

SUGGESTED READINGS

The United Kingdom's Arctic Strategy

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The internet is filled with perspectives and opinions. These lists, compiled by academic subject matter experts, are intended to help direct policy makers, practitioners, and academics to credible, open-access sources, available online, free of charge, that reflect leading-edge research and thinking. The compilers of each list have been asked to select readings that are accessibly written (i.e. they are not filled with excessive jargon), offer a diversity of viewpoints, and encourage critical thinking and debate.

“While the United Kingdom is not an Arctic State, we have a strong and enduring connection to the region as the Arctic’s nearest neighbour,” the [British Minister of State responsible for the Polar Regions noted in 2023](#). The following readings outline the UK’s interests in the region, security priorities and objectives which shape its engagement strategies, and its commitments to work with Arctic partners and Allies.

Alyson Bailes, "[The Arctic’s Nearest Neighbour? An Evaluation of the UK’s 2013 Arctic Policy Document](#)," *Arctic Yearbook* (2013).

In October 2013 the United Kingdom became the first sovereign state not included among the Arctic Council's members to publish an official Arctic strategy document. The paper discusses the human, environmental, and commercial aspects of Arctic management in turn, and places a strong emphasis throughout on British scientific contributions. It seems to be trying to stress relevant UK competences, and keep the door open for UK firms to get their fair share in development, while assuring the Arctic powers proper that London respects their rights and will behave as a 'model' Arctic Council observer. Compared with other Arctic strategies, the UK document is rather light on security-related analysis, climate concerns and commercial facts, taking in fact a rather *laissez-faire* position on economic development. It says little on the European Union's role. It remains to be seen whether this presentation of the UK position is complete and compelling enough to secure the desired national influence in Arctic affairs. Much may depend on how other AC observers behave and react.

Ryan Dean, "[Military Threats In, To, and Through the Arctic East of Greenland and Implications for Canada](#)," NAADSN (August 2023).

The waters and airspace east of Greenland are a nexus of Canadian defence concerns and are re-emerging as an important stage for international strategic

competition. This report covers Norway, the United Kingdom, the Faroes Islands (Denmark), and Iceland, charting military threats “in,” “to,” and “through” their borders. This initial mapping of threats is intended to offer new perspectives on where and how Canada could contribute military capabilities to NATO’s defence of the Arctic and North Atlantic. In the section on the UK, Dean charts how the country has taken an increasing interest in the region over the last decade, shifting from concern with climate change and scientific research to protecting shipping across the High North and rising geopolitical tensions with Russia. These efforts are based around the UK’s contributions to NATO.

Duncan Depledge, Klaus Dodds, and Caroline Kennedy-Pipe, “[The UK’s Defence Arctic Strategy: Negotiating the slippery geopolitics of the UK and the Arctic](#),” *The RUSI Journal* (2019).

Following the UK defence secretary’s announcement in September 2018 that the Ministry of Defence is to devise a Defence Arctic Strategy, Duncan Depledge, Klaus Dodds and Caroline Kennedy-Pipe look back on how UK defence has engaged with the Arctic over the past two decades and draw attention to the shift in focus from climate change to hard security threats. They analyse what this means for the development of national Arctic policy in general, including the potential for divergence with other stakeholders such as the Foreign Office and the Scottish government. They conclude by considering how UK Arctic policy might change after Brexit.

Duncan Depledge, Caroline Kennedy-Pipe, and James Rogers. “[The UK and the Arctic: Forward Defence](#),” *Arctic Yearbook* (2019).

The UK is not an Arctic state, but over the past decade its policies towards the region have developed in significant ways. Since 2013 the British Government has published two Arctic Policy Frameworks, setting out commitments to working cooperatively with the Arctic states and other stakeholders to ensure that as climate change occurs the region remains peaceful. In 2019, the Ministry of Defence (MOD) committed to publishing an Arctic Defence Strategy, that would “put the Arctic and the High North central to the security of the United Kingdom”. This article examines the evolution of UK defence interests in the Arctic, whilst also highlighting the emergence of a significant Scottish dimension in UK Arctic affairs.

