern Europe suggests the distinctive features of the European Arctic security subcomplex. First, the European Arctic holds the largest number of state actors and the densest web of regional governance, particularly in the Barents region, an area of longstanding security interaction between Russia and Europe.¹³ In addition to six circumpolar states (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and Russia), the subcomplex includes non-Arctic states with polar proximity, interests, or identities, such as the United Kingdom and Scotland, the neighbouring Baltic states of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia (also NATO members), and self-governing, non-sovereign polities such as Greenland, the Faroe Islands, the Sámi Parliaments, and the European Union.¹⁴ NATO itself is a key actor in the European Arctic in a more direct role than in the North American context, thus implicating the United States in the sub-region's security.

Second, the European Arctic is the northern zone of the broader European RSC. Unlike most of the Circumpolar Arctic, Northern Europe has a relatively large, urbanized population, and is tightly integrated with proximate southern regions. In this respect, the European Arctic most closely resembles non-Arctic regions in terms of its levels of economic development and social well-being.¹⁵ As such, states in the sub-region have worked to promote "business as usual," seeking to resolve outstanding boundary issues (such as the 2010 Norway-Russia agreement in the Barents Sea), promoting investment and further economic development (such as the continued extraction of oil and gas in the North Sea and Barents Sea), and facilitating technical and scientific cooperation across various policy domains, including the adjudication of their extended continental shelf claims under UNCLOS. Overall, regional actors strive to balance continued engagement between the West and Russia (considered essential for regional peace and stability) with firm, but measured, collective responses to state-sanctioned wrongdoing.¹⁶

By contrast, the North American Arctic security subcomplex is characterized by three factors: the central role of sub-state actors, including self-governing Indigenous peoples; severe socioeconomic and ecological challenges that create chronic and acute human insecurity; and a politics of exceptionalism that politicizes and complicates public policymaking.

First, the North American Arctic – roughly defined as the area north of 60°N, with some significant exceptions – principally consists of territory governed by sub-national governments: the state of Alaska; the Canadian territories of Yukon, the Northwest Territories, and Nunavut; the four self-governing Inuit regions of Canada (Inuvialuit, Nunavut, Nunavik, and Nunatsiavut); and Greenland. While dependent on their respective national governments, particularly in the area of foreign and defence policy, these sub-

state actors exercise considerable devolved and symbolic authority as legitimate governmental representatives of ‘the Arctic’ within their national polities.¹⁷

Second, geographic, ecological, and socioeconomic factors have produced communities that are typically small, isolated, and heavily dependent on fiscal support from southern governments. Life for residents can be challenging, with high levels of poverty, ill health, chronic social issues, culture and language loss, political and social alienation, exposure to pollution, and rapidly-advancing climate change effects that are causing short-term harm and conditions of chronic poor well-being.¹⁸ Together, this has led some analysts to discuss the North American Arctic as a region experiencing pronounced human insecurity.¹⁹

Third, the North American Arctic is characterized by a politics of exceptionalism that politicizes and complicates public policymaking. In contrast to the European Arctic, where politics are mostly treated as a northern extension of normal domestic policymaking, the North American Arctic is prone to having decisions over contentious issues such as land use and non-renewable resource extraction determined by southern political institutions, with sometimes limited local input and on the basis of southern political or ideological considerations. Sometimes characterized as an ongoing form of colonialism, this is demonstrated most clearly by the politics of climate change and fossil fuel extraction in the region, which can strongly affect human security.²⁰ Projects such as the Mackenzie Valley pipeline project, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, and drilling off the Alaskan, Canadian, and Greenlandic coasts have become intensely politicized and securitized as either essential for the *economic* security and well-being of Northern residents and national economies, or as devastating to the *environmental* or *social* security of the affected communities and ecosystems.²¹ These competing securitizations also mean that public policy decisions in the North are prone to reversal when elected governments change, such as the Canada-US joint moratorium on Arctic oil and gas drilling, signed by then-President Obama and Prime Minister Trudeau, which was reversed by President Trump then reinstated by President Biden.

The fact that climate and energy security are more contentious in the North American Arctic than in Northern Europe is driven, in part, by the greater impacts of climate change in the former, thus raising the stakes of fossil fuel extraction that will worsen global warming. The ecological differences between the two Atlantic Arctic sub-regions demonstrate the relationship between environmental change and changing conditions of security, with the warming Arctic Ocean resulting in the fragmentation of the Arctic into distinct sub-regions, partly on the basis of their ecological differences and the

corresponding impacts of the physical environment on state interests and human well-being.

The penchant for exceptionalism in the North American Arctic applies not only to the securitization of unconventional security issues, such as energy and the environment, but also to the relationship with Russia. Unlike the European context where political actors expend significant effort to position Russia as a neighbour and prospective partner (and only reluctantly as a potential belligerent), in the North American Arctic Russia is typically depicted as an expansionist adversary pursuing regional domination through renewed militarization.²² Although the sub-regions remain linked in important ways (including the overlap between some state actors, the role of the United States as the lead actor in NATO, and the relevance of Russian behaviour to both security subcomplexes), the social and political contexts for each region are distinct. Given their different experiences of climate change, security in the North American and European Arctics will continue to diverge, as the highly developed and geographically proximate European Arctic is incorporated more thoroughly into European political institutions, while the geographically vast but socially isolated North American Arctic becomes even more peripheral to mainstream North American politics.

