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THESIS

**DETERRENCE IN THE ARCTIC:
IS NATO A SOLUTION FOR A PEACEFUL ARCTIC?**

by

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IS NATO A SOLUTION FOR A PEACEFUL ARCTIC?**

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ABSTRACT

Global warming has increased the Arctic's geopolitical significance, especially for Russia, which has taken steps to expand its military and economic influence there. This thesis sought to develop a strategy that the United States and its allies can use to minimize Russian influence in the Arctic. The research considered the Arctic's economic importance to Russia, security matters associated with the region, and Russia's national pride regarding the Arctic. It also looked at the implications of bringing the Arctic to NATO's attention and analyzed the capabilities of the United States and its allies to deter Russia and maintain the status quo in the region. This study determined that Russia is using the Arctic to pursue an economic resurrection and is maintaining an ambiguous political environment in which it might use the threat of military incursion to accomplish its foreign policy objectives. Moreover, there is little each Arctic country can do to predict or to deter Russia's actions in the region. The Western states need to align in a collective response to prevent Russia from taking a leading role in the Arctic. Pulling the Arctic into NATO's orbit might be a solution, but the implications and risks of doing this need to be considered carefully.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AC	Arctic Council
A2/AD	anti-access/ area denial
AZRF	Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation
BEAC	Barents Euro-Arctic Council
CLCS	Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf
CNPC	China National Petroleum Corporation
CSIS	Center for Strategic & International Studies
DOD	Department of Defense
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
EOP	Enhanced Opportunities Partners
EU	European Union
FONOPS	Freedom of Navigation Operations
FPZ	Fisheries Protection Zone
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GIUK	Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom
ICBM	intercontinental ballistic missile
JSC	Joint Strategic Command
LNG	Liquefied Natural Gas
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NSR	Northern Sea Route
SAR	Search and Rescue
SSBN	nuclear-powered ballistic-missile submarine
SSGN	nuclear-powered guided-missile submarine
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
USGS	United States Geological Survey

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I. INTRODUCTION

This project focuses on Russia's increased military and economic interest in the Arctic region¹ and the possibility that Russia might use the threat of military incursion or seek to take advantage of a possible crisis in the Arctic to accomplish its national policy objectives. The United States and its allies within the aegis of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) alliance should adopt a NATO Arctic Strategy to achieve a common understanding that addresses the region's security challenges.

Climate change has led to an unprecedented melting of ice in the Arctic, which has opened new opportunities, such as easier extraction of natural resources as well as safer shipping and navigation in the so-called "Northern Sea Route (NSR), also known as the Northeast Passage."² For that reason, and others, this study explicitly highlights, the importance of the Arctic is growing, especially for Russia.³ The thesis will examine what factors other than purely economic interest aroused Russia's greater involvement in the Arctic, and what challenges the United States and its allies will face in deterring Russia's attempt to restore its position as a global power.

The Arctic has been a long-dismissed territory, to which the great powers have gradually switched their attention, as a new region, maybe the last one of the "*balance-shifters* in the global equilibrium of power."⁴ Both Russia and China have growing interests in the region and have increased their military capabilities on open ice waters. Russia's interest is further influenced by its limited ability to expand in Europe and Asia. Moreover, the Ukraine crisis triggered by Russia's hostile posture has damaged Western states' willingness to cooperate with Moscow. The sanctions that were placed on Russia as

¹ This region is also referred to as the "High North"

² *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. "Northeast Passage," June 19, 2013, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Northeast-Passage>.

³ Kathrin Keil, "The Arctic: A New Region of Conflict? The Case of Oil and Gas," *Cooperation and Conflict* 49, no. 2 (June 2014): 162–90, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836713482555>.

⁴ Marlène Laruelle, *Russia's Arctic Strategies and the Future of the Far North* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc, 2014), xviii.

a result greatly reduced the cooperation on Arctic exploration.⁵ The other Arctic rim states such as Canada, Denmark, or Norway are not interested in the collective defense of the Arctic, their focus being purely on securing their current national territories.⁶ In this context, in this challenging region of the world, the United States should join together with its allies and take a leading role on expanding deterrence in the region of the Arctic.

A. RESEARCH QUESTION

This research seeks to address the following: What is the strategy that the United States and its allies should enact to minimize Russian influence in the Arctic? The response requires two additional questions.

First, what policies can be applied by the United States and its allies to extend such deterrence in the Arctic? Russia's interests in the Arctic are straightforward. The thesis will consider Russia's involvement in the Arctic, from three perspectives: economic concerns, security matters, and international acknowledgment tied with national pride. The project will examine each of these three components. Consequently, the policies that the United States and its allies should apply, need to be aligned with the actual regional relations between all Arctic states.

Second, how should the NATO alliance engage in the Arctic? The Arctic is a controversial political space governed by policies enacted mainly from economic and ecological points of view. Institutions such as the Arctic Council (AC) and the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) work on issues related to environmental protection and sustainable development, but also engage in activities such as simplifying border crossings, emergency search and rescue, and protection of indigenous people.⁷ The Arctic military issues and territorial matters are excluded from such institutions, including the European

⁵ Dmitri Trenin, "Russia and China in the Arctic: Cooperation, Competition, and Consequences," Carnegie Moscow Center, Foreign and Security Policy, March 31, 2020. https://carnegie.ru/commentary/81407?fbclid=IwAR3_Kv99Zrw7M880Zt3zoUc0WZaHE9X__vy8CSHiso9i5kGvH27Fj2xBfw4.

⁶ Siemon Wezeman, "Military Capabilities in the Arctic," *Sipri Background Paper*, October 2016, <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2016/sipri-background-papers/military-capabilities-arctic>.

⁷ Laruelle, *Russia's Arctic Strategies and the Future of the Far North*, xiv.

Union (EU). As a result, the only international institution capable of addressing the challenge of security in the Arctic remains NATO.⁸ However, placing the Arctic under NATO's purview comes with certain challenges. How will the alliance consider outweighing the costs and the benefits of such action? Is NATO ready, and more importantly, what are its capabilities to deter Russia's arousal in the Arctic?

B. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION

The Arctic region is emerging as a new focus of intensified struggle, not just between Russia and the other four rim Arctic states (Canada, Denmark, Norway and the United States), but also for those that consider the Arctic an area of interest, such as China. The unique geopolitical and military features of the Arctic have attracted the interest of many nations. One of the unique geopolitical and military features of the Arctic is the critical strategic maritime transit route known as the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom (GIUK) Gap. Scholars such as Benjamin Rhode believe that the Gap strategic value has caught NATO's attention, especially after Russia's subversion of Ukraine in 2014.⁹ Second, some of the shortest trade distances between Asia, Europe, and the Americas are through the contested NSR, and Russia tightened its control by imposing limitations on foreign ships transiting through these newly ice-free waters.¹⁰ Other Arctic states have contested these limitations. Arctic's unexplored natural resources, and the idea of Russia's "resource nationalism," will likely cause increased tensions in the region. Last but not least, the Arctic is part Arctism, one of the three Russia's main geographical metanarratives, in which Russia is going farther north, and which together with Eurasianism (Russia's territory is larger than any other countries in the world and forms a continent), and Cosmism (territorial expansion continues in the space), gives the country its uniqueness

⁸ Anna Wieslander, "It's Time for NATO to Engage in the Arctic," Defense One, September 16, 2019, <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2019/09/its-time-nato-arctic/159887/>.

⁹ Benjamin Rhode, "The GIUK Gap's Strategic Significance," IISS 25, October 2019, <https://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-comments/2019/the-giuk-gaps-strategic-significance>.

¹⁰ *The Maritime Executive*, "Russia Tightens Control Over Northern Sea Route," August 3, 2019, <https://www.maritime-executive.com/article/russia-tightens-control-over-northern-sea-route>.

among nations.¹¹ According to Marlene Laruelle, the Arctic is an important component of Russian nationalist movement, being probably the last opportunity for the revival of Russia's great-power status.¹²

Laruelle argues that Russia has an increased political-military interest in expanding influence in the Arctic, as a pursuit of its state objectives. Its expansion there is a coherent and goal-oriented activity meant to challenge Western domination of an international order that Russia's state leadership perceives as detrimental to its own interests and therefore, intrinsically vulnerable.

During the peak of the Cold War, the Arctic was considered of strategic importance for both the United States and the Soviet Union. However, the general opinion about the region was perceived like being well-balanced, especially by the two superpowers, the United States, and the Soviet Union. The bipolar period of the Arctic was characterized by the strategies of those two countries, which were to preserve the stability of the region through their own political views (democracy by the United States and communism by the Soviet Union). Threats were seen only from the military perspective; therefore, the concept of security was narrowed.

However, after the end of the Cold War, the Arctic region has declined considerably in strategic relevance for both the United States and the new Russia. However, by its nature, the Arctic is a region of growing geo-strategic cautious competition heightened by climate change. Climate change in the Arctic brings new threats not only to the United States national security, but also to the fragile status-quo of the region; therefore it is imperative for the second largest Arctic state—the United States—to adapt its maritime strategy and posture.¹³ Access to vast and new petroleum and gas reserves, mineral deposits, along with the perspective of new shorter and safer maritime trading routes, have increased the

¹¹ Laruelle, *Russia's Arctic Strategies and the Future of the Far North*, 39.

¹² Laruelle, 39–40.

¹³ Heather Conley and Jamie Kraut, *U.S. Strategic Interests in the Arctic: An Assessment of Current Challenges and New Opportunities for Cooperation* (Washington, DC: CSIS Europe Program, 2010), 7–8, https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/publication/100426_Conley_USStrategicInterests_Web.pdf.

security strategic importance of this region as a growth prospect energy. Although the United States has promoted an Arctic Strategy since 2009, it lacks needed capabilities to successfully respond to challenges in the Arctic region, and to ensure it can play a significant role in the Arctic global commons.¹⁴ The United States must address the shortcomings in both military capacity and policy thinking, if it plans to support and enhance its stated national Arctic policy, and to maintain a stable geopolitical environment. For that, the United States needs to “foster close allegiances and play a leadership role in NATO.”¹⁵

The NATO alliance can help defend the Arctic. Thule Air Base is a good example of cooperation in the Arctic, with its population of approximately 600, made up of American, Canadian, and Danish military members, as well as civilians from Greenland, Denmark, and the United States. Although it is extremely isolated, being found 700 km above the Arctic Circle, it is a good example of inter-alliance cooperation at the top of the world.¹⁶

Without an official Arctic strategy, NATO is challenged to raise its attention to yield its vision in the area and to fulfill a more significant role, although there is a growing recognition within NATO that the Arctic dynamics may pose a threat to the security of the Alliance in the world.¹⁷

C. METHODOLOGY AND HYPOTHESIS

This thesis focuses on the increase of Russia’s military and economic interest in the Arctic region, and on the possibility that Russia might use the threat of foreign military incursion or might seek to take advantage of a possible crisis in the Arctic to accomplish its national policy objectives. To determine that, it is essential to weigh the strategic

¹⁴ Ronald O’Rourke et al., *Changes in the Arctic: Background and Issues for Congress*, CRS Report No. R41153 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2020), <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R41153.pdf>.

¹⁵ Tyler Cross, “The NATO Alliance’s Role in Arctic Security,” *The Maritime Executive*, January 16, 2020, <https://www.maritime-executive.com/editorials/the-nato-alliance-s-role-in-arctic-security>.

¹⁶ Cross.

¹⁷ Iona Allan Mackenzie, “Arctic Narratives and Political Values: Arctic States, China and NATO” (Riga, Latvia: NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, December 2019).

purposes the Russian arctic forces could pose in the Arctic. Russia has shown that it has the capacity and the determination to take advantage of its military power to carry out its foreign policy goals. This has been visible as part of Russian grand strategy under Putin, as Keith Payne and John Foster noted, since Russia's 2008 occupation of Georgia's territories, augmented in 2014 with the occupation of Crimea, the war in eastern Ukraine and military support for the Syrian government.¹⁸ This argument leads to the question of what Russia would gain by lengthening its borders in the Arctic, and if it did so, what the implications would be for the Arctic states and for the region itself.

Disastrous events in the Arctic may happen anytime, due to the fact that the emergency response policies and infrastructure such as search and rescue (SAR) capabilities is not sufficiently developed, due to the increase in commercial, tourist, and military traffic.¹⁹ Moreover, the research will highlight how essential the Arctic is in the Russian Federation Strategy, and what challenges are faced by the United States and the Arctic coastal states such as Canada, Denmark, and Norway.

This research assesses the degree to which the strategy of the United States and its allies will succeed in minimizing Russian influence in the Arctic and deterring future Russian influence in the High North. Moreover, this effort analyzes why the Arctic is essential in Russian Federation Strategy, addressing the matter from two perspectives: economic and social development on the one hand, and sovereignty interests in the region on the other. In addition, this study investigates whether economic and social development is a subterfuge for future Russian military intervention in the region.

To assess Russia's behavior toward the Arctic, the study will examine Russia's interests, and then its activities who are challenging the rules-based international orders who applies in the Arctic. Finally, the study will reflect the challenges that are faced by the United States and the Arctic coastal states such as Canada, Denmark, and Norway to deter and minimize Russian influence and avoid futile escalation of force into the Arctic region.

¹⁸ Keith B. Payne and John S. Foster, "Russian Strategy Expansion, Crisis and Conflict," *Comparative Strategy* 36, no. 1 (January 2017): 1–89, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01495933.2017.1277121>.

¹⁹ Conley and Kraut, *U.S. Strategic Interests in the Arctic*, 7.

First thesis will first examine why the Arctic matters for the Russian Federation. The concern for the Arctic is growing in the face of the changing climate and environment. While the fragile barrier of ice is melting, Russian claims in the Arctic region are increasing. Russia seeks control over an area, to include the North Pole that is increasingly available for oil drilling, new trade routes and more, as it is the nation with the longest Arctic coast of any state. According to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), all Arctic littoral states' territorial waters extend to a maximum of 12 nautical miles (22 km).²⁰ However, every coastal state may establish an exclusive economic zone (EEZ) extending 200 nautical miles (370 km) from shore giving that state "special rights regarding the exploration and use of marine resources, including energy production from water and wind."²¹ UNCLOS also "allows states to extend their limits beyond 200 miles if they can provide scientific evidence that the continental shelf beyond their coastline extends that far," thus giving them rights to make any decisions on the extraction of natural resources.²² This is considered to be the legal basis for Russia's claim to the Lomonosov ridge/subsoil resources under the North Pole, its dispute being on the last agenda of the discussions at the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) still under revision by the organization.²³ A positive response is not likely to be well perceived by the other littoral states, especially by Denmark and Canada, the two countries that already have overlapping claims with Russia. It is worth mentioning that although the United States, has not ratified UNCLOS, it has contested the Russian claims by submitting formal demands supported by scientific arguments.²⁴

²⁰ United Nations, "UNCLOS," November 16, 1982, https://www.un.org/Depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/UNCLOS-TOC.htm.

²¹ United Nations, "UNCLOS."

²² United Nations, "UNCLOS."

²³ Atle Staalesen, "Russia Is Winning Support for Its Claims on Arctic Shelf, Says Chief Negotiator," *The Independent Barents Observer*, Arctic, November 28, 2019, <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/arctic/2019/11/russia-winning-support-its-claims-arctic-shelf-says-chief-negotiator>.

²⁴ Laruelle, *Russia's Arctic Strategies and the Future of the Far North*, 100.

Therefore, disputes derive from the desired further development of each state's EEZ, based on the previous geological expertise determining that this area constitutes a natural extension of the continental shelf of a given country.²⁵ In 2008, the United States Geological Survey (USGS) estimated that the Arctic may contain 13 percent of the world's undiscovered oil and up to 30 percent of the world's undiscovered gas resources.²⁶ A study by Alexander Sergunin and Valery Konyshev emphasizes the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation (AZRF) as being extremely important in the economy of Russia with interests to access and exploit its natural resources.²⁷ For that, dominating the Arctic has become vital for Russia to boost its economy, and moreover, Putin's regime sees in the Arctic policy a way of restoring Russia's status as a global power, and at the same time gaining support from its domestic audience.²⁸ This argument emphasizes the fact that the Arctic is a long-term strategic focus for Russia, on which Moscow relies to define its dynamic and powerful role on the international stage but also to rebuild its nation-branding and prestige on the international scene.²⁹

Next, this thesis will examine the international environment and how Russia may take advantage of it. Russia's policies in the Arctic focus on security matters, economic issues and other outcomes accredited to them. Russia's authority and behavior in the Arctic have always been in accordance with the rules of international law, especially with the provisions of the 1982 UNCLOS that ensure the legal rights of each of the five coastal

²⁵ Mateusz Kubiak, "Russian Policy towards the Arctic," Warsaw Institute, December 14, 2018, <https://warsawinstitute.org/russian-policy-towards-arctic/>.

²⁶ USGS, "Circum-Arctic Resource Appraisal: Estimates of Undiscovered Oil and Gas North of the Arctic Circle," Fact Sheet, 2008, <https://pubs.usgs.gov/fs/2008/3049/fs2008-3049.pdf>.

²⁷ Alexander Sergunin and Valery Konyshev, "Russia's Arctic Strategy," in *Russia: Strategy, Policy and Administration*, ed. Irvin Studin (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2018), https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-56671-3_13.