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [Looking North: the UK and the Arctic](#) (9 February 2023).

This document consolidates the UK’s policies and strategies relating to the Arctic, outlining the UK interests in the region and the government’s long-term priorities and objectives which shape the country’s engagement and actions on the Arctic. Released at a time of heightened tension, the long-term strategic objective remains for the Arctic to be a peaceful and stable region, characterised by cooperation. The framework reiterates that the UK will remain an active, influential and reliable partner in the Arctic across four priority areas: partnering

and collaborating; protecting the climate, people and environment; preserving security and stability; and promoting our shared prosperity. Its whole-of-government approach to the region builds upon diplomatic efforts, defence capabilities, and the UK Arctic research community's scientific expertise. Previous strategic policy documents include the 2013 UK Arctic policy framework: [*Adapting To Change: UK policy towards the Arctic*](#) and the 2018 update [*Beyond the Ice: UK policy towards the Arctic*](#).

Andrew Foxall, "[Russia's Policies towards a Changing Arctic: Implications for UK Security](#)," *Henry Jackson Society Russia Studies Centre Research Paper (2017)*.

The UK can do little to prevent Russia's activities in the Arctic per se, but a more sophisticated assessment of these activities and their implications would aid the development of more effective policies, both domestically and internationally. Together with its NATO allies, the UK should encourage the alliance to adopt an Arctic strategy, and thereby ensure that there is a common understanding of the region's security challenges as well as a comprehensive policy to address them. In particular, NATO needs to rethink the nature of Article 5 in the context of the Arctic and recognise the renewed importance of the 'GIUK Gap.'

House of Lords, [Our Friends in the North: UK strategy towards the Arctic](#) (29 November 2023).

As the Arctic opens up and security challenges grow more complex, the UK Government will almost certainly need to pay closer attention to the region in future. This will require a cross-government and multi-disciplinary approach, as well as increased ministerial focus. The Committee expresses concern that the UK has insufficient key military assets, such as submarines, maritime patrol or airborne early warning aircraft, to support an increased focus on the Arctic alongside the UK's growing interest in other regions, such as the Indo-Pacific. While noting that it is not in Russia's interest to start a conventional conflict in the Arctic, sub-threshold activity in the High North is a significant and growing threat. Close co-operation between the state and the private sector is key to combat threats to critical infrastructure. While China has sought to work within the Arctic's existing governance framework to date, that could change quickly and the UK is encouraged to remain "alert to the evolving nature of the Sino-Russian relationship and whether it could lead to a Chinese military presence in the Arctic." The report also calls on the government to sustain ministerial engagement in the Arctic and to appoint a dedicated Arctic Ambassador.

Nicolas Jouan, Theodora Ogden, James Black, Corine Wood-Donnelly, and Stephen Coulson, [UK Strategy for the High North: Policy levers to influence developments out to 2050](#), RAND Europe (2022).

As the UK seeks to promote a future for the Arctic as an area of 'low tension', and enhance UK influence in the wider High North region, the authors emphasize that it must remain cognisant that the UK is not an Arctic State and, consequently, often

needs to use indirect levers of power to achieve its objectives. At the same time, the impact of ongoing changes in the region is likely to be felt across a broad variety of policy areas – both within central government and devolved administrations (e.g. in Scotland) – increasingly affecting the UK's wider influence, security and prosperity. A lack of cross-government cohesion could bring significant challenges to the UK, while missing out on significant opportunities. Conversely, a more integrated approach towards the High North could unify UK strategy into a cross-government effort directed at specific goals. The authors also note that further investment in military capabilities that do not disrupt the balance of power in the region could strengthen the UK's position, and that the UK might further leverage its scientific and economic clout to enhance its bilateral diplomatic relations with Arctic States and facilitate regional cooperation.

Ministry of Defence of the United Kingdom. [The UK's Defence Contribution in the High North](#) (March 2022).