Pacification

The Pacification of the Arctic RSC refers to the emergence of a distinct sub-region centred on Eurasia, incorporating the long Russian coastline along the Northern Sea Route, the bulk of Russia's Far North and Far Eastern territories, and the emergence of Asian actors pursuing circumpolar interests. It is difficult to overstate the importance of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation (AZRF) to the Russian economy or its national security interests.²³ The vital contributions of the Arctic to its economy has led Russia to insist on its peaceful intentions and desired cooperation with its polar neighbours, since large-scale conflict that disrupted Russia's capacity to extract and export its Arctic resources would be devastating for its national economy, causing far more harm than would be experienced by other Arctic states experience (given the comparatively small portion of economic activity in their northern regions). Nevertheless, despite the domestic and economic focus of its Arctic strategy, and the belligerent rhetoric of some other Arctic states,²⁴ Russia has often been characterized as aggressive by its Arctic neighbours, and its behaviour has sometimes fuelled these suspicions.

The Eurasian Arctic sub-region is also structured around the growing role of Asian states. China's significant investments in Arctic science, research,

cooperation, resource extraction, and tourism, coupled with its Observer status at the Arctic Council, its Arctic policy released in 2018, and its avowed status as a “near Arctic state,” have attracted tremendous international attention. Other Asian states such as Japan, India, South Korea, and Singapore have also become Observers at the Arctic Council and invested in natural resource extraction in the Russian Far North, deepening the political and economic connections between the Russian Arctic and the Asia-Pacific region. Overall, however, China’s Arctic aspirations have attracted the most scholarly and policymaking attention as it has established itself as the foremost non-Arctic state that is active in the circumpolar region.²⁵

Whatever its own capabilities, China’s current influence on Arctic security is closely related to its relationship with Russia. As the two most powerful states in Eurasia and the strongest non-democratic countries in the world, China and Russia have forged a mutually beneficial partnership in the Arctic. The cornerstone is the \$27 billion project to ship liquefied natural gas from Russia’s Yamal Peninsula to China via the Northern Sea Route (NSR). The foreign investment in Russia from this deal has been critical in mitigating the damage to Russia’s economy caused by the Western sanctions imposed over Crimea. Russia also cites the need for refuelling, surveillance, and search and rescue infrastructure to support increased traffic along the NSR as justification for investing in military infrastructure along its northern coastline. This reinvestment has, in turn, been part of the evidence cited for the ‘remilitarization’ of the Arctic. Furthermore, Sino-Russian Arctic cooperation is not limited to the economic, energy, and environmental security dimensions of major fossil fuel projects, with military exercises like Russia’s Vostok 2018 marking a significant deepening in China and Russia’s military cooperation and reflecting the pragmatic partnership between the two foremost non-Western global powers.

The rise of Chinese influence in the Arctic has been met by concern by the other circumpolar states, reflecting a desire to limit China’s power to the Eurasian sub-region. In recent years, three Arctic states have intervened to prevent Chinese companies from acquiring private corporations on the basis of national security, even though Chinese investment could help fund sorely needed infrastructure and natural resource projects. In 2019, Denmark, under American pressure, prevented Chinese companies from winning the contract to construct three new airports on Greenland; in 2020, Canada rejected a Chinese company’s attempt to acquire a gold mine that would have given it a port on the Northwest Passage; and in 2021, Finland revealed it had also rejected China’s acquisition of a far northern airport. Each country cited national security as the basis for their decisions. In other contexts, however, Chinese

interests are heavily involved in providing Arctic infrastructure projects that are in high demand for many northern governments. Chinese engagement in the Arctic highlights this tension between local and regional infrastructure deficits and state-level security concerns, a dynamic that is playing out across the region. Again, the significance of these developments lies in the fact that security in the Arctic is now difficult to analyze at the pan-regional level, and varies across the different sub-regions, where security and insecurity are produced according to the actions of primarily regional actors.

Conclusion

The sub-regionalization of Arctic politics marks the end of the post-Cold War period of Arctic exceptionalism, in which the circumpolar world was seen as separate from the competition and great power manoeuvring that characterize global politics. As the Arctic Ocean warms and Arctic ecosystems lose their distinctiveness to resemble zones at lower latitudes, Arctic politics and security are increasingly becoming a northward extension of the forces that dominate further south.