²⁸ Ekaterina Piskunova, "Russia in the Arctic: What's Lurking behind the Flag?," *International Journal: Canada's Journal of Global Policy Analysis* 65, no. 4 (December 2010): 851–64, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002070201006500415>.

²⁹ Laruelle, *Russia's Arctic Strategies and the Future of the Far North*; Dmitri Trenin and Pavel Baev, "The Arctic: A View from Moscow,," 44.

states of the Arctic.³⁰ However, aggressive actions and illegitimate behavior existed, such as the incident from 2005 in which a Russian trawler named Elektron did not submit to arrest by the Norwegian Coast Guard and moreover broke away from its escort and headed for the Russian coast with two Norwegian officers on board, and a 2007 Russian polar expedition (with a Russian official from the State Duma on board) which ended with the planting of a one meter-high titanium Russian flag as a symbolic claim of the North Pole. Such comportment contradicts Viatcheslav Gavrilov's argument in which he indicates that Russia as a responsible player, and proves that the Arctic is a region of Russian great interest.³¹ When Russia's military build-up in the Arctic is compared to that of the other littoral states, concerns about future conflicts in the region appear to be real.³²

Third, this thesis argues that the tensions between Russia and the other littoral states stem from the activities that the Putin regime has undertaken to protect its national interests in the Arctic. Also, natural disasters and weather climate change recognize no borders or states identities and may turn into a cradle of tensions in the region. Another thing to consider is to determine the challenges that are faced by the United States and the Arctic rim states such as Canada, Denmark and Norway deterring Russia influence and avoiding futile escalation of force in the Arctic region.

Conflicts between the five Arctic rim states substantially framed the geo-political status of the area. According with Laruelle, there have been eight bilateral disputes over EEZ boundaries, of which Russia has been involved in two: with the United States over the Bering Sea and with Norway over the Barents Sea and Svalbard Archipelago.³³ Despite the fact that both disputes are now resolved, the last after more than 40 years of

³⁰ Viatcheslav Gavrilov, "Russian Arctic Policy," in *Breaking the Ice Curtain? Russia, Canada, and Arctic Security in a Changing Circumpolar World*, ed. Whitney Lackenbauer and Suzanne Lalonde (Canadian Affairs Institute, 2019), 1–13.

³¹ Alexander Nurnberg, "An Arctic Circle Chase Pits Norway and Russia," *The New York Times*, October 21, 2005, <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/10/21/international/europe/an-arctic-circle-chase-pits-norway-and-russia.html>; Tom Parfitt, "Russia Plants Flag on North Pole Seabed," *The Guardian*, August 2, 2007, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/aug/02/russia.arctic>.

³² Wezeman, "Military Capabilities in the Arctic."

³³ Laruelle, *Russia's Arctic Strategies and the Future of the Far North*, 94–95.

negotiations, there is still room from interpretation and arguments.³⁴ In the same context, disputes can also occur from the legal status of regulating transit through the Northwest Passage and the Northeast Passage as well as territorial claims based on the continental shelf (Lomonosov Ridge and Alpha-Mendeleev Ridge).³⁵ Laruelle remarks that Russia is involved in all three types of legal disputes: “those concerning the delineation of EEZ boundaries, the delimitation of the continental shelf but also in those concerning the vessel transit.”³⁶ Against this confrontational background, different types of scenarios can lead to situations that are evolving and putting additional pressure and stress on the capabilities of the United States and its allies, such as tourist or maritime ships stuck in the icy waters, violation of regulations regarding economic activities in disputed territories (based on the status of the EEZ or on the status of the continental shelf) and different interpretations of bilateral treaties, one example being the use of the Svalbard island for military purposes.

In response to this, and to maintain the region’s security status quo, NATO needs to develop and deliver a comprehensive strategy to challenge of Russia’s visible ascendancy. This thesis does not attempt to define this strategy, focusing instead on the costs and the benefits of such a measure.

The Arctic, since the end of the Cold War has proven to be a place where most countries have advocated peace, stability, and cooperation. However, concerns over potential new or unsettled claims that could lead to regional disputes, increased the attention on the UNCLOS, with the international agreement being the sole document with its guiding principles on how nations should make use of the Arctic waters. As of March 8, 2020, there were 168 countries that ratified the treaty.³⁷ The United States did not ratify

³⁴ Laruelle, 109.

³⁵ Laruelle, 94–95.

³⁶ Laruelle, 95.

³⁷ United Nations, “Chronological Lists of Ratifications of Accessions and Successions to the Convention and the Related Agreements,” September 3, 2020, https://www.un.org/Depts/los/reference_files/chronological_lists_of_ratifications.htm#.

the treaty, however it willingly accepts it, and acts accordingly as long as its rights and freedom are accepted, not only in the Arctic, but also in international waters.³⁸

On this background, what will a strategy delivered by the United States as a lead nation and its NATO partners from the Arctic will look like to minimize and deter Russian ambition over the Arctic?

Russia, the only non-NATO Arctic coastal state, ratified UNCLOS, and by its claim to reach the North Pole it overlaps in part with territory of Denmark and Canada.³⁹ Even if defensive by some scholars, adding the Russian military build-up in the region, new efforts need to be made to address military security and to maintain the region's 'low tension' status.⁴⁰

As stated earlier, individually there is little that each of the Arctic states will do to prevent Russia's activities in the Arctic.⁴¹ It becomes difficult to address these challenges and to preserve Arctic's balance, especially now, with China's involvement and a possible partnership with Russia, as China identifies herself as a "Near-Arctic-State."⁴² China's interest in the Arctic may be an advantage for Russia but also an opportunity for the United States and NATO to create a competition between China and Russia to weaken the ties between these two countries.

At the same, there is a general misunderstanding that NATO is already involved in the Arctic. Also, as mentioned previously there is no international institution that focuses

³⁸ *Changes in the Arctic: Background and Issues for Congress*, 10.

³⁹ European Parliament, "Arctic Continental Shelf Claims. Mapping Interests in the Circumpolar North," January 2017, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2017/595870/EPRS_BRI\(2017\)595870_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2017/595870/EPRS_BRI(2017)595870_EN.pdf).

⁴⁰ Mathieu Boulegue, "Russia's Military Posture in the Arctic," Chatham House, June 2019, <https://reader.chathamhouse.org/russia-s-military-posture-arctic-managing-hard-power-low-tension-environment>.

⁴¹ The term Arctic states refers to eight nations, consisting of a core of five coastal, littoral or rim states (Canada, Denmark - by the virtue of Greenland, a member country of the Kingdom of Denmark, Norway, Russia and the United States) plus three 'non-coastal states' (Iceland, Finland and Sweden)

⁴² James Foggo III, "Russia, China Offer Challenges in the Arctic," Defense One, July 10, 2019, <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2019/07/russia-china-offer-challenges-arctic/158303/>.

on security in the Arctic, as a result, NATO remains the only international institution capable of addressing it. The United States cooperation within the alliance will contribute to Arctic security and deter possible opponents from expanding their influence in the Arctic. A NATO Arctic strategy, together with an increased presence in the frigid waters of the Arctic, may be the looked-for solution to a secure and stable region where states' national interests are maintained and challenges are commonly and cooperatively shared to preserve the existing order in the Arctic.

NATO needs a course of action to enhance its activity in the Arctic. But this needs to be done without Russia perceiving that the alliance is trying to displace and constrain it as NATO did in Eastern Europe. The study will determine how this action will balance the thin equilibrium in the Arctic region and whether the extra costs of this approach will outweigh the benefits. Outlying the implications and investigating how to prevent possible scenarios in which Russia maintains the trump card on ice waters is a challenge we need to consider in our future discussions about the Arctic.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Russia's policy towards the Arctic, is the subject of many discussions in the academic community, with an emphasis on its security strategies. However, the literature review of this study will explore Russia's pursuits in the Arctic, and will examine the economic, military-strategic, and national pride motivations that are driving those pursuits. Moreover, it will review the literature related to Russia's activities in the Arctic and provide an overview of the Arctic as a region of cooperation or conflict.

A. RUSSIA'S PURSUIT IN THE ARCTIC

Considering Russia's pursuit into the Arctic, the literature consulted will assume that the state demeanor is pushed by its economic interest and national pride.

1. Economic

Some scholars claim that Russia's attentiveness toward the Arctic comes from a desire to harvest its valuable resources. As Arctic ice continues to melt, access to these natural resources continue to increase.

USGS estimated that the Arctic may contain 13 percent of the world's undiscovered oil and up to 30 percent of the world's undiscovered gas resources.⁴³ The significance of AZRF as the most prolific producer of Russian gas and oil (95 percent and 70 percent respectively) is highlighted in Sergunin and Konyshev's study.⁴⁴ These same authors stated that Russian geologists discovered more than 200 oil and gas deposits in AZRF.⁴⁵ Also, their study emphasizes the importance of the AZRF in the economy of Russia; this region is abundant in mineral resources such as diamond (99 percent of total Russian production), platinum-group elements (98 percent), nickel and cobalt (over 80 percent),

⁴³ USGS, "Circum-Arctic Resource Appraisal: Estimates of Undiscovered Oil and Gas North of the Arctic Circle."

⁴⁴ Sergunin and Konyshev, "Russia's Arctic Strategy."

⁴⁵ Sergunin and Konyshev.

chromium and manganese (90 percent), copper (60 percent), antimony, tin, tungsten, rare metals (between 50 per cent and 90 percent), and gold (about 40 percent).⁴⁶

It is also worth mentioning that the development and promotion of the NSR is one of Russia's objectives in the Arctic. The Putin administration recognizes the NSR as a geostrategic asset in its Arctic Strategy, which was demonstrated in 2013 policy documents, with plans in the same year to begin regular naval patrols along the shipping lane.⁴⁷ Unlocking and taking advantage of the icy waters of the Arctic, by reviving the Arctic route, is a goal of Moscow's ambitions.

The importance of the NSR for Russia domestic affairs is emphasized by well-known scholars such as Laruelle. Laruelle also argues that although the NSR is extremely unlikely to become a busy international trade route, Moscow will enforce a soft security policy alongside with international cooperation the later mainly dedicated on search and rescue systems.⁴⁸ At the same time, others scholars, such as Pavel Deviatkin, argue that that defending the NSR is a high priority for Russia in the Arctic, suggesting that Moscow's actions and policies regarding the progress and defense of the NSR can be a source of potential for dissension over the route's jurisdiction.⁴⁹

2. Military-Strategic

The Arctic plays an important role in Russia's defense strategy and has been highlighted in various security doctrines, especially after the early 2000s, when Putin's ambitious agenda to restore Russia came to power. The feeling of a revisionist Russia towards the Arctic region, could have been triggered by its limited capacity to expand in

⁴⁶ Sergunin and Konyshev.

⁴⁷ Thomas E. Rotnem, "Putin's Arctic Strategy," *Problems of Post-Communism*, January 2, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10758216.2016.1222869>.

⁴⁸ Laruelle, *Russia's Arctic Strategies and the Future of the Far North*, 191.

⁴⁹ Pavel Devyatkin, "Russia's Arctic Strategy: Maritime Shipping," *The Arctic Institute*, February 6, 2018, <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/russias-arctic-strategy-maritime-shipping-part-iv/>.

Europe and Asia, after illegal violations of the territorial integrity of The Republic of Moldova (1990), Georgia (2008), and Ukraine (2014).⁵⁰

However, authors such as Sergunin, point out that Russia's strategies in the Arctic are balanced between a hard security strategy and a soft security strategy.⁵¹ Sergunin concludes that the soft security agenda (threats and challenges to its AZRF are domestic) is much more important.

Moreover, Russia's military strategies towards the Arctic seem to remain constant in contrast to its security agenda abroad, as Konyshev and Sergunin pointed out, and are aimed to three major goals: "to demonstrate and ascertain Russia's sovereignty" over the AZRF, "to protect its economic interest in the High North," and to validate its "great-power status."⁵² At the same time, Russia's military buildup in the last decade has been a goal-oriented strategy aimed to challenge Western supremacy of an international order that Russia views as unfavorable to its interests, as James Sherr noticed in his article.⁵³

In a recent article from the Arctic Institute, Devyatkin highlights the fact that Russia's presence in the Arctic is far below the level it was during the Cold War. Nonetheless, he also mentions that the significant increase of naval patrols in the region, the enhanced operational capabilities of submarines, and larger investments in defensive missile systems indicate that Russia is protecting its economic interests, thus suggesting that Russia is preparing for a possible conflict.⁵⁴ A study from 2016, brings strong evidence

⁵⁰ Gerald E. Connolly, *NATO and Security in the Arctic*, 172 PCTR17 (NATO Parliamentary Assembly, 2017), <https://www.nato-pa.int/download-file?filename=sites/default/files/2017-11/2017%20-%20172%20PCTR%2017%20E%20rev.1%20fin%20-%20NATO%20AND%20SECURITY%20IN%20THE%20ARCTIC.pdf>

⁵¹ Alexander Sergunin, "Arctic Security Perspectives from Russia," in *Routledge Handbook of Arctic Security*, ed. Gjørv Hoogensen, Marc Lanteigne, and Horatio Sam-Aggrey (London ; New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), 129–39.

⁵² Alexander Sergunin and Valery Konyshev, "Is Russia a Revisionist Military Power in the Arctic?," *Defense & Security Analysis* 30, no. 4 (October 2, 2014): 323–35, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14751798.2014.948276>.

⁵³ James Sherr, "The Militarization of Russian Policy," *Transatlantic Academy*, 2017, 24.

⁵⁴ Pavel Devyatkin, "Russia's Arctic Strategy: Military and Security," *The Arctic Institute*, February 6, 2018, <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/russias-arctic-military-and-security-part-two/>.

that Russia is taking big steps toward securing the Arctic: building more bases, repositioning troops into the region, investing in the icebreaker fleet, and technology and constructing the natural resource infrastructure with the overall and stated goal in its military doctrine of protection of “national interests in the Arctic.”⁵⁵

3. National Pride

Russia seeks to control the Arctic and its natural resources in order to boost its economy. At the same time, Putin looks at the Arctic as a way of restoring Russia’s status as a global power by gaining support from its local audience.

Russia’s tendency to the Arctic is oriented towards economic and social development, and at the same time in maintaining its sovereign interests in the region as a last desperate attempt “to seek great power, claiming nearly half the Arctic in a ploy for energy, power, and ultimately prestige.”⁵⁶ This last claim of Russia is the most persuasive one. Multiple statements of Russian leaders, especially President Putin, make it even more credible when he tells the West that the “Arctic is an inalienable part of Russia. So, it has been and so it always will be.”⁵⁷ Laruelle remarks that the Arctic is being used by the Putin regime as a “national-branding” effort in which the desired outcome is to reassert to the Western states that Russia is a “great power” and to appeal to Russia’s domestic audience to view the High North “as place of refuge.”⁵⁸ The same view has been expressed by

⁵⁵ Andrew Poulin, “5 Ways Russia Is Positioning to Dominate the Arctic,” *International Policy Digest*, January 24, 2016, <https://intpolicydigest.org/2016/01/24/5-ways-russia-is-positioning-to-dominate-the-arctic/>.

⁵⁶ Shane C. Tayloe, “Projecting Power in the Arctic: The Russian Scramble for Energy, Power, and Prestige in the High North,” *Pepperdine Policy Review*; *Malibu*, 2015, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1699070132/abstract/19D61D42D4B144D0PQ/1>.

⁵⁷ Regnum, “Putin: The Arctic Is an Integral Part of Russia,” October 3, 2013, <https://regnum.ru/news/polit/1715500.html>.

⁵⁸ Laruelle, *Russia’s Arctic Strategies and the Future of the Far North*, 9–15.

Dmitri Trenin and Pavel Baev, who found that Russia looks at the Arctic “through a patriotic rather than an economic lens”.⁵⁹

However, other scholars such as Thomas Rotnem, concludes that if Russia’s Arctic strategy comes as a vain attempt, it will undermine the regime legitimacy rather than booster its confidence. Either way, Russia’s attempt to augment its status through its Arctic initiative may bring it political benefit in the international community.⁶⁰

B. RUSSIA’S ACTIVITIES IN THE ARCTIC: THREAT OR RELIANCE?

The end of the Soviet Union ends Russia’s supremacy in Arctic exploration, which has been visible most of the 20th century, the Soviet Union being “the world’s first country to begin the prospecting, exploration, and development of the Arctic.”⁶¹ The Arctic region came back into international attention in 2007 when Russia’s attention focused on the High North. Russia’s starting point can be revealed with the scientific expedition of two mini-submarines that “reached the seabed more than two and a half miles beneath the North Pole,” and planted a one meter-high titanium Russian flag underwater to stake a symbolic claim to the energy riches of the Arctic.⁶² Although the action was a success for the Moscow’s scientific community, the act itself was “widely criticized in North America and Western Europe as an example of Russia’s forceful expansionism.”⁶³ Many scholars were

⁵⁹ Dmitri Trenin and Pavel Baev, “The Arctic: A View from Moscow,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, (Washington, DC, 2010), 44. https://carnegieendowment.org/files/arctic_cooperation.pdf

⁶⁰ Rotnem, “Putin’s Arctic Strategy.”