The UK's Defence Contribution in the High North lays out the Defence objectives that support wider UK aims outlined in the government's 2018 Arctic policy framework *Beyond the Ice*. The main commitments include: protecting critical national infrastructure and our other national interests, as well as those of Allies and partners; ensuring freedom to navigate and operate across the wider region; reinforcing the rules-based international system, particularly UNCLOS; and contesting malign and destabilising behaviours. To deliver these objectives, the UK MoD commits to: improve understanding of the region, how it is changing, and the activities of state and non-state actors within it; work with regional Allies and partners, including through NATO, the Northern Group, and the Joint Expeditionary Force, to align policy, activity, and capability where possible and across all domains; maintain a coherent Defence posture, presence, and profile in the region, including training, partnering, and operating from and in the Arctic; and develop sustainable, modernised, and proportionate Defence capability for the region, including through investment in Research and Development.

Martin Siegert, Sheldon Bacon, David Barnes, Ian Brooks, Henry Burgess, Finlo Cottier, Duncan Depledge et al. "[The Arctic and the UK: Climate, research and engagement](#)," Imperial College London *Grantham Institute Discussion Paper* (2020).

Scientists need to take observations and improve their understanding of climatic processes in the Nordic Seas and the Arctic Ocean to fill gaps in knowledge about the links between the Arctic climate and the UK's weather; a risk identified by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The UK has significant research expertise and experience to understand how global warming will change the Arctic's environment and affect the UK. This strength, allied with the capabilities of the UK's new polar research ship the RRS Sir David Attenborough, warrants an integrated programme of research, including advanced numerical modelling, to improve predictions of future extreme weather events. Such a programme must acknowledge that the Arctic is politically an increasingly congested and contested space. It should be designed in collaboration with key

Arctic and near-Arctic nations to increase the UK's influence and ability to prepare, respond and plan for future extreme weather events.

Andrey Todorov, and Dmitriy Lyzhim. "[The UK's interests in the Arctic](#)," *Arctic and North* (2019).

The article by two Russian scholars analyzes British policy priorities in the Arctic. Noting that the UK has a long tradition of studying the Arctic and is one of the first observer countries of the Arctic Council, they observe several significant policy changes which they describe as "a natural reaction to the changing situation in the region." Their analysis of the British Foreign Ministry's 2018 report reveals four primary areas of UK interest in the Arctic: economic reliance on hydrocarbons and bioresources; military security (primarily after Russia's invasion of Ukraine); climate change; and international cooperation rooted in scientific diplomacy. Despite official documents setting these strategical priorities, they assess that "London's Arctic policy is passive" which invites expert criticism.

Other Readings

Duncan Depledge, "Assembling a (British) Arctic." *The Polar Journal* 3, no. 1 (2013): 163-177.

Duncan Depledge, *Britain and the Arctic* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

Duncan Depledge, "Emerging UK Arctic policy," *International Affairs* 89, no. 6 (2013): 1445-1457.

Duncan Depledge and P. Whitney Lackenbauer, eds. [On Thin Ice? Perspectives on Arctic Security](#), NAADSN, March 2021.

Duncan Depledge, "(Re) Assembling Britain's 'Arctic,'" *Polar Geopolitics? Knowledges, Resources, and Legal Regimes*, ed. Richard Powell and Klaus Dodds, 183-200 (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2014).

Duncan Depledge, "[The United Kingdom and the Arctic in the 21st century](#)," *Arctic Yearbook* (2012): 130-138.

House of Lords, Select Committee on the Arctic, [Responding to a Changing Arctic](#) (February 2015).

Natalia Eremina, "UK-Russia Relations in the Arctic: From Damage Limitation to a Cooperative Agenda?" *The Polar Journal* (2021): 1-18.

Rebecca Pincus, "Towards a New Arctic: Changing Strategic Geography in the GIUK Gap," *RUSI Journal* 165, no. 3 (2020): 50-58.