The fragmentation of the Arctic RSC does not mean that inter-state conflict is inevitable, or even more likely to occur. All eight Arctic states, as well as increasingly important non-Arctic states like China, have repeatedly affirmed their commitments to a peaceful and rule-governed Arctic order based on international law and the peaceful negotiation of disputes, and have insisted that there is no prospective military threat in or to the region. While some observers have expressed worries over an emerging Arctic security dilemma,²⁶ conflict in the Arctic is still more likely to be caused by outside disputes spilling into the circumpolar region, than overt competition within the Arctic itself. Nevertheless, the fragmentation of the Arctic RSC will likely affect the current patterns and structures of Arctic regional governance and cooperation. Pan-Arctic governance may weaken as issues are negotiated bilaterally, and as Arctic sub-regions become incorporated into adjacent blocs of regional politics with their own intergovernmental institutions. This will likely reinforce state-centrism in Arctic politics, at the expense of sub-state governments, local decision-making, and self-governing Indigenous institutions.²⁷

Fragmentation will also occur in terms of what 'security' is understood to mean across the region, as the different subcomplexes experience distinct political, economic, social, and ecological conditions. This variation will drive the continued erosion of the Arctic as a single, holistic region over the course of this century, and may strain the region's governance architecture as states pursue their distinct interests and priorities. As climate change transforms the

region into one that is still distant from most centres of political influence but is otherwise less and less distinct, security in the Arctic – always highly contested – will increasingly become a reflection of the specific factors within the adjacent political areas.

Notes

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Afterword: Time for a New Arctic Security Architecture

Mathieu Boulègue and Duncan Depledge

If we can draw one simple conclusion from this volume, it is that Arctic defence and security issues can no longer be ignored. Despite the return of military interest to the region, the international community remains committed to the idea of ‘Arctic exceptionalism’: that the Arctic should be kept free of military conflict and insulated from geopolitical spill-over spread by inter-state rivalry elsewhere. As a popular refrain has it, the ‘High North’ is to be kept as an area of ‘low tension.’

Yet, we cannot ignore that this aspiration is being severely tested by the increased military activity, and related defence and security issues, creeping into the European High North. There is real danger that the spirit of ‘low tension’ could slip away. Policymakers must address the issue head-on by building new mechanisms for circumpolar dialogue. Several endeavours in the expert and think-tank community have begun to map a way forward, including through an Arctic Security Task Force that we set up in December 2020.¹

Geographically, the potential for miscalculation, accident, and confrontation is concentrated in the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom/Norway (GIUK/GIN) gaps, thereby increasing the pressure towards the North Atlantic, the Barents Sea, and the Norwegian Sea. The growing military activity of the US and its allies is feeding Russia’s sense of encirclement and ‘justifying’ the expansion of the Kremlin’s own militarization efforts, which in turn informs Western policy decisions to further toughen posture, increase numbers, and grow presence.

The risk is that this action-reaction dynamic in the European Arctic will continue to escalate. More military activity in the region means that incidents at sea, and environmental – if not nuclear – accidents, will require careful management to avoid miscalculation and confrontation. Left unaddressed, as Russia grows bolder and more assertive, such incidents could potentially escalate into a dangerous, possibly even armed, dispute.

Another risk relates to horizontal escalation, namely the spill-over of tension from another theatre – for example, the Baltic Sea or the North

Atlantic – to the Arctic. Collectively these regions form a ‘Wider North’: a crisis in one will affect the whole region.

Building a new hard security architecture in the Arctic

The issue is that the ‘Arctic 8’ states have long been reluctant about discussing their military interests collectively, for fear that it would disrupt the consensus around other key issues facing the region. Many attribute the Arctic Council’s successes in other areas precisely to this reticence towards raising military affairs.

The Arctic Security Forces Roundtable (created in 2011) and the Arctic Chiefs of Defence Staff meetings (2012) were exceptions to this. However, these forums were structured in such a way that Russia’s participation became untenable after the fallout spread from the Crimean crisis. Since the demise of these institutions, multilateral military dialogue with Russia in the Arctic has been almost non-existent. It is therefore paramount that a new dialogue begins on how to collectively address the role and place of defence-related, hard security, and military issues, crafted in such a way as to once again insulate the Arctic from geopolitical tensions elsewhere.

We think it necessary to establish a dedicated mechanism that helps regional stakeholders address Arctic military security concerns.

The first task for this mechanism is to create an Arctic Military Code of Conduct with all relevant parties. This would help define the ‘rules of the road’, namely what is (il)legitimate and (un)acceptable military practice in peacetime. The Code would offer a functional, holistic framework regulating military activity. The ultimate goal is to decrease the risk of miscalculation and escalation through predictability and transparency.

In terms of format, such a mechanism would deal exclusively with defence-related and military security affairs. It should be a flexible dialogue, as circumstances dictate, while avoiding over-institutionalization. This mechanism should also be inclusive, and engage countries capable of conducting and sustaining military operations in the Arctic.

Finally, the mechanism should help streamline accountability and responsibility over military activity. Small steps could be achieved, for instance, through more reciprocal information-sharing for military movement, or reciprocal invitations to observe military exercises.

Of course, none of this should be read as code for accepting Russia’s intolerable actions in Ukraine. Nevertheless, Russia’s chairmanship of the Arctic Council and the Arctic Coast Guard Forum from 2021-2023 presents a

unique opportunity to engage Moscow over Arctic military security in parallel diplomatic tracks.

Note

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ISBN:978-1-989811-13-9

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