⁶¹ Alexey Kontorovich, “Oil and Gas of the Russian Arctic: History of Development in the 20th Century, Resources, and Strategy for the 21st Century,” *Science First Hand*, Russian Arctic, 41, no. N2 (August 30, 2015), <http://scfh.ru/en/papers/oil-and-gas-of-the-russian-arctic-history-of-development/>.

⁶² Parfitt, “Russia Plants Flag on North Pole Seabed.”

⁶³ Pavel Devyatkin, “Russia’s Arctic Strategy: Aimed at Conflict or Cooperation?” *The Arctic Institute*, February 6, 2018, <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/russias-arctic-strategy-aimed-conflict-cooperation-part-one/>.

worried that this act meant the beginning of a “new Cold War” between Russia and the West over the Arctic.⁶⁴

The action was followed by an announcement in September 2008 of Russia’s first (and only so far) Arctic policy, called “Russian Federation’s Policy for the Arctic to 2020.”⁶⁵ Moreover, the development strategy of the Arctic was approved again by Putin in February 2013, which became “The Development Strategy of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation and National Security for the Period up to 2020; hereinafter, Russia’s Arctic policy will be referred to in this thesis as the Strategy”⁶⁶ While the document adopted in 2008, focused on the realization of Russia’s national interests, the second part of the Strategy highlights the role of Russia as a responsible international actor in line with principles and norms of international law and its international commitments, as was recently highlighted by Gavrilov in his study.⁶⁷ Although the international community believes that Russia has an aggressive attitude towards the Arctic, Moscow’s official statements contradict that.

Unlike Georgia or [Crimea/Ukraine], the Arctic region is not a country: it is an international region that is governed differently, a political space with blurred and contested borders. Although the Arctic has historically been spared major conflicts, some scholars, point out that, the region itself has the potential for legitimate security concerns.⁶⁸ Laruelle highlights the possibility that different countries’ actions may be misinterpreted

⁶⁴ Andrew Foxall, *Russia’s Policies Towards a Changing Arctic: Implications for UK Security*, 12, 2017, <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Russias-Policies-towards-a-Changing-Arctic-1.pdf>.

⁶⁵ Arctic Knowledge, “Russian Federation Policy for the Arctic to 2020,” September 18, 2008, <http://www.arctis-search.com/Russian+Federation+Policy+for+the+Arctic+to+2020>.

⁶⁶ The International Expert Council on Cooperation in the Arctic, “The Development Strategy of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation.,” April 14, 2013, <http://www.iecca.ru/en/legislation/strategies/item/99-the-development-strategy-of-the-arctic-zone-of-the-russian-federation>.

⁶⁷ Gavrilov, “Russian Arctic Policy,” 1–13.

⁶⁸ Conley and Kraut, *U.S. Strategic Interests in the Arctic*.

due to the high risk of potential circumstances (collisions, oil spills et) or small-scale tensions over resources.⁶⁹

On this background, Russia is perceived as the main actor that wants not only to operate in the Arctic but mostly to dominate it, through investments in infrastructure and research.⁷⁰ Andrew Foxall takes this same view, sharing its main concerns about the expansion and restoration of Russia's infrastructure in the Arctic, which creates a new defense landscape in the region.⁷¹

However, the amount of confrontation in the region has not risen much. Backed by Russia's declared strategic documents regarding the Arctic, some authors are contending with Russia's scheme of using the Arctic as a soft power in its international strategy linked with its domestic goal into the region.⁷² Sergunin, makes a point in his article, and claims that Russia has an open agenda in the Arctic, and it will achieve its goals through international cooperation by vigorously participation in various initiatives and forums related to environmental research and assessment.⁷³

Other scholars believe that Russia's ambitions over the Arctic are overstated and exaggerated. Mathieu Boulègue and Elizabeth Buchanan both argue that Russia's assertiveness is predictable and, moreover, focused on defending its energy investments in the Arctic, and that the region continues to be a place for cooperation rather than conflict.⁷⁴ Statements from Russia but also from representative of Norway—a very active Arctic state, and also a NATO partner—point out that Russia is a “responsible actor in the High North,”

⁶⁹ Laruelle, *Russia's Arctic Strategies and the Future of the Far North*.

⁷⁰ Poulin, “5 Ways Russia Is Positioning to Dominate the Arctic.”

⁷¹ Foxall, *Russia's Policies Towards a Changing Arctic*.

⁷² Laruelle, *Russia's Arctic Strategies and the Future of the Far North*, 3; Sergunin, “Arctic Security Perspectives from Russia.”

⁷³ Sergunin, “Arctic Security Perspectives from Russia.”

⁷⁴ Mathieu Bouleque and Elizabeth Buchanan, “Russia's Military Exercises in the Arctic Have More Bark than Bite,” *Foreign Policy*, May 20, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/05/20/russias-military-exercises-in-the-arctic-have-more-bark-than-bite/>.

that Russia's strengthening of force is just a necessity after years of little or no maintenance of its military capabilities.⁷⁵

In this context, it may be necessary to focus on future Russian violations of international laws in order to highlight its duplicity in using international law to legitimize illegitimate gains.

C. SECURITY CONCERNS IN THE ARCTIC

Since 2007, most of the Western states have increased military patrols in the Arctic in response to the perceived threat from Russia. All of the Arctic littoral states, which are NATO allies as well (Canada, Denmark, Norway, and the United States), have conceived Arctic strategies that focus on strengthening the defense of their respective territories (internal waters, territorial seas, exclusive economic zones).⁷⁶ Andrew Kramer, a reporter based in the Moscow bureau of *The New York Times* even stated that, though the North Pole is in international waters, Russia still claims it as being part of the continental shelf of the Russian Federation, with a formally staked claim at the United Nations based on a broad range of scientific data collected over many years of Arctic exploration.⁷⁷ It is a broad claim, well within Russia's rights under UNCLOS, but also both Denmark and Canada have done the same thing.⁷⁸

Recently, the importance of the Arctic for the United States was strongly emphasized by U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo at the 2019 meeting of the Arctic Council in Finland, when he stated that the United States is entering a "new age of strategic

⁷⁵ Arne F. Finne, "Russia Is a Responsible Actor in the Arctic," January 22, 2019, <https://www.highbornnews.com/en/russia-responsible-actor-arctic>.

⁷⁶ Wezeman, "Military Capabilities in the Arctic."

⁷⁷ Andrew E. Kramer, "Russia Presents Revised Claim of Arctic Territory to the United Nations," *The New York Times*, February 9, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/10/world/europe/russia-to-present-revised-claim-of-arctic-territory-to-the-united-nations.html>.

⁷⁸ European Parliament, "Arctic Continental Shelf Claims. Mapping Interests in the Circumpolar North."

engagement in the Arctic.”⁷⁹ Also, he pointed out that Russia’s and China’s “aggressive behavior” in other parts of the world increases the risk of having the same behavior in the Arctic.⁸⁰

The Arctic was of strategic interest to the United States during the height of the Cold War. A report by Heather Conley and Jamie Kraut regarding United States interests in the Arctic noted that the region itself was a geopolitical playground for the United States and the Soviet Union, including a race to the polar cap with strategic bombers and nuclear submarines, which lasted until the dissolution of the Soviet Union.⁸¹

However, the Arctic has always been strategically important for Russia. In 2008, 2013, 2014, 2017, and recently in March 2020, Moscow has outlined a strategy to consolidate Russia’s “Arctic military capabilities, strengthen territorial sovereignty and develop the region’s infrastructure for gathering its valuable resources.”⁸²

By contrast, the same thing cannot be said about the United States over time. Russia’s investment in the Arctic has given it an advantage over the United States, but recently the United States has taken minimal steps to show that it is catching up. The 2019 United States Arctic Strategy drew attention to the lack of U.S. military capabilities for the Arctic and calls for increasing awareness to enhance Arctic operations and to strengthen the rules-based in the Arctic.⁸³

To secure its sovereign waters and partly wishing to control its maritime routes, Russia has steadily built up and modernized its military component, as part of the effort to create a comprehensive presence in the Arctic and to position itself for the future.

⁷⁹ Somini Sengupta, “United States Rattles Arctic Talks with a Sharp Warning to China and Russia,” *The New York Times*, May 6, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/06/climate/pompeo-arctic-china-russia.html>.

⁸⁰ Sengupta.

⁸¹ Conley and Kraut, *U.S. Strategic Interests in the Arctic*.

⁸² O’Rourke et al., *Changes in the Arctic: Background and Issues for Congress*, 23.

⁸³ Department of Defense, “Department of Defense Arctic Strategy,” June 2019, <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jun/06/2002141657/-1/-1/1/2019-DOD-ARCTIC-STRATEGY.PDF>.

Presumably, the biggest concern of Russia is the expansion of NATO in the Arctic region. Russian's academics and top politicians, such as Dmitry Medvedev or Vladimir Putin, have expressed concerns about a "NATO Exclusion Zone" through numerous statements regarding NATO enlargement toward Russia's borders as has been done.⁸⁴

Other scholars such as James Whither, draw attention to the Norwegian archipelago, Svalbard, where the danger of an armed conflict could surface from misjudgment or opportunism, due to the disputed status of the islands.⁸⁵ However, Laruelle points out that Russia has largely accepted Norwegian jurisdiction over Svalbard, even though it demands special status due to its historical association with the archipelago.⁸⁶

With expectations of increasing the use of NSR as the main shipping route from Asia to Europe, Russia has imposed legislation to increase its control over managing access to the NSR through icebreakers that can frame ships.⁸⁷ Russia's intentions are clear. If you need to sail through the Arctic, you will agree with the Russian oversight. The United States Department of Defense (DOD) points out that the maritime route has the potential for conflict, due to Russia's numerous threats to use force against those who do not comply with Russian regulations concerning the NSR.⁸⁸

A number of academics are also concerned about Russia's growing military assertiveness in the Arctic and its strategic implications for the United States and its allies. A recent report emphasized the increased operational tempo, scale, and testing of nuclear weapons of Russian's military exercises in the Arctic, with different scenarios and outcomes such as defending and securing the GIUK Gap and blocking the English Channel

⁸⁴ Lincoln Flake, "Russia's Security Intentions in a Melting Arctic," *Military and Strategic Affairs* 6, no. 1 (March 2014): 99–115.

⁸⁵ James K Wither, "Svalbard: NATO's Arctic 'Achilles' Heel'," *The RUSI Journal* 163, no. 5 (September 3, 2018): 28–37, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2018.1552453>.

⁸⁶ Laruelle, *Russia's Arctic Strategies and the Future of the Far North*, 106–8.

⁸⁷ Chris Campbell, Nastassia Astrasheuskaya, and Henry Foy, "Polar Powers: Russia's Bid for Supremacy in the Arctic Ocean," April 28, 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/2fa82760-5c4a-11e9-939a-341f5ada9d40>.

⁸⁸ Department of Defense, "Department of Defense Arctic Strategy."

(the August 2019 Ocean Shield Exercise), testing newly designed Arctic military equipment (Tsentr -19) or incorporating all its Arctic fleets and troops in launching nuclear warheads and other ballistic missiles (Grom-19).⁸⁹

Concurrently, other scholars such as Boulegue and Buchanan claim that, although the military exercises are large and with a growing significant in size and complexity, they mostly are predictable and often have defense purposes.⁹⁰

As a conclusion, the academic community is debating whether or not Russia is a responsible and predictable stability factor in the Arctic region that is interested in fostering regional cooperation and keeping the High North out of tension. Other observers question the above argument, emphasizing the military posture of Russia as a sign of future aggressiveness, and arguing that Moscow is taking steps to secure its interests in the Arctic.

⁸⁹ Matthew Melino and Heather Conley, "The Ice Curtain: Russia's Arctic Military Presence," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, accessed July 20, 2020, <https://www.csis.org/features/ice-curtain-russias-arctic-military-presence>.

⁹⁰ Boulegue and Buchanan, "Russia's Military Exercises in the Arctic Have More Bark than Bite."

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III. RUSSIA'S INTERESTS IN THE ARCTIC

“Arctic resources are key to Russia’s future,” Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, 2008⁹¹

After the fall of the Soviet Union, and the end of the Cold War, the Arctic has lost in its significance for Russia, for almost a decade; thus, its military and economic potential are being underestimated. Nowadays, Russia’s strategies in the Arctic are a matter of continuing debate both in the academic community and in the international security policies. It is commonly known, and everyone agrees that Russia has the largest territory, population, and the highest military presence in the Arctic than any other state. According with Laruelle, “the Arctic zone is home to only 1 percent of Russia’s population, but represents 11 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) and 22 percent of its exports.”⁹² Therefore, Russia is in the way to achieving its first and foremost objective of transforming the Arctic into one of its main drilling and mining regions.

As delineated in Figure 1, and being considered the definition in this study, “the Arctic defines the region as the land and sea north of the Arctic Circle (a circle of latitude at about 66° 34’ North),” to comprise territories “within eight sovereign states (Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the USA),” and contain “about 4 million people” (half of them living in Russia’s part of the Arctic) spread across an approximately “8.14 million square miles area surrounding the Arctic Ocean, accounting for about 4 percent of the Earth’s surface.”⁹³

⁹¹ The Seattle Times, “Medvedev: Arctic Resources Are Key to Russia’s Future,” September 18, 2008, <https://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/medvedev-arctic-resources-are-key-to-russias-future/>.

⁹² Marlène Laruelle, “Russia’s Arctic Policy: A Power Strategy and Its Limits,” *Russie.Nei.Visions*, no. 117 (March 2020): 6, https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/laruelle_russia_arctic_policy_2020.pdf.

⁹³ O’Rourke et al., *Changes in the Arctic: Background and Issues for Congress*, 1–4.



Figure 1. The Arctic Circle and the Arctic Nations⁹⁴

Compared to the United States, which commits rather little importance to the Arctic in and to the region's resources such as petroleum and oil, the Arctic for Russia is of immense importance due to "a combination of security, economic and identity reasons."⁹⁵ Moreover, of all the five Arctic rim states, Russia has considerably the greatest rooted interests in the region, being in the same time the country with the longest Arctic coastline as seen in Figure 1, thus presumed to yield the most from Arctic's resources.⁹⁶ Russia's

⁹⁴ Source: Mara Oliva, "Arctic Cold War: Climate Change Has Ignited a New Polar Power Struggle," The Conversation, November 18, 2018, <http://theconversation.com/arctic-cold-war-climate-change-has-ignited-a-new-polar-power-struggle-107329>.

⁹⁵ Keil, "The Arctic."

⁹⁶ Keil.

views about the region changed two decades ago, when the Arctic was recognized as a key economic resource. Putin administration ratify its “Energy Strategy for Russia up to 2022,” with high interests in the Barents Sea, the Kara Sea, and the Yamal Peninsula; this happened concurrently with the start of Russia’s process of re-nationalizing its oil and gas companies.⁹⁷

Moscow’s proactive policies, towards the Arctic region emphasize the importance of the High North for Russia. The Arctic’s low strategic priority for the United States and its allies in the North created a window of opportunity for Russia, which has taken some significant steps toward gaining regional superiority, starting with Putin administration, in early 2000.

This chapter will be focused on Russia’s economic ambitions for harvesting the Arctic resources and investing in the infrastructure of the NSR, the Arctic route which connects the Kola Peninsula (situated far northwest of Russia, inside the Arctic Circle bordered by the Barents Sea in the north, the White Sea in the east and southeast, and the Finland and Norway in the west and northwest, as seen in Figure 1) with the Bearing Strait. It will also examine Russia’s process of securing its Arctic borders as part of Russia aspirations to promote its political legitimacy as a great power both domestically and internationally.

A. ECONOMIC AMBITIONS

Due to its geographical position, the economic gamble associated with development of the Arctic’s natural resources abundance is of great importance for Russia, “as the region is rich in raw materials, accounting for most of Russia’s extraction of oil, gas, copper, cobalt, nickel and platinum,” and also offers “some military advantages (for example, the shortest linear distance to U.S. territory).”⁹⁸ Moscow is determined to harness the Arctic sea by extracting its resources and looking at commercial opportunities in the High North. Its main goal is to take advantage of the region’s abundance of oil and gas.

⁹⁷ Laruelle, *Russia’s Arctic Strategies and the Future of the Far North*. 135–136

⁹⁸ Kubiak, “Russian Policy Towards the Arctic.”

Russia already possesses and exploits more than half of all Arctic's estimated hydrocarbons resources, as presented in Table 1.⁹⁹

Table 1. Distribution of Estimated Arctic Oil and Gas Resources among the Arctic Five States¹⁰⁰

Rank	Country	Total estimated resources in oil equivalent (billion barrels)	Percentage
1.	Russia	215.94	52
2.	USA	83.31	20
3.	Norway	47.46	12
4.	Denmark/ Greenland	44.49	11
5.	Canada	22.08	5
	Total	413.28	100

However, Russia's economic weight is the extraction and production of liquefied natural gas (LNG). Russia took a chance in the Yamalo-Nenets district, located above the Arctic Circle in western Siberia; the region is considered the world's largest natural gas producing area the Arctic Circle, with the main gas fields situated in the Yamal and Gydan Peninsula (Figure 1).¹⁰¹ The gas fields in the region are accountable for approximately 90 percent of Russia's current natural gas production, 45 percent of its reserve, and 20 percent of the world's gas production.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Keil, "The Arctic."

¹⁰⁰ Adapted from Keil.

¹⁰¹ International - U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), "Russia," October 31, 2017, <https://www.eia.gov/international/overview/country/RUS>; ALTEN Group, "Yamal LNG: A Titanic Gas Project in Arctic Siberia," April 12, 2019, <https://www.alten.com/yamal-lng-project-gas-arctic-anotech-energy/>.

¹⁰² Laruelle, *Russia's Arctic Strategies and the Future of the Far North*. 135

Yamal LNG, which was launched in 2013 as one of the largest and most complex LNG plant projects in the world, reached full capacity in 2017, and provides annually 16.5 million tons of LNG, which represents more than 5 percent of the world market, according to the official release of its investors.¹⁰³ A second extraction complex, Arctic LNG2, is currently under development in the Gydan Peninsula, with an estimated production of 19.8 million tons of LNG per year, at full capacity.¹⁰⁴



Figure 2. Yamal and Gydan Peninsulas, and Sabetta Port.¹⁰⁵

In May 2019, Russia's largest natural gas company, Novatek, also the owner of the previous two projects, announced the start of the development of a third LNG plant, Ob LNG, which will be built in Sabetta near the Yamal LNG facility. The plant will produce

¹⁰³ ALTEN Group.

¹⁰⁴ Novatek, "Arctic LNG 2," [novatek.ru](http://www.novatek.ru/en/business/arctic-lng/), accessed August 24, 2020, <http://www.novatek.ru/en/business/arctic-lng/>.

¹⁰⁵ Source: Novatek, "Yamal LNG," accessed August 24, 2020, <http://www.novatek.ru/en/business/yamal-lng/>

an estimated 5 million tons of LNG per year and is forecast to reach full capacity in around 2023.¹⁰⁶

The private company Novatek had also impacted the region's overall infrastructure and freedom of movement. The port of Sabetta (see Figure 1), has become the center of the three main projects of the company, and furthermore, the company's and Russia's efforts to export the valuable LNG have called for the construction of the new generation of nuclear icebreakers, named the Arktika class.¹⁰⁷ The company's plans are directly related with Russia's objectives, as Russia's Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin has emphasized the role of this fleet of powerful modern icebreakers, to unlock the potential transport of NSR; to enhance the economic interest between Europe and Asia, and of course, to ensure the primacy of Russia in the Arctic.¹⁰⁸ From a diplomatic point, on the background of sanctions imposed by the Western states, Russia succeed to find alternatives in international cooperation by signing an agreement with a British group to build a LNG factory, and more important by attracting China which now controls 20 percent of Yamal LNG's shares.¹⁰⁹

Thus, one of Russia's main objectives in the Arctic is the development, promotion, and control of the NSR as an international route. As the Arctic Ocean's icepack decreases, domestic and foreign transit through the NSR has risen significantly. With traffic through the NSR estimated by Vladimir Putin from the current ratio of 17 million tons to 80 million tons of cargo per year in 2024, and optimistic forecast ranging from 26 to 92 million tons per year by 2030 by several federal officials, Western analysts agree that the NSR might

¹⁰⁶ Atle Staalesen, "Novatek Announces 3rd LNG Project in Arctic," *The Independent Barents Observer*, May 23, 2019, <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/industry-and-energy/2019/05/novatek-announces-3rd-lng-project-arctic>.

¹⁰⁷ Laruelle, "Russia's Arctic Policy"; Malte Humpert, "Novatek Arctic LNG 2 Project Remains on Schedule Despite Impact Of Covid-19," June 30, 2020, <https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/novatek-arctic-lng-2-project-remains-schedule-despite-impact-covid-19>.

¹⁰⁸ Rustem Falyakhov, "Russia in 'Leaders': How Icebreakers Surf the Budget," *Gazeta.Ru*, June 15, 2020, <https://www.gazeta.ru/business/2020/06/15/13118977.shtml>.

¹⁰⁹ Laruelle, "Russia's Arctic Policy."

result in large opportunities, since it would shorten the sea route between Europe and Asia, by one third.¹¹⁰

The Putin administration recognizes the NSR as a geostrategic asset in its Arctic Strategy, which was demonstrated in 2013 policy documents, with plans in the same year to begin regular naval patrols along the shipping lanes.¹¹¹ Concurrently, in 2017 Russia enacted a law, followed by amendments in the following years, restricting the transport on foreign-flagged ships of Russian energy resources such as oil, natural gas and coal through the NSR. This law is intended to protect the Russian shipbuilding industry, with one noteworthy exception, the private company Novatek, whose powerful icebreaking LNG carriers fly foreign flags, of South Korea.¹¹² At the same time, transit through the NSR has been restricted to foreign warships which are required to notify the Russian government 45 days in advance. The legislation is contrary to maritime law, where authorization for transit is required within 12 nautical miles of territorial waters.¹¹³ These measures are aligned with Russia's policy of ensuring the right to regulate the traffic through NSR, as it considers the maritime route to be part of its territory; this stance is at odds with those of other states, which support the freedom of navigation on the oceans, such as the United States which considers these restrictions to be inconsistent with the international law. The United States Navy challenges them constantly, as part of its wider Freedom of navigation Operations (FONOPS) program.¹¹⁴

Besides oil and gas, the AZRF is very important for the economy of Russia, because, as Sergunin and Konyshov have pointed out, the region is abundant as well in

¹¹⁰ Kubiak, "Russian Policy Towards the Arctic"; Atle Staalesen, "Kremlin's Prophecy for the Northern Sea Route Is Keeping Moscow Officials Busy," *The Independent Barents Observer*, August 8, 2019, <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/arctic-industry-and-energy/2019/08/kremlins-prophecy-northern-sea-route-keeping-moscow-officials>.

¹¹¹ Rotnem, "Putin's Arctic Strategy."

¹¹² Atle Staalesen, "New Restrictions Coming up in Russian Arctic Shipping," *The Independent Barents Observer*, March 28, 2018, <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/industry-and-energy/2018/03/new-restrictions-coming-russian-arctic-shipping>.

¹¹³ The Maritime Executive, "Russia Tightens Control Over Northern Sea Route."

¹¹⁴ The Maritime Executive.

mineral resources, including 99 percent Russia's total production of diamonds, 98 percent of its platinum-group elements, over 80 percent of its nickel and cobalt, 90 percent of its chromium and manganese, 60 percent of its copper, between 50 percent and 90 percent of its antimony, tin, tungsten, rare metals and about 40 percent of its gold.¹¹⁵ Thus, controlling and dominating the Arctic has been of great importance for Russia's global and domestic politic purposes, particularly after Putin's return to the presidency in 2010 and internal demonstrations against it from 2011–2013.¹¹⁶

Against this background, it is not surprising at all that Russia has been the first country to submit a claim for recognition of its territory, under the UNCLOS, reaching now to have more claims of Arctic lands and seas than any other country, including large areas of the ocean, as part of its EEZ.¹¹⁷ This gives Russia the opportunity to gain new territories, with their related natural resources. However, natural resources have a limited character, therefore, they are being used as tools of foreign policies, which is what Russia has been doing in terms of natural gas.

In addition to capitalizing on the Arctic resources and growing its economy based on these resources, it appears that Russia's increased focus on the High North is also vouched on strengthening its international prestige vis-a-vis the West, as well as justifying its narratives with regard to the Arctic to its domestic audience. Russia seeks power and influence due to geographical and economic advantages that the Arctic has enhanced.

However, Russia itself cannot sustain the development and potential use of its AZRF without cooperation with foreign countries, as seen in Yamal LNG projects where Novatek, the Russian company and China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC)

¹¹⁵ Sergunin and Konyshchev, "Russia's Arctic Strategy."

¹¹⁶ Rotnem, "Putin's Arctic Strategy"; OpenDemocracy Russia, "Dissecting Russia's Winter of Protest, Five Years On," December 5, 2016, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/dissecting-russia-s-winter-of-protest-five-years-on/>.

¹¹⁷ Encyclopedia Britannica, s.v. "Arctic - The Economy," December 30, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Arctic>; Laruelle, "Russia's Arctic Policy."

partnered in 2013 to fund the Yamal LNG project; the tradeoff is often perceived by Russia as offsetting the advance stand in economic Arctic matters.¹¹⁸

B. STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE

To secure and achieve its economic gamble, Russia needs to prioritize safeguarding its vision of national security in the AZRF. Russia can spur tensions with the Western countries, due to the existence of Russian interests in the Arctic, and which, in addition, Russia is committed to protecting them.¹¹⁹

In addition to supporting Russia's economic interests, the Arctic, unlike the Black Sea or Baltic Sea, gives Russia the possibility of direct access to the world's oceans, creating opportunities for power projection into other regions, primarily into the North Atlantic. Therefore, the Arctic has strategic importance for Russia's military, as well as for the other Arctic states, particularly for the United States.

Russia has increased its military presence in the sea, air, and land in the Arctic area, both physically and declaratively, to maintain the objectives set out in its various security doctrines. In his chapter from a report regarding Russia's Strategic Intentions, Devyatkin stated that the Russian military presence in the Arctic has three strategic objectives: "to protect [the] national sovereignty in the region, to secure economic interests, and to demonstrate that Russia remains a great power with first rate-military capabilities."¹²⁰ The Arctic is seen as of strategic importance for Russia, and moreover, as Boulegue concluded, Russia's policymakers have "accorded the same threat perception... [to the region itself] as it has to other theaters of operation."¹²¹

According to Ekaterina Klimenko, but also other researchers such as those from the Warsaw Institute, the reasons for Russia's increase in military capabilities in the Arctic are

¹¹⁸ Laruelle, *Russia's Arctic Strategies and the Future of the Far North*, 158–59.

¹¹⁹ Foxall, *Russia's Policies Towards a Changing Arctic*.

¹²⁰ John Arquilla et al., "Russian Strategic Intentions," May 2019, 82–85.

¹²¹ Boulegue, "Russia's Military Posture in the Arctic," 2.

twofold.¹²² First, Russia is acknowledging the changing of the Arctic environment, which brings new security challenges related to the projected increased shipping along the NSR and the need to protect its longest coastline, which has opened up due to melting sea ice.¹²³

Secondly, in addition of controlling the Arctic's natural resources and shipping lanes, Russia's military growth in the Arctic is linked to the issue of seeking to maintain strategic parity with the United States and NATO. The Arctic region may easily become a place where tensions that arise elsewhere between the two great powers may spill over into the Arctic region.¹²⁴

According to Boulegue, Russia has a militarized risk appraisalment for its Arctic, while pursuing "consistent control over foreign military activity" in the region and ensuring freedom of maneuver for its own armed forces.¹²⁵ This gives Moscow a sense of perceived military superiority as it considers the Arctic to be in its convenient position of strength.¹²⁶ Hence, the Arctic holds a unique place in Russia's defense strategy, especially the Kola Peninsula and its surroundings, as implementing the "Bastion" defense concept, further west to the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom (GIUK) gap (Figure 3).¹²⁷

¹²² Ekaterina Klimenko, "The Geopolitics of a Changing Arctic," *SIPRI*, December 2019, 16; Kubiak, "Russian Policy Towards the Arctic."

¹²³ Klimenko, "The Geopolitics of a Changing Arctic."

¹²⁴ Klimenko; Wezeman, "Military Capabilities in the Arctic."

¹²⁵ Boulegue, "Russia's Military Posture in the Arctic," 2.

¹²⁶ Boulegue, 7.

¹²⁷ Harri Mikkola, "The Geostrategic Arctic: Hard Security in the High North," April 2019, 8.



Figure 3. Russia's Bastion Defense Concept and GIUK Gap¹²⁸

The Bastion concept introduced by the Ministry of Defense at the beginning of the 1990s, aims to guarantee “both the security of the Kola Peninsula and access... [for Russia's] fleet to the North Atlantic [Ocean] and beyond,” as well as securing the NSR.¹²⁹ Consequently, the Bastion concept, centered on the Kola Peninsula, is particularly concerned with protecting Russia's sea-based nuclear assets, which ensure the likelihood of surviving for a second-strike nuclear response, but also to maintain Russia's defense in depth.¹³⁰

The perimeter concerning the Bastion defense concept is aligned with the Russian military buildup around its resources throughout the Arctic. Steve Schneider wrights that this buildup consists of “the addition of a new Arctic command, four new combat brigades, 13 new airfields protected by S-400 long-range surface-to-air missiles, 16 deep-water ports,

¹²⁸ Source: Harri Mikkola, “The Geostrategic Arctic: Hard Security in the High North,” April 2019

¹²⁹ Boulegue, “Russia's Military Posture in the Arctic,” 7.

¹³⁰ Boulegue, 6.

and a fleet of 40 icebreakers, with 11 new ones on the way.”¹³¹ This buildup is to enhance the capabilities of the Arctic Force Structure of Russia, whose main objective is to secure its economic interests along the borders of the AZRF. It is easy to see that it is connected with the oil, gas and mineral reserves of Russia (see Figure 4).

Issues related to the Arctic region will remain on Russia’s political agenda and will extend through the term of the current administration in Moscow. However, Russia’s military build-up, which is currently justified as defensive, may have a more offensive outline with “respect to NATO and its partners.”¹³²

¹³¹ Steve Schneider, “The Arctic Buildup: A New Cold War,” *Richardcyoung.Com*, April 11, 2018, <https://www.richardcyoung.com/essential-news/the-arctic-buildup-a-new-cold-war/>.

¹³² Boulegue, “Russia’s Military Posture in the Arctic,” 35.

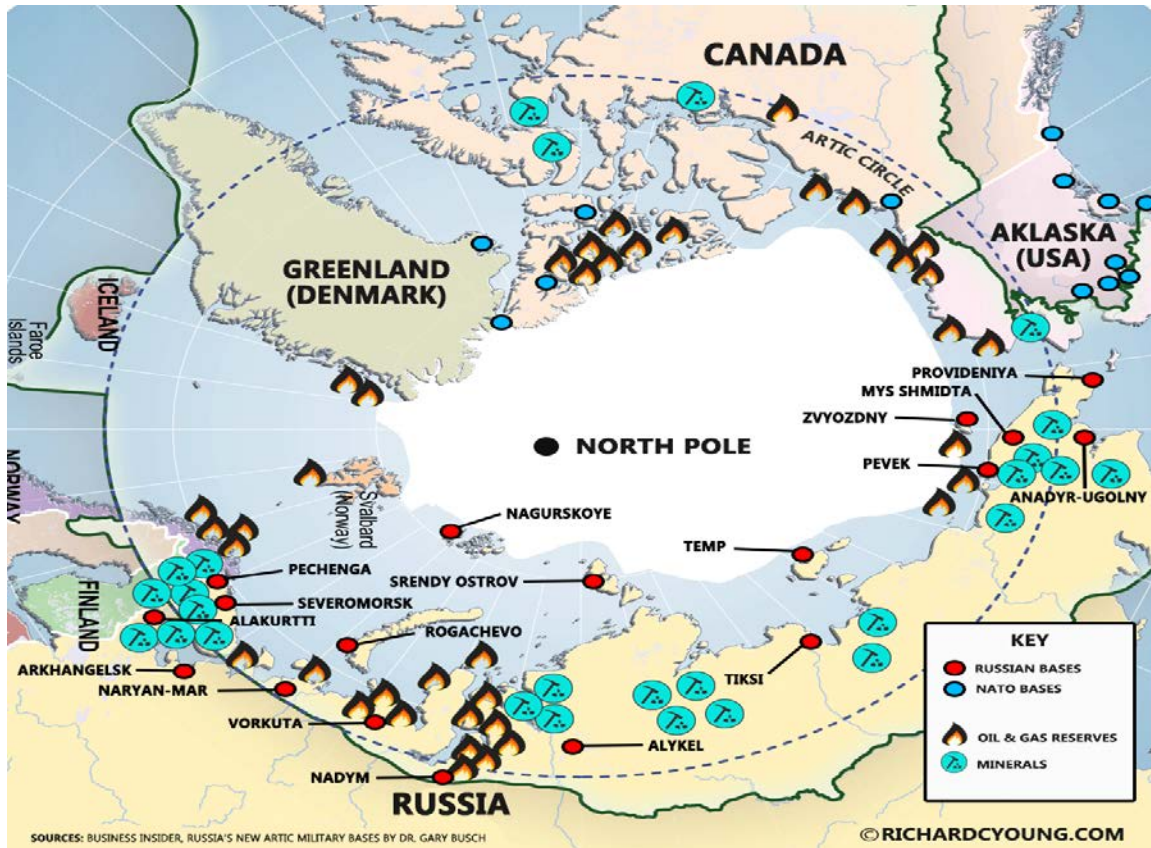


Figure 4. Russia Securing its Resources in AZRF¹³³

C. NATIONAL PRIDE, BRAND IN INTERNATIONAL SCENE

As emphasized above, besides significant economic interest, Russia considers the Arctic of strategic interests. The Kola Peninsula acts as a primary instrument in the country's nuclear deterrence strategy, as it hosts the Russian Navy's nuclear fleet.¹³⁴ However, Russia's interest in the Arctic is more than that.

The importance of the region is part of a larger context; the acknowledgment of nationalism and patriotism as way of justification and promotion of political legitimacy

¹³³ Source: Steve Schneider, "U.S. Coast Guard Admiral: Potential Russian 'Checkmate' in the Arctic," *Richardcyoung.Com*, May 5, 2017, <https://www.richardcyoung.com/essential-news/u-s-coast-guard-admiral-potential-russian-checkmate-arctic/>.

¹³⁴ Kristian Atland, "The Building up of Russia's Military Potential in the Arctic Region and Possible Elements of Its Deterrence," *Centre for Russian Studies*, June 12, 2017, http://r-studies.org/cms/index.php?action=news/view_details&news_id=43590&lang=eng.

domestically.¹³⁵ The Arctic plays a great role, as well, on the international scene, where Russia views the Arctic region's role as affirming its prestige and status as a great power, proclaiming that this will promote dialog and international cooperation instead of confrontation, but also from a security point of view and domestically.¹³⁶

As seen above, Russia's policy of re-mastering the Arctic, both in terms of economic prospects and military dominance, is a response equally to legitimate concerns and international status. Thus, Vladimir Putin succeeded to create an "Arctic brand" during its first two tenures based on international cooperation with Russia as a self-assumed leader.¹³⁷ Thereby, the Arctic grants itself an opportunity not be missed.

According with Laruelle, a successful "Arctic brand" offers Russia to "turn its competition with the United States to its advantage," particularly given the latter's non-ratification of several international engagements and protocols.¹³⁸ Russia's collaborative behavior has roots on the already positive role played in most of the Arctic institutions, such as: the Arctic Council, BEAC, joint SAR agreements, and scientific cooperation.¹³⁹

At the same time, Russia's new Arctic Policy document – Basic Principles of Russian Federation State Policy in the Arctic – adopted by the Putin administration in March 2020, puts forward the concept of "ensuring sovereignty and territorial integrity" as the high national interest in the context of the Arctic.¹⁴⁰ As well as the previous policy from 2008, the new document signals continuity rather than change, but also brings new goals, interests and mechanism of implementation for the next 15 years, such as developing

¹³⁵ Laruelle, *Russia's Arctic Strategies and the Future of the Far North*, 9.

¹³⁶ Laruelle, "Russia's Arctic Policy."

¹³⁷ Laruelle, *Russia's Arctic Strategies and the Future of the Far North*, 12.

¹³⁸ Laruelle, 13.

¹³⁹ Laruelle, 14; Rotnem, "Putin's Arctic Strategy."

¹⁴⁰ Ekaterina Klimenko, "Russia's New Arctic Policy Document Signals Continuity Rather Than Change," April 6, 2020, <https://www.sipri.org/commentary/essay/2020/russias-new-arctic-policy-document-signals-continuity-rather-change>.

the NSR and promoting the well-being and prosperity of the Arctic people.¹⁴¹ Concurrently, according to Putin, the new strategy will strengthen the legal framework and organization for the implementation of projects and programs, investment plans of infrastructure companies and programs development in the Arctic.¹⁴²

While the new Arctic policy also refers to the major constraints to guarantee Moscow's national security in the region, its main agenda points out that Russia will preserve and encourage cooperation on multiple matters, including the delimitation of the Arctic shelf, SAR operations in the region, and strengthening the Arctic Council institution, as the "key regional institution coordinating the international cooperation in the Arctic."¹⁴³ Given the fact that in 2021, for a period of two years, Russia will mandate the chair of the Arctic Council, the priority of strengthening the institution is not a surprise, as the "presidency will be crucial for Russia's strategy of reintegrating the international community," after its relations with the Western states have been deteriorated in the last years.¹⁴⁴

However, the Russian strategic posture in the Arctic remains increasingly ambitious, assertive, and sometime even overtly aggressive, especially in the matter of protecting the AZRF, in order to secure its economic interests. The coherent and purpose-driven Russian ambitions and actions in the Arctic are gradually challenging the fragile balance in the region, being part of the wider and more general Russian policies and actions aimed at eroding the power status of Western states, which Russia's state administration perceives as harmful to its interests and vulnerable, which also could potentially lead to conflict.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴¹ Klimenko.

¹⁴² Atle Staalesen, "Putin Signs Arctic Master Plan," *The Independent Barents Observer*, Arctic, March 2020, <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/arctic/2020/03/putin-signs-arctic-master-plan>.

¹⁴³ Klimenko, "Russia's New Arctic Policy Document Signals Continuity Rather Than Change."

¹⁴⁴ Laruelle, "Russia's Arctic Policy."

¹⁴⁵ Sherr, "The Militarization of Russian Policy."

Russia's Arctic policy to retain control and secure its Arctic perimeter has been successful, and is reflected in its approach to the three major goals: strategic control of vitally important sea routes, such as NSR; strategic control of natural resources in the region; and deterring or containing the presence and action of its strategic competitors, especially the United States and its allies. However, whatever the motives for its actions, Russia's demeanor in the Arctic is creating a new landscape in the region focused on competition but still vulnerable to future conflicts.

IV. RUSSIA'S ACTIVITIES IN THE ARCTIC

Russian military activities in the Arctic region are driven by the erratic and unclear geopolitical space, the existence of a great Russian national interest in the region and finally, its view of the Arctic as a Russian national territory.¹⁴⁶ Therefore, its tough posture and military actions shall cease to be count as isolated, given Russia's growing altercations with the Western countries, and on the background of previous hostile actions from Europe and the economic sanctions imposed on them.¹⁴⁷

Since beginning of the Putin regime, after more than a decade of looking away from the High North, Russia has pursued a renewed interest in the Arctic. This chapter looks at Russia's activities in the Arctic, looking whether, how and under what circumstances Russia is likely to engage in an international confrontation, to protect its national interests or to reaffirm its position as a great power, domestically and in the international arena. It outlines Russia's claims and actions in the region, it looks for possible conflicts in the Arctic and prospects for their resolution; it examines if Russia is a revisionist power by the threats both perceived and posed in the region. The legal endeavor that Russia is pursuing in the Arctic, as well as the military actions at the threshold of the law that Russia is carrying out, lays the groundwork on which Russia's effort relies.

Lacking opportunities to expand further into the West, Russia has begun to advance its confrontational posture in the Arctic. Russia's actions there have raised concerns, due to its obvious and unprecedented military modernization, its military assertiveness, and its development of the North Sea Route, all of which have become increasingly important in Russian politics and official documents. At the same time, Sergunin and Konyshchev point out the opinion of some Western analysts, who believe that Russia, "due to economic weakness and technological backwardness, tends to privilege coercive military instruments to protect its national interest in the Arctic."¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Laruelle, *Russia's Arctic Strategies and the Future of the Far North*, 39.

¹⁴⁷ Boulegue, "Russia's Military Posture in the Arctic," 2.

¹⁴⁸ Sergunin and Konyshchev, "Russia's Arctic Strategy," 135–36.

A. NOT SO LEGAL AFFAIRS IN THE ARCTIC

Russia's Arctic actions are based on several nation strategic documents, including: *Basic Principles of Russian Federation State Policy in the Arctic to 2035* (adopted in 2020); *Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation* (adopted in 2014); *The National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation up to 2020* (adopted in 2008), *The Merchant Shipping Code* (adopted in 1999).¹⁴⁹

Although these different and ambitious Arctic policies do not contravene with the provisions of the 1982 UNCLOS (which Russia ratified in March 1997), that ensure legal rights of each of the five coastal Arctic states, the above documents articulate Russia's intent to secure its legitimate interests, investing in the improvement of AZRF, which is abundant in mining resources but less developed when it comes with infrastructure, and defending its self-legitimate rights on the extended continental shelf.¹⁵⁰

1. Who Will Own the North Pole?

Russia has sent numerous messages, both declarative and symbolic, to endorse, its territorial claims in the Arctic, but what stand up is the race to conquer the North Pole and its surroundings. Currently, the North Pole is under international jurisdiction; however, under the UNCLOS, Russia, Denmark and Canada have staked claims to the continental shelf Lomonosov Ridge that runs beneath the Pole.

¹⁴⁹ Klimenko, "Russia's New Arctic Policy Document Signals Continuity Rather Than Change"; Laruelle, *Russia's Arctic Strategies and the Future of the Far North*; Olga Oliker, "Russia's New Military Doctrine: Same as the Old Doctrine, Mostly," January 15, 2015, <https://www.rand.org/blog/2015/01/russias-new-military-doctrine-same-as-the-old-doctrine.html>.

¹⁵⁰ Alexander Sergunin, "Arctic Security Perspectives from Russia," in *Routledge Handbook of Arctic Security*, vol. I (London; New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2020), 129–39.

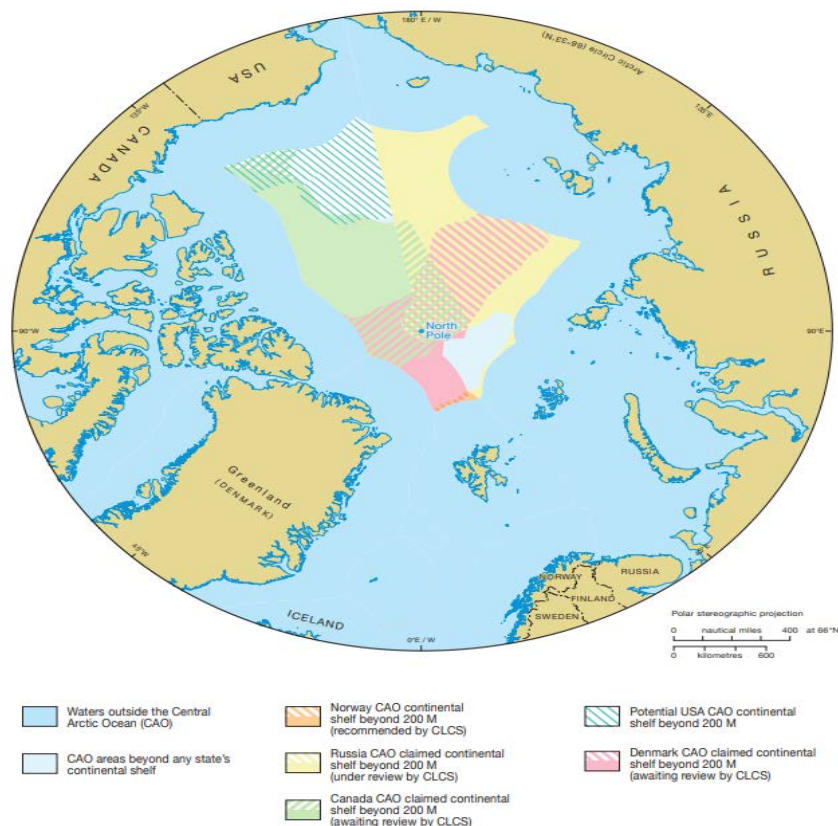


Figure 5. Continental Shelf Submissions in the Arctic¹⁵¹

The UNCLOS established that all coastal states on the Arctic Ocean benefit from an EEZ covering up to 200 nautical miles (370 km) from shore.¹⁵² Also, according to the UNCLOS, Arctic states can claim offshore seabed beyond the 200 nautical mile limit if the underwater geology shows that the seabed is actually an extension of their landmass, as part of their portion of the continental shelf. A continental shelf is a shallow extension of the continent's landmass under the ocean, and is important as it gives rights to the sovereign state to explore and exploit the natural resources, found in the soil and sub-soil, as opposed to an EEZ, which grants the state permission to exploit only marine resources (fish, etc.)

¹⁵¹ Source: Durham University, "IBRU: Centre for Borders Research: Central Arctic Ocean Maps - Durham University," accessed October 6, 2020, <https://www.dur.ac.uk/ibru/resources/arctic/simplifiedmaps/>.

¹⁵² United Nations, "UNCLOS."

and seabed resources (sponges, etc.) from the water column.¹⁵³ Overlapping continental shelf as depicted in Figure 5, are at the forefront of legal disputes, which derive from some countries' desired further development of their EEZs - based on the previous geological expertise - as a natural extension of the continental shelf of a given country.

In 2001, Russia was the first country to submit a claim on the offshore seabed, including both the Mendeleev and Lomonosov Ridges, as well as the North Pole, as natural extensions of Russia's continental shelf (see Figure 6).¹⁵⁴ Since then, Russia has been proven to be by far the most aggressive in their claims, reaching the point of planting a titanium flag on the seabed in 2007, as part of a scientific expedition where soil samples were collected.¹⁵⁵ The exploration was perceived ostensibly to be within the scientific framework of the 2007–2008 International Polar Year, as it had both a global undertaking and a national purpose as well. After this controversial mission and another scientific expedition in 2012, Russia submitted additional evidence in 2015 to CLCS, arguing that the Lomonosov Ridge is a continental extension of the Russian mainland.¹⁵⁶ In 2016, among other evidence of previous submissions, it added the Mendeleev Elevation and the Chukchi high plain to its revised claim (see Figure 6).¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ Tufts University, "Chapter 2: Maritime Zones – Law of the Sea," 2017, <https://sites.tufts.edu/lawofthesea/chapter-two/>.

¹⁵⁴ European Parliament, "Arctic Continental Shelf Claims. Mapping Interests in the Circumpolar North."

¹⁵⁵ Parfitt, "Russia Plants Flag on North Pole Seabed."

¹⁵⁶ Laruelle, Russia's Arctic Strategies and the Future of the Far North, 98–99.

¹⁵⁷ European Parliament.



Figure 6. The Arctic Ocean Disputed Seabed¹⁵⁸

If Russia is granted the territories it has requested, it will gain an additional 1.2 million square kilometers of the Arctic sea shelf, which will extend more than 350 nautical miles (650 km) from the shore.¹⁵⁹ The new expansion of Russia's territory comes with the right to the resources located below the seabed as well, with estimates of 594 new oil and 159 new gas fields, as well as two large nickel fields and over 350 gold fields.¹⁶⁰ Also,

¹⁵⁸ Source: European Parliament, "Arctic Continental Shelf Claims. Mapping Interests in the Circumpolar North," January 2017, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2017/595870/EPRS_BRI\(2017\)595870_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2017/595870/EPRS_BRI(2017)595870_EN.pdf).

¹⁵⁹ Staalesen, "Russia Is Winning Support for Its Claims on Arctic Shelf, Says Chief Negotiator."

¹⁶⁰ Trude Pettersen, "Russia to Present Territorial Claims to Un Next Month," The Independent Barents Observer, January 2016, <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/arctic/2016/01/russia-present-territorial-claims-un-next-month>.

initial recoverable fuel resources are estimated to 258 billion tons of fuel equivalent, accounting for 60 percent of the actual Russia's total hydrocarbon resources.¹⁶¹

Russia's claim created tensions with Denmark, as Greenland, which is a sovereign state of Denmark, also submitted a partial submission to CLCS, claiming that the area surrounding the North Pole, part of the Lomonosov Ridge is an extension of its landmass.¹⁶² At the same time, after more than a decade of research and a partial claim in 2013, Canada, the second biggest Arctic state, took a stand in the Arctic matters when it advanced a submission to CLCS claiming the seabed under the North Pole for itself, bringing evidence that the Lomonosov ridge is part of its own continental shore.¹⁶³

As of now, the overlapping claims are waiting for a peaceful and fair resolution from the CLCS. However, there is a potential for tensions concerning this matter. Laruelle points out that if the CLCS refuses to confirm the respective claims, some states could be tempted to find gaps in the law, in their favor.¹⁶⁴ Russia, for example, which has invested billions of dollars to gather scientific evidence, could strengthen its posture, and perhaps even be expected to disregard international law, while being prepared domestically to deviate from the scientific arguments against it, making the possible negative ruling seem political or geopolitical.¹⁶⁵

On the other hand, a positive decision in the favor of Russia will foster its ambition as a global power, changing the geostrategic balance in its favor, and, in addition, will bring important economic prospects to Russia.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶¹ Pettersen.

¹⁶² European Parliament.

¹⁶³ Alina Bykova, "Canada Makes Substantial Step in Arctic Territory Delimitation, Submits Claim Which Includes North Pole," May 27, 2017, <https://www.highnorthnews.com/en/submits-claim-which-includes-north-pole>.

¹⁶⁴ Laruelle, *Russia's Arctic Strategies and the Future of the Far North*, 109.

¹⁶⁵ Laruelle, 109.

¹⁶⁶ Laruelle, 109.

2. The Argued Archipelago

Another way for Russia to shift the weight of the argument in its direction and, more important, to challenge the West and its solidarity is through Norway's Svalbard archipelago.¹⁶⁷ The legal status of the Svalbard archipelago is highlighted by Laruelle, who points out that, following the 1920 Svalbard Treaty, Russia claims special rights among signatories due of its long history with the archipelago, in spite of the fact that it has overall recognized Norwegian sovereignty over the islands.¹⁶⁸ Therefore, Russia sees the Svalbard archipelago in a crucial role for the country's position in the Arctic. However, the archipelago remains an integral part of Norway.

Disputes between the two countries derive from the different interpretations of the outdated agreement mentioned above, given three issues: the interpretation of the term "military purposes," the status of the continental shelf surrounding the islands, and the status of the EEZs.¹⁶⁹

First and foremost, the two-side interpretation of the article concerning with de demilitarization of the Svalbard islands, lead to disagreements. Russia interprets the regulations of the treaty as forbidding all military activities in the area, including the use of the double-use facility of monitoring and surveillance systems, which Russia argues could be used for military purposes by NATO and the United States.¹⁷⁰ Norway, on the other hand, understands the article differently, and therefore Svalbard islands are often used by the Norwegian armed force, especially the coast guard.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ Svalbard is a group of islands within the Arctic Circle, 400 miles north of mainland Norway; Spitsbergen is the largest island

¹⁶⁸ Laruelle, *Russia's Arctic Strategies and the Future of the Far North*, 106–7.

¹⁶⁹ Laruelle, 107–8.

¹⁷⁰ Katarzyna Zysk, "Russia and the High-North: Security and Defence Perspectives," in *Security Prospects in the High North: Geostrategic Thaw or Freeze* (Rome: NATO Defense College, 2009), 115, https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/102391/fp_07.pdf.

¹⁷¹ Wither, "Svalbard."

Second, in 2003, Norway act unilaterally, but without violating the international norms, and decided to expand its maritime territory around Svalbard under the aegis of the UNCLOS norm of 12 nautical miles (22 km), resulting in an increase of approximately 35 percent of its territorial waters.¹⁷² This would give Norway exploitation rights to those waters; however, the change was recognized only by Canada and Finland and contested by other signatories of the treaty.¹⁷³ Russia condemned Norway for applying domestic law to the archipelago.

The last matter of friction between the two countries is the control of fisheries around Svalbard. In 1977, Norway established a new maritime zone where fishing is domestically regulated, but kept distinct from its own EEZ: the so-called Fisheries Protection Zone (FPZ).¹⁷⁴ There have been many circumstances in which Russian fishing vessels were intercepted by the Norwegian coast guard and found in violation of different regulations. One incident was widely publicized and commented upon worldwide: that of the Russian trawler *Elektron*, which occurred in 2005.¹⁷⁵ *Elektron* did not submit to arrest by the Norwegian Coast Guard; moreover it broke away from its escort and headed for the Russian coast with two Norwegian officers on board for more than three days. Eventually the officers were released when the trawler linked up with the Russian Coast Guard, but also after a vehement dialogue between the two governments.¹⁷⁶

This last incident was important as it occurred in a disputed place between the two countries it also brought attention to the necessity of enhanced cooperation between the Arctic states, especially in the matters of search and rescue, maritime awareness or legal rights to explore maritime resources. It is significant that the incident did not spiral out of control into a possible open conflict, even though it had all the characteristics of a crisis,

¹⁷² Laruelle, *Russia's Arctic Strategies and the Future of the Far North*, 107.

¹⁷³ Laruelle, 107–8.

¹⁷⁴ Laruelle, 107.

¹⁷⁵ Andreas Osthagen, “Managing Conflict at Sea: The Case of Norway and Russia in the Svalbard Zone,” *Arctic Review on Law and Politics* 9, no. 1 (2018): 108–11, <https://doi.org/10.23865/arctic.v9.1084>.

¹⁷⁶ Osthagen, “Managing Conflict at Sea.”

which could have been enhanced by the changing and challenging environment of the Arctic.¹⁷⁷

To sum up, the question of Svalbard has not been settled by international regulations, and the archipelago is yet exposed both politically and military being a potential focus of friction between the two countries, and in a larger context, NATO.

The Russian stance on Arctic territorial conflicts goes beyond those mentioned. However, these issues are the most relevant in terms of identifying Russia as a revisionist power in the Arctic.

B. MILITARY PROJECTIONS

Despite Russia's economic prospects in the Arctic, the region stands as essential in terms of military power and strategic value. Moscow looks to safeguard it by committing time and resources for its militarization. Therefore, its military buildup in the Arctic is certainly prominent in the competition between the West and itself, especially now in the face of the changing climate and environment.

Looking at the Russian military footprint (Figure 7), one can observe that Russia has created a protective network of military bases across all its coastline and beyond, by refurbishing old airbases, SAR capabilities, and radar stations to enhance its overall domain awareness.¹⁷⁸ Russia's build-up is intended initially for territorial defense, but more important, is designed and aligned to secure Russia's second-strike capabilities.¹⁷⁹ As the hard security policies dominate the West's perception of Russia, the Russian analyst Sergunin, argued in 2015 that, in the issue of the Arctic region, the strategic component is

¹⁷⁷ Osthagen.

¹⁷⁸ Boulegue, "Russia's Military Posture in the Arctic."

¹⁷⁹ Yu Koizumi, "Russia's Military Build-Up in the Arctic: Russia's Threat Perception and Its Military Strategy in the Arctic Region," in *The Influence of Sub-State Actors on National Security*, ed. Minori Takahashi (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 69–84, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-01677-7_5.

different than the conventional component, and has nothing to do with the Arctic region and everything to do with Russia's global confrontation with the United States.¹⁸⁰

However, Russia's military posture surpasses the United States' current posture across the region. In addition, a recent study by Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS) highlighted several scenarios that concluded that the United States not only will miss the power to access portion of the Arctic ocean by 2050, but Russian advances in its anti-access/ area denial (A2/AD) capabilities in the Arctic will make the United States "costs of entry" much higher, though making NATO a solution to deter Russian stance in the Arctic.¹⁸¹

¹⁸⁰ The Arctic Institute, "The Arctic Institute - High North Dialogue 2015 - Interview with Alexander Sergunin," accessed September 30, 2020, <https://podcasts.google.com/feed/aHR0cDovL2ZlZW5kY2xvdWQuY29tL3VzZXJzL3NvdW5kY2xvdWQ6dXNlcnM6NjM5OTkyNS9zb3VuZHMucnNz/episode/dGFnOnNvdW5kY2xvdWQsMjAxMDp0cmFja3MvMTkyNjE1NDcw>.

¹⁸¹ Heather A Conley et al., *America's Arctic Moment: Great Power Competition in the Arctic to 2050*, 2020, https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/Conley_ArcticMoment_layout_WEB%20FINAL.pdf?EkVudAlPZnRPLwEdAIPO.GlpyEnNzlNx.

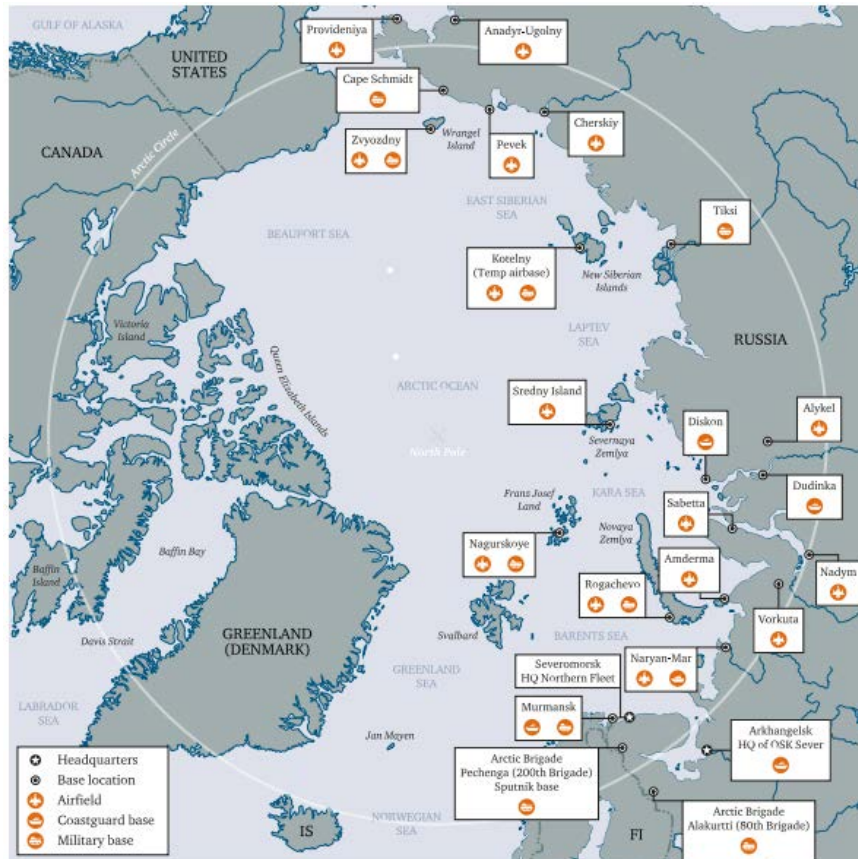


Figure 7. Russian Military Infrastructure in the Arctic.¹⁸²

Although most of the Arctic states have been upgrading their military capabilities in the region, it is Russia's military buildup that is of primary concern.¹⁸³ In addition to expanding the size of the Russian forces in the Arctic and modernizing their equipment, Russian assertiveness and military activities have also increased. Evidence of these will follow forward down.

a. Sea Capabilities

The Arctic Ocean, unlike the Black Sea or Baltic Sea, gives Russia the possibility of direct access to the world's oceans, particularly to the North Atlantic. In the summer of 2008, Russia resumed strategic patrols by the Northern Fleet in its Arctic waters for the

¹⁸² Source: Boulegue, "Russia's Military Posture in the Arctic."

¹⁸³ Wezeman, "Military Capabilities in the Arctic."

first time since the end of the Cold War.¹⁸⁴ To this, Russia has directed its modernization efforts to its naval capacity, the Northern Fleet, which is responsible for its military operations in the Arctic. The Northern Fleet stands as the most powerful of the Russian Navy's five fleets, with such impressive numbers such as 41 submarines (with more than 75 percent nuclear powered) and 37 warships.¹⁸⁵ With a strategy similar to that from the Cold War, Russia has continued to use the Arctic as the staging ground for its strategic nuclear capabilities, as it "decided to develop five of the... ballistic missile nuclear submarines (SSBN) equipped with the new solid fuel submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLMBs)."¹⁸⁶

Since the Northern Fleet equals almost two-thirds of the Russian navy's nuclear strike capabilities, in December 2014, it "was given independent status as the Joint Strategic Command North" (JSC North) and assumed command of "the air and ground units within its area of responsibility."¹⁸⁷ JSC main task is "to maintain the strategic forces in a state of constant readiness, and to ensure the survivability both of [the infrastructure on] the Kola Peninsula and of the strategic submarine assets" that are based there.¹⁸⁸ Besides, protecting Russia's EEZ from illegal activities and ensuring the safety of navigation, another priority of the Northern Fleet is to maintain and secure access "to the North Atlantic through the Barents and Norwegian Seas and further west via the GIUK gap."¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁴ Stephen Blank and Army War College (U.S.), eds., *Russia in the Arctic*, Strategic Studies Institute Monograph (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2011).

¹⁸⁵ RussianShips, "Russian Navy 2019: List of Active Russian Navy Ships and Submarines," October 20, 2020, <http://russianships.info/eng/today/>.

¹⁸⁶ Koizumi, "Russia's Military Build-Up in the Arctic," 70.

¹⁸⁷ Atland, "The Building up of Russia's Military Potential in the Arctic Region and Possible Elements of Its Deterrence"; Koizumi, "Russia's Military Build-Up in the Arctic."

¹⁸⁸ Boulegue, "Russia's Military Posture in the Arctic," 19.

¹⁸⁹ Boulegue, 19.

b. Land Capabilities

Like the Northern Fleet, the backbone of Russian land troops under the command of JSC North is the new Arctic Brigade. It was established and manned in 2015 from two army motorized brigades, “and is supplemented by Special Forces units from the 61st “Red Banner” Naval Infantry Brigade.”¹⁹⁰ These units have are trained to perform strategic military operations in the Arctic, in a cold-weather environment, and are part of Russian’s plans to “balance the situation” with NATO forces in the Arctic.¹⁹¹

c. Air Capabilities

The least important part of Russia’s emerging Arctic Structure is its air assets, which consists mainly of the aircraft supporting the Northern Fleet, with limited range beyond the Russian territory.¹⁹² However, new airfields have been built or upgraded in the Arctic on the Russian mainland and the islands nearby from the Arctic Ocean.¹⁹³ According with Yu Koizumi, “most of those are radar bases and support facilities for the reconstruction of air defense networks in the Arctic,” where Russian officials have “deployed air defense and anti-ship missile units to defend them.”¹⁹⁴

Concurrently, in 2008 the first battalion of Arctic air defense systems Tor-M2DT (Russian-made short range missiles; NATO: SA-15 Gauntlet) was assigned to the Northern Fleet, which seems to be well beyond the amount needed based on the number of foreign troops in the region.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁰ Boulegue, 15.

¹⁹¹ Wezeman, “Military Capabilities in the Arctic,” 14–15.

¹⁹² Wezeman, “Military Capabilities in the Arctic.”

¹⁹³ Koizumi, “Russia’s Military Build-Up in the Arctic.”

¹⁹⁴ Koizumi.

¹⁹⁵ Kubiak, “Russian Policy Towards the Arctic”; Boulegue, “Russia’s Military Posture in the Arctic.”

d. Military Assertiveness

Perhaps more worrying that the military buildup is what Russia is practicing (and signaling) through military exercises. Direct experience and adaptability of Russian Arctic forces have been demonstrated through numerous military exercises in the Arctic, covering a vast array of missions and focusing on the “overall combat readiness of the Northern Fleet, and also testing the battle capacities of the Arctic troops.”¹⁹⁶ A recent study detailed a selected number of Russian military exercises that were conducted between 2014 and 2017, highlighting all spectrum of missions (to include large-scale navigation exercises and strategic bombers’ air flight), the large number of servicemen, and the various number of weapons tested (from tactic to strategic levels, to include missile launches).¹⁹⁷

Moreover, exercises from the last two years such as the Vostok-2018, or Grom-2019 were the biggest ever held by Russia, and involved Russia’s strategic nuclear forces, all of Russia’s naval fleets, and a very large number of troops and aircrafts; they also tested nuclear warheads along with other ballistic missiles.¹⁹⁸

The rise of military forces and resources committed to these activities could suggest the potential declining of other diplomatic means Russia could use in its stand in the Arctic, but not only. However, Western countries understand that the likelihood of “Russia’s direct military intervention in the Arctic is quite low because Russia’s main interest is preserving its sphere of influence [in region];”¹⁹⁹ therefore they cannot be alarmed by Russia’s military accumulation.

The concerns of a revisionist Russia employing a hard power strategy when it comes to the Arctic can be considered when we explore its military actions in the context of Georgia, Ukraine and Syria, where Russia safeguarded its national interest in its near abroad, thus negatively affecting its relations with the Western countries. Moreover,

¹⁹⁶ Boulegue, “Russia’s Military Posture in the Arctic,” 22.

¹⁹⁷ Foxall, *Russia’s Policies Towards a Changing Arctic*.

¹⁹⁸ Conley et al., *America’s Arctic Moment*.

¹⁹⁹ Koizumi, “Russia’s Military Build-Up in the Arctic.”

according to James Sherr, Russia will continue to use kinetic and non-kinetic instruments to force material changes upon the Western countries if it believes that it has the capacity to do so.²⁰⁰ Consequently, that the nerves between the Western countries and Russia surfaces not from the existence of Russian national interests in the Arctic, but contrary from the activities Russia is pledge to rise and secure its interests.²⁰¹

²⁰⁰ Sherr, "The Militarization of Russian Policy."

²⁰¹ Foxall, *Russia's Policies Towards a Changing Arctic*, 12.

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V. BREAKING THE DEADLOCK

Two ways. Gradually, then suddenly.²⁰²

Russia's prioritization of the Arctic and its bellicose behavior are the primary driving factors in making the Arctic a security concern. As an Arctic power, Russia is expected to project its military power in the region. However, due to Russia's pattern of aggression and its self-assurance, its presence there should be viewed with some caution by the Western states.

The United States is considered an Arctic state by way of its Alaskan coastline. Therefore, the United States is one of the few states with economic interests in the region which at the same time brings security issues to its foreign policy. However, the Arctic region has been neglected in the United States external policy, for almost 30 years, and nowadays the dearth of its attention borders on negligence.²⁰³

The "gradual" point of bringing the Arctic to NATO's attention is based on the slow steps that the United States and its allies undertake. These gradual measures can be seen as the United States and its allies shift their attention to the Arctic by developing policy about the region and increasing their assertiveness in the area. However, a miscalculated "sudden" move may bring security challenges. Given Russia is already concerned about a NATO Exclusive Zone.

A. ENDS, WAYS, AND MEANS: AN UNBALANCED STOOL?

This chapter deals with the implications of the United States and NATO deterring Russia's activity in the Arctic. Bringing the Arctic under NATO's attention comes with certain challenges. In assessing these challenge, I will consider Arthur Lykke's three-legged stool model, depicted in Figure 8, where strategy is defined by the sum of its Ends

²⁰² Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*, Scribner Classics (New York: Scribner, 1996).

²⁰³ Heather Conley, "The Arctic Spring," *Foreign Affairs*, September 24, 2019, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/commons/2019-09-24/arctic-spring>.

(the objectives), Ways (the concepts), and Means (the resources), and moreover, if these three concepts are not in balance, the strategy delivered comes with greater risk.²⁰⁴

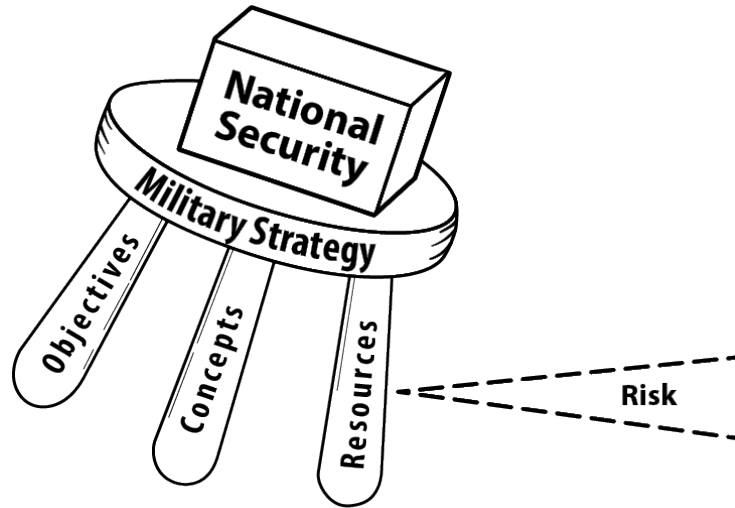


Figure 8. Lykke Three-Legged Stool Strategy²⁰⁵

1. The Arctic's Plan of Action

In Lykke's model the Ends represent the desired end state; they explain what this strategy aims to achieve. In this study, the desired objective of the Arctic deadlock is the promotion of NATO and its close partners nearby (including, but not limited to Finland, and Sweden), with the United States, as a leading role. This would involve expanded cooperation among the four littoral states that are part of NATO, and the adoption of a proper deterrence strategy against Russia.

²⁰⁴ Gabriel Marcella and Army War College (U.S.), eds., "How Do Students Learn Strategy? Thoughts on the U.S. Army War College Pedagogy of Strategy," in *Teaching Strategy: Challenge and Response* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2010), 179–202; Borer, Douglas. "Conflict in the Information Age." Class Lecture presented at the Strategy - A Simple Heuristic Model, NPS, October 2019.

²⁰⁵ Source: Borer, "Conflict in the Information Age"; Richard Berkebile, "Military Strategy Revisited A Critique of the Lykke Formulation," *The Army University, Military Review*, May 7, 2018, <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/journals/military-review/online-exclusive/2018-ole/may/military-strategy/>; Author contributions

A similar approach should be initiated and enhanced through the Enhanced Opportunities Partners (EOP)²⁰⁶ program, in which Sweden and Finland are playing important roles, as being Arctic states outside the NATO.²⁰⁷ The trade-off of this partnership is that Russia may strengthen its military capabilities and partnership with other actors, such as China, hence only a step to a possible crisis in the Arctic. This brings into discussion the security dilemma; although that discussion is beyond the scope of this thesis, it does raise questions for future research. Briefly, bringing the Arctic to NATO's attention should be a strategic objective for the United States and its allies; therefore, the assessment for delivering such an option should be considered as "high."

2. Gradual Return into the Arctic by Bureaucratic Means and Persistent Nearness

How this strategy will be accomplished lead to the second part of the three-legged stool, the Ways in which it will be accomplished, which should resolve the question of what this strategy will look like. As mentioned earlier, the United States has paid little attention to the problem of the Arctic since the end of the Cold War.

The United States did not have an articulated policy on the Arctic until 2009, when Bush administration released the National Security Presidential Directive 66/ Homeland Security Presidential Directive 25, "establishing a new U.S. policy for the Arctic region."²⁰⁸ Since then, little has been done, apart from the release of several strategic documents, including "the May 2013 National Strategy for the Arctic region," the "January 2014 Implementation Plan for National Strategy for Arctic Region," the "January 2015 Executive Order for Enhancing Coordination of Arctic Efforts," (all three of them released

²⁰⁶ The Enhanced Opportunities Partner (EOP) has been launched by NATO in 2014. Its goal is to strengthen the interoperability of troops of the EOP countries with NATO forces. The higher this compatibility is, the easier and more effective the participation of such states in the Alliance's missions and operations.

²⁰⁷ Anna Wieslander, "What Makes an Ally? Sweden and Finland as NATO Partners," Atlantic Council, April 1, 2019, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/what-makes-an-ally-sweden-and-finland-as-nato-partners/>.

²⁰⁸ O'Rourke et al., *Changes in the Arctic: Background and Issues for Congress*, 7.

by the Obama Administration), and the “December 2017 National Security Strategy Document” (though the term Arctic only mentioned once).²⁰⁹

However, the United States Arctic Strategy, released in June 2019, outlines the “Department of Defense’s... strategy for the Arctic in an era of strategic competition.”²¹⁰ The new document supersedes previous documents related to the Arctic and focuses on the competition with China and Russia as being the principal challenges to long-term United States security and prosperity. The updated strategy’s “desired end-state for the Arctic is a secure and stable region where United States national security interests are safeguarded, the homeland of the United States is defended, and nations work in cooperation to address shared challenges.”²¹¹

When it comes to NATO, the absence of interest is even greater. Though Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, through various press statements, has recognized the increasing importance of the Arctic, the alliance lacks a specific policy for the region; the security challenges in the Arctic are missing from the current NATO Strategic Concept, which dates from 2010.²¹² Therefore, without a comprehensive NATO security concept for the Arctic based on defense, deterrence and cooperation, the region may bring challenges for the NATO alliance and its members.

Actual evidence of the United States’ growing interest in the Arctic is seen through its raised assertiveness there, culminating in the series of Northern Edge joint-training exercises. Approximately 10,000 military personnel participated in the 2019 exercise, which was hosted by the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command. The USS *Theodore Roosevelt* (a Nimitz-class nuclear-powered aircraft carrier) and its Carrier Strike Group also

²⁰⁹ O’Rourke et al., 7–8.

²¹⁰ Department of Defense, *Department of Defense Arctic Strategy*, 2.

²¹¹ Department of Defense, 2.

²¹² Dick Zandee, Kimberley Kruijver, and Adája Stoetman, “The Future of Arctic Security,” *Clingendael Report*, April 2020, 40; NATO, “Strategic Concepts,” NATO, September 24, 2020, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_56626.htm.

participated, the first time in a decade that an aircraft carrier had sailed to Alaska.²¹³ The exercise follows the NATO Exercise Trident Juncture 2018, when the USS *Harry S. Truman* and its Carrier Strike Group deployed in the cold Norwegian waters in the Arctic Circle, being a first since the ending of the Cold War. Moreover, Trident Juncture 2018 brought together all of NATO's members countries (29 at that time), and also the Arctic states Finland and Sweden.²¹⁴ Though the United States and its allies through NATO have stepped up their presence by military assertiveness and enhancing cooperation in the region, the stake is the Russian views and opposition to the incursion of the alliance in the Arctic.²¹⁵

In comparison with the United States and its allies, Russia's tempo of exercises and training is higher, and has "expanded significantly over the last twelve years."²¹⁶ As seen in the previous two chapters, the same thing can be argued about Russia's military buildup. To sum up, the gradual approach to the Arctic taken by the United States and its allies, differs from Russia's approach and seems to be "moderate."

3. Shattering the Ice

The third leg of the strategy, the Means, addressed the type of resources that will be required to accomplish the desired objective for the Arctic.²¹⁷ This section will briefly analyze the intangible (the will) or tangible (the icebreakers fleet - as being essential in

²¹³ John Madeira, "Is the U.S. Finally Taking the Melting Arctic Seriously?," American Security Project, June 4, 2019, <https://www.americansecurityproject.org/is-the-us-finally-taking-the-melting-arctic-seriously/>.

²¹⁴ Megan Eckstein, "Truman Carrier Strike Group Operating North of Arctic Circle; First Time for U.S. Navy Since 1991," *USNI News*, October 19, 2018, <https://news.usni.org/2018/11/06/truman-strike-group-operating-in-arctic-circle-required-more-consideration-of-logistics-safety>; O'Rourke et al., *Changes in the Arctic: Background and Issues for Congress*, 39–40.

²¹⁵ Rotnem, "Putin's Arctic Strategy."

²¹⁶ Heather Conley, Katarzyna Zysk, and Michael Kofman, "Online Event: Russia's Military Posture in the Arctic," June 30, 2020, produced by Center for International & International Studies, podcast, MP3 audio, 51:16, <https://testpage.csis.org/events/online-event-russias-military-posture-arctic-0>

²¹⁷ Borer, "Conflict in the Information Age."

having Arctic superiority, the facilities, etc.) means that the United States and its allies dedicates to the Arctic region.

The comparison of icebreaker fleets between countries with interests in the polar region and Russia, depicted in Figure 9, is essential in assessing the resources needed to achieve and maintain the preferred goal for the Arctic. Though icebreaker capability is not a substitute for a well-resourced and consistent United States Arctic policy, it does provide a primary factor to security and stability in the Arctic, as icebreakers provide the ability to supply and maneuver in the region, and are crucial in SAR operations. Also, when it comes to icebreaker capability, Russia is leading by far with an impressive 46 vessels. Moreover, with the commission of the *Arktika* in December 2019, Russia became the only country in the world to operate a nuclear-powered icebreaker.²¹⁸ At the same time, Putin issued a statement declaring that the majority of Russia's Arctic heavy-duty icebreakers would be powered by nuclear reactors.²¹⁹

²¹⁸ Reuters, "Russia Says the World's Largest and Most Powerful Icebreaker Just Joined Its Fleet," Business Insider, accessed November 13, 2020, <https://www.businessinsider.com/russia-says-worlds-largest-nuclear-icebreaker-starts-arctic-voyage-2020-9>.

²¹⁹ Reuters.

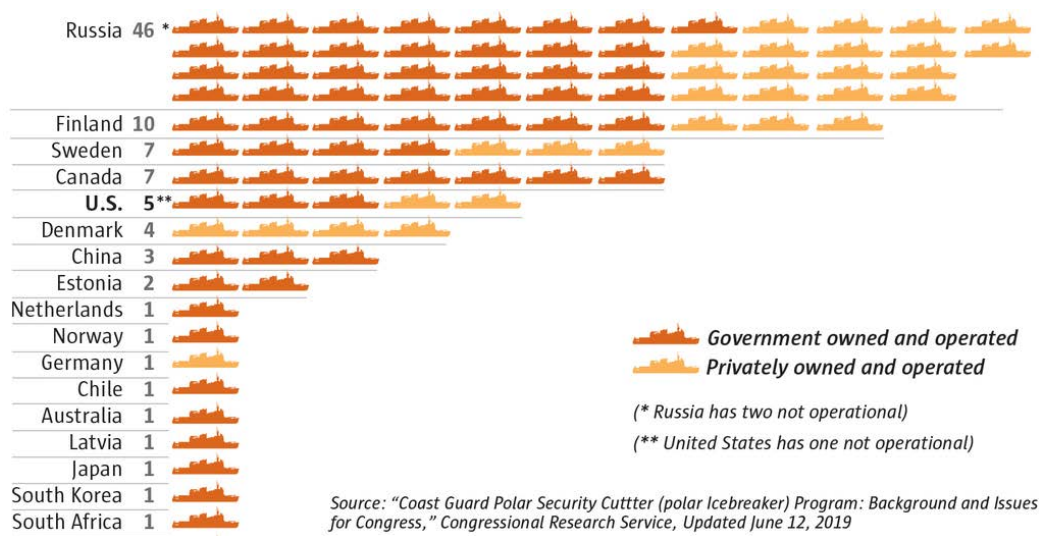


Figure 9. Icebreakers of the World²²⁰

As a whole, “the Arctic security concerns play only a minor role in overall United States defence policy.”²²¹ However, in 2019, the United States began to view the Arctic in terms of Great Power Competition, acknowledging the strengthened military and economic presence of Russia. In a speech to the Arctic Council in Rovaniemi, Finland, in May 2019, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo summarized this viewpoint: “This is America’s moment to stand up as an Arctic nation... The region has become an arena of global power and competition... We’re entering a new age of strategic engagement in the Arctic, complete with new threats to Arctic interests and its real estate.”²²²

However, despite the military modernization and, in some cases expansion of all five Arctic rim states, their commitment towards the Arctic is limited and has advanced slowly; also, the official policies released by those states appear to be focused solely on the

²²⁰ Source: Ronald O’Rourke, *Coast Guard Polar Security Cutter (Polar Icebreaker) Program: Background and Issues for Congress*, CRS Report No. RL34391 (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2020), <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/weapons/RL34391.pdf>; Hal Bernton, “Seattle Will Be Home Port for New Class of Icebreakers,” *The Seattle Times*, June 17, 2019, <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/seattle-will-be-home-port-for-new-class-of-icebreakers/>.

²²¹ Wezeman, “Military Capabilities in the Arctic.”

²²² Sengupta, “United States Rattles Arctic Talks with a Sharp Warning to China and Russia.”

defense of their current national territories.²²³ As was mention earlier, the same statement is true for the NATO alliance as a whole.

a. Canada

Canada's policy to military issues in the Arctic has been a careful one, primarily dedicated to environmental security. However, climate change and the new geopolitical interest have raised broader security issues and a number of initiatives introduced since the late 2000s have been aimed at strengthening Canadian Arctic sovereignty.²²⁴ One of these measures is the extension of its Canadian Air Defense Identification Zone in 2018, to cover not only all of Canada's landmass, but the entirety of its Arctic territory. It comes as a response to Russia stepping up its long bomber patrols, alongside the Arctic border of Canada and the United States.²²⁵

Also, in addition to the current force power of its icebreaker fleet, (which belongs solely to the Canadian Coast Guard, seven vessels plus two under construction), the Canadian Government announced that it will be procuring six new icebreakers to replace its current old fleet (which on average is 42 years old) in order to ensure year-long icebreaking support and SAR operations.²²⁶

In considering facilities, "the nearest Canadian naval base to the Arctic region is at Halifax, Nova Scotia, in the far southeast of Canada" with a small and old "coast guard

²²³ Wezeman, "Military Capabilities in the Arctic."

²²⁴ The Defence Committee, UK, "On Thin Ice: UK Defence in the Arctic - Defence Committee - House of Commons," July 19, 2018, 29, <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmdfence/388/38802.htm>.

²²⁵ Levon Sevunts, "Canada Extends Air Defence Monitoring Zone to Entire Canadian Arctic – Eye on the Arctic," May 29, 2018, <https://www.rcinet.ca/eye-on-the-arctic/2018/05/29/canada-arctic-defence-military-intercept-russia/>.

²²⁶ Xavier Vavasseur, "Six New Icebreakers to Be Built for Canadian Coast Guard," *Naval News* (blog), August 11, 2019, <https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2019/08/six-new-icebreakers-to-be-built-for-canadian-coast-guard/>; Michael Byers and Nicole Covey, "Arctic SAR and the 'Security Dilemma,'" *International Journal: Canada's Journal of Global Policy Analysis* 74, no. 4 (December 2019): 499–517, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020702019890339>.

base at Nanisivik on Baffin Island, Nunavut.”²²⁷ The base at Nanisivik was due to be expanded at a cost of approximatively \$100 million; however, the expansion was delayed and the base was downsize to just a refueling base.²²⁸

b. Denmark/ Greenland

Denmark’s stand on the Arctic matter is reflected in its latest Arctic policy from 2016. In summary, although Denmark has recognized Russia’s increased military activity in the Arctic, it did not consider this a priority as it viewed Russia’s buildup to be “primarily defensive in nature.”²²⁹ However, according with the Danish prime minister, Denmark is now preparing to triple its defense spending in the Arctic to a total of \$220 million for a three year period in order to enhance its surveillance capacity around Greenland, as well as to detect Russian submarines patrolling in the vicinity of the island.²³⁰

As seen in Figure 9, Denmark has limited capabilities in the numbers of its icebreakers (four) with no known plans for rebuilding or modernizing its fleet. Moreover, the vessels it has have limited capabilities of breaking ice (thinner as much as 80 cm).²³¹

In Greenland, Nuuk and Thule are the main facilities focused on military issues. Nuuk serves as a command headquarters for the Danish military that is responsible for coordinating deployments across the Arctic and Antarctic. Thule Air Base in Greenland’s northwest houses a large intercontinental ballistic missile detection radar station but no

²²⁷ Wezeman, “Military Capabilities in the Arctic.”

²²⁸ Wezeman.

²²⁹ House of Commons, *On Thin Ice*.

²³⁰ Kevin McGwin, “Denmark Will Triple Arctic Defense Spending,” *ArcticToday* (blog), December 3, 2019, <https://www.arctictoday.com/denmark-will-triple-arctic-defense-spending/>.

²³¹ Edward H. Lundquist, “Danish Navy’s Knud Rasmussen-Class Patrol Ships Are Built for Icy Greenland Waters,” *Defense Media Network* (blog), December 3, 2012, <https://www.defensemедianetwork.com/stories/danish-navys-knud-rasmussen-class-patrol-ships-built-icy-greenland-waters/>.

aircraft; an agreement regarding its use by an alliance between Denmark, Canada, and the United States has recently been renewed.²³²

c. Norway

Norway is one of the few NATO country with a direct border with Russia, which is situated west of the Kola Peninsula, over the Arctic Circle. Maintaining stability and international cooperation in the Arctic region comes as one of the Norway' strategic goal.²³³ Furthermore, due to the proximity of Russia, Norway stresses the importance of military security and NATO's territorial defense guarantees. However, Norway position on Arctic matters in relation with Russia, has taken a dual approach: maintain bilateral cooperation while at the same time holding a policy of strong defense.²³⁴

This approach is highlighted on several documents. First, the Soria Moria Declaration from 2007 prioritizes the Arctic region of Norway (the Svalbard archipelago) within its national defense, as well as identifying the region to be of strategic importance.²³⁵ It is also worth mentioning Norway's White paper "Defining the Foreign Policy and Security Policy" from 2017. Designed for a period of eight years, this policy emphasizes the military and strategic importance of the Arctic, and moreover, turns Russia from a partner to a threat.²³⁶ In April 2017, Norway also release its first Arctic Strategy focused on promoting "a peaceful, innovative and sustainable region," where international cooperation under the norms of law is the overarching goal.²³⁷

²³² Cross, "The NATO Alliance's Role in Arctic Security"; Wezeman, "Military Capabilities in the Arctic."

²³³ House of Commons, *On Thin Ice*, 23.

²³⁴ House of Commons, 23

²³⁵ Wezeman, "Military Capabilities in the Arctic."

²³⁶ A D Trebukh et al., "Arctic Military Security: Geopolitical Interaction in 'the United States-Russia-Norway' Triangle," *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science* 539 (August 13, 2020): 012015, <https://doi.org/10.1088/1755-1315/539/1/012015>.

²³⁷ Norwegian Ministries, "Norway's Arctic Strategy – between Geopolitics and Social Development," April 2017.

Norway's defense spending for the Arctic has also increased since 2015 by 25 percent in real terms, with plans for acquisition of new F-35 Joint Strike Fighters, maritime patrol aircraft, conventional submarines, modern air defense systems and intelligence capabilities.²³⁸ However, it almost lacks icebreaking capabilities, as seen in Figure 9, with the exception of one icebreaker, operated by the Norwegian Coast Guard, and a new oceanographic icebreaker launched in 2017, which is operated by civilian agencies for civilian purposes, in both oceanographic research and fishing.²³⁹

Starting with 2009, Norway began the process of moving some of its military headquarters north, of the Arctic circle, including Norwegian Army HQ, Norwegian Armed Forces HQ, Coast Guard HQ, along with some aviation facilities.²⁴⁰ It is also worth noting that, out of all NATO members, Norway has one of the most active military in the Arctic; since 2006 it has been the lead country for large military exercises such as Cold Challenge and Arctic Challenge, and has played a major role in other NATO exercises such as the Trident Juncture Series.²⁴¹

d. United States

As was mentioned previously, Arctic policies have played a minor role in the United States' overall defense strategy. The strategic direction outlined in documents discussed in Section A.2. is to "describe U.S. national security and homeland security interests in the Arctic," to commit "increased attention to the Arctic in their [DOD and the Coast Guard] planning and operation," and "to strengthen international cooperation," by ensuring the status quo of the region.²⁴² Therefore, the United States and NATO can deter

²³⁸ House of Commons, *On Thin Ice*. 23

²³⁹ Wezeman, "Military Capabilities in the Arctic"; Eric Haun, "Norway's New Oceanographic Icebreaker Launched," MarineLink, February 28, 2017, <https://www.marinelink.com/news/oceanographic-icebreaker422636>.

²⁴⁰ Wezeman, "Military Capabilities in the Arctic."

²⁴¹ Eckstein, "Truman Carrier Strike Group Operating North of Arctic Circle; First Time for U.S. Navy Since 1991"; Wezeman, "Military Capabilities in the Arctic."

²⁴² O'Rourke et al., *Changes in the Arctic: Background and Issues for Congress*, 7–10.

and defense their territories from possible threats through their military advantages not only in the Arctic but also in other regions.²⁴³ To conclude, in the 2019 United States Arctic Strategy, concerns about the increased military presence, buildup and interest of Russia are highlighted as risks to United States national security goals in the region.²⁴⁴

When it comes to the icebreaking capability, the United States capability, is seriously dwarfed by that of Russia, as is easily seen in Figure 9. The United States icebreaking fleet consists of just one heavy polar icebreaker and two medium polar icebreakers (one of which has been nonoperational since 2010 and is used for spare parts in keeping the other one operational), all of them with more than 30 years in service.²⁴⁵ However, in 2013 the United States Coast Guard (USCG) initiated Polar Security Cutter, a program to acquire three new heavy polar icebreakers and three medium polar icebreakers, with an estimated cost of \$2.619 billion for the first three heavy vessels, with the first projected to be delivered in 2024.²⁴⁶

The majority of the United States Army military facilities, with the exception of Thule Air Base in Greenland, are located in Alaska. These include two large air bases, two land bases located in Anchorage and Fairbanks, and other small facilities, most of them part of North American Aerospace Defense Command, an integrated United States and Canadian air and missile defense system.²⁴⁷ The United States army does not have permanent sea facilities dedicated to the Arctic region, and the Coast Guard's icebreakers are homeported in Seattle, which is approximately 11 days sailing away from the closest

²⁴³ Department of Defense, *Department of Defense Arctic Strategy*, 13.

²⁴⁴ Department of Defense, 6.

²⁴⁵ O'Rourke, *Coast Guard Polar Security Cutter (Polar Icebreaker) Program: Background and Issues for Congress*, 3–4.

²⁴⁶ O'Rourke, 5–6.

²⁴⁷ Wezeman, "Military Capabilities in the Arctic."

United States Arctic harbor.²⁴⁸ However, the activation of the United States 2nd Fleet in 2018, to operate both in the North Atlantic and the Arctic, comes as a recognition of the challenging and complex security environment that the changes in the Arctic region (ice melting and the resurgence of Russia) have brought.²⁴⁹ Moreover, in 2019, the United States Congress called for a bill to identify and designate a strategic port in the Arctic as a measure to counter Russia's advances in the region.²⁵⁰

Evidence of the United States' growing interest in the Arctic is seen also by its increase military assertiveness, evident in Exercise Northern Edge and the NATO Exercise Trident Juncture 2018. Its Arctic operations capabilities are also sustained through numerous recurring exercises, including the Alaska Shield summer exercises and Ice Exercise series, the last one with a tradition dating back to the early Cold War.²⁵¹

To sum up, the United States Armed Forces (to include the United States intelligence agencies), particularly the Navy and the Coast Guard are “paying renewed attention” to the Arctic.²⁵² The challenges in the Arctic need an approach with a strong commitment to multilateral cooperation, and the United States with its allies should take more seriously the rising challenges and opportunities, and adopt a more assertive deterrence strategy.

e. Iceland, Finland, and Sweden

The three countries: Iceland, Finland and Sweden are considered Arctic states since part of their territory are above the Arctic circle. However, they lack direct access to the

²⁴⁸ Bernton, “Seattle Will Be Home Port for New Class of Icebreakers”; “Port of Seattle, United States to Port of Kotzebue, United States Sea Route and Distance,” Ports.com, accessed November 13, 2020, <http://ports.com/sea-route/port-of-seattle,united-states/port-of-juneau,united-states/#/?a=0&b=2619&c=Port%20of%20Seattle&d=Kotzebue%20Harbor,%20United%20States>.

²⁴⁹ Madeira, “Is the U.S. Finally Taking the Melting Arctic Seriously?”

²⁵⁰ Ed Adamczyk, “Defense Bill Calls for Military Port on Arctic Ocean,” *UPI*, June 24, 2019, <https://www.upi.com/Defense-News/2019/06/24/Defense-bill-calls-for-military-port-on-Arctic-Ocean/3241561399214/>.

²⁵¹ Wezeman, “Military Capabilities in the Arctic”; House of Commons, *On Thin Ice*.

²⁵² Department of Defense, *Department of Defense Arctic Strategy*, 9–10.

Arctic Ocean. Furthermore, they are part of the Arctic Council, an organization founded in 1996 that deals with issues regarding environmental and sustainable environment, as well as promoting cooperation among the eight Arctic states, but exclusively set asides military issues.²⁵³

Even though Iceland officially has no regular army, its geographic location gives the small country a great strategic role, especially to the United States. It was crucially important throughout the Cold War, since the United States operated a major Naval Air base, in Keflavik, Iceland, until 2006.²⁵⁴ However, the Icelandic Coast Guard and Crisis Response Unit are considered fully military in all but name.²⁵⁵ With limited assets, the Icelandic Coast Guard is responsible for the coordination of all SAR operation within its economic zone. Iceland's view about its security is that "certain developments in the Russian military might be a concern... in the future," but it hopes for peaceful cooperation and no militarization in the region.²⁵⁶

The increasing needs for mutual defense bring the country further into NATO and closer to the United States, with the initiative of Icelandic Air Policing by NATO in 2008, which provides Iceland with an air defense capability in the absence of its own, but also with the reactivation of the United States Naval Base in Keflavik in 2016.²⁵⁷ Moreover, Iceland is part of the Nordic Defense Cooperation (NORDEFECO), which consists of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, a structure of cooperation that works to strengthen the member states' national defenses.²⁵⁸

Although Sweden and Finland are not members of NATO, they play an important role in the alliance, being two of NATO's partners with status as EOPs. The new Sweden

²⁵³ Laruelle, *Russia's Arctic Strategies and the Future of the Far North*, xiv.

²⁵⁴ House of Commons, *On Thin Ice*.

²⁵⁵ Cross, "The NATO Alliance's Role in Arctic Security."

²⁵⁶ House of Commons, *On Thin Ice*.

²⁵⁷ House of Commons.

²⁵⁸ NORDEFECO, "About Nordic Defense Cooperation," accessed November 13, 2020, <https://www.nordefco.org/the-basics-about-nordefco>.

Arctic policy from 2020, which supersedes the country's strategy from 2011, is mainly focused on the people, peace, and climate, and states that "the current security policy challenges in the Arctic are not of a military nature."²⁵⁹ Moreover, Sweden looks to ensure that the Arctic remains a region where security issues are at a low level. Finland also has the same political approach in its Arctic Strategy revision from 2013, and is working one at its new Arctic Strategy, which will focused on economic development "within the carrying capacity of the environment" and putting the climate first.²⁶⁰

Both countries recognize the military buildup of Russia in the Arctic, but their concerns are more focused on the Baltic Sea region. When asked about Arctic being militarized the Swedish ambassador to the United Kingdom, stated that "Russia focus on building up..., because is that they do all over their territory."²⁶¹ Finland's foreign and defense policy has a similar focus, stating that "Russia has also increased its military footprint and activity in the Arctic, where the situation, so far, has remained relatively stable."²⁶²

When it comes to icebreaker capabilities, both countries have a large fleet of icebreakers, as depicted in Figure 9. However, their armadas have different roles. Sweden dedicates four of its medium polar icebreakers to Arctic operations (SAR and oil spill recovery), while Finland has assigned seven out of its fleet of 10 medium polar icebreakers to the region's challenges, with the remaining ones being dedicated to the Baltic region.²⁶³

All three countries have tested their training and interoperability with NATO through different exercises meant to defend Northern Europe and the Arctic. Not only did

²⁵⁹ Government of Sweden, "Sweden's Strategy for the Arctic Region," accessed November 13, 2020, <https://www.government.se/contentassets/85de9103bbbe4373b55eddd7f71608da/swedens-strategy-for-the-arctic-region>.

²⁶⁰ Kevin McGwin, "Finland Will Put Climate First in Its Next Arctic Policy," ArcticToday, March 6, 2020, <https://www.arctictoday.com/finland-will-put-climate-first-in-its-next-arctic-policy/>.

²⁶¹ House of Commons, *On Thin Ice*.

²⁶² House of Commons.

²⁶³ O'Rourke, *Coast Guard Polar Security Cutter (Polar Icebreaker) Program: Background and Issues for Congress*, 41.

they contribute substantial number of troops to these exercises, they were also involved in planning for the Trident Juncture 18 exercise.²⁶⁴ Moreover, Finland and Sweden have managed to create, maintain and strengthen closer security relationships with their allies in NATO , more than any other Alliance partner, because the two countries share not only an unofficial agreement in not seeking NATO membership, but also “have a mutual interest to cooperate on the defense of the Baltic,” where their interest align.²⁶⁵

Based on the information presented in this section, it is apparent that the overall situational awareness of the Arctic, whether regarding tangible resources or intangible strategies, is relatively constant among all the Western Arctic states. Most of the countries have adapted their official national documents regarding the Arctic to the new security and environmental challenges, taking small steps from the focus on the defense of their national territory in the Arctic to engage in expanded cooperation. Besides that, most of the Arctic countries have started to increase their spending in acquisition and modernization of their Arctic forces. However, they are far from reaching the number of icebreakers in Russia’s fleet, and in sum, the fleet of the Western Arctic states is comparable to about half that of Russia. Therefore, after examining the resources needed for an Arctic strategy among the Western Arctic States, I assess them as being low to moderate in supporting their desired end goal.

4. The Risk

The last premise of the three-legged stool strategy applied to this study is that some risk is inherent and needs to be considered in assessing a comprehensive Arctic strategy. The balance, between what is desired to be achieved, in this case a stable and peaceful Arctic, and the concepts and resources available to achieve this objective demands to be stable.²⁶⁶ Therefore, the risk related to delivering this strategy needs to be considered in this research.

²⁶⁴ Eckstein, “Truman Carrier Strike Group Operating North of Arctic Circle; First Time for U.S. Navy Since 1991.”

²⁶⁵ Wieslander, “What Makes an Ally?”

²⁶⁶ Borer, “Conflict in the Information Age.”

The evidence presented in this thesis suggests that the Arctic is likely to be one of the twenty-first century's most contested places. Accurate assessment is necessary to the formulation of an Arctic strategy. The United States' and NATO's relations with Russia have been deteriorating for years, especially after Russia annexed Crimea in March 2014.

Therefore, one of the risks is that Russia will perceive that fear in terms of perceptions that the other Arctic states, especially the other four rim-states, have decided to cooperate and pull together a strategy against it. Russia's fear of this makes sense and is legitimate, and Russia may have felt that it deserved to develop its military capabilities in the Arctic. On the other hand, Russia may view the United States and NATO's militarization of their Arctic forces as offensive in nature. Therefore, a security dilemma may be unfolding in the Arctic. As noted by John Mearsheimer, "This is Geopolitics 101: great powers are always sensitive to potential threats near home territory."²⁶⁷ Russia is a great power, and as seen in the past in the cases of Georgia and Ukraine, has always responded to American and NATO attempts to expand their influence near its borders.

However, the crises from Georgia and Ukraine are similar example of competition over influence between Russia and the West, where Russia took military actions because it lacked the attractiveness of the West.²⁶⁸ The situation is different in the Arctic, due to the fact that the region is governed differently; moreover, besides the Arctic states domestically objectives, they share common interests in keeping a stable and peaceful Arctic.

The same perception of the risk occurs with the close cooperation that NATO has with Finland and Sweden. Even though neither country is a member of NATO and neither is seeking that membership, Russia recognizes that they will stand close with NATO in case of a crisis. Furthermore, a formal NATO membership of those two countries would

²⁶⁷ John J. Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault," *Foreign Affairs*, October 2014, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-08-18/why-ukraine-crisis-west-s-fault>.

²⁶⁸ Mearsheimer.

increase Russian concerns about balance of power not only in the Arctic, but also in the Baltic Sea region.²⁶⁹

Another risk that needs to be considered comes from the solution to the desired objective. Is NATO willing to engage into the Arctic? As was discussed earlier in this chapter, although NATO members among the Arctic states have a common interest in keeping the Arctic environment free and stable, some of them hold different views regarding security in the region. Overlapping disputes between the NATO Arctic states regarding economic interests, particularly over the delimitation of their respective EEZ, may also cause disagreements; this is the case for all four NATO Arctic states, to include Iceland as well, which have been involved so far in six disputes concerning Arctic EEZ, one over the legal status of straits, and one over the delimitation of the continental shelf.²⁷⁰

There are also concerns about some countries disagreeing with NATO's militarization of the Arctic. This is the case of Iceland, as its Prime Minister has expressed his opinion that her country should leave NATO over concerns about a possible Arctic policy being too militaristic.²⁷¹ The same issues related to the militarization of the Arctic have been expressed by some scholars from Canada, who claim that the expansion of NATO in the region could deteriorate Canadian and Russian cooperation in areas such as SAR operation.²⁷²

On the other hand, non-Arctic NATO countries, such as the United Kingdom, are encouraging the expansion of the alliance into the Arctic, which together with the North Atlantic is of strategic importance for the United Kingdom and Europe security. The concern is significant, especially nowadays with Russia's military resurgence, and with the

²⁶⁹ Wieslander, "What Makes an Ally?"

²⁷⁰ Laruelle, *Russia's Arctic Strategies and the Future of the Far North*, 94–95.

²⁷¹ Krestia DeGeorge, "Iceland Is Key to NATO — but Iceland's Prime Minister Worries About Militarization in the North Atlantic," *ArcticToday*, November 2, 2018, <https://www.arctictoday.com/iceland-key-nato-icelands-prime-minister-worries-militarization-north-atlantic/>.

²⁷² Krestia DeGeorge, "Canada Should Discourage Arctic NATO Operations, Experts Say," *ArcticToday*, November 30, 2017, <https://www.arctictoday.com/canada-should-discourage-arctic-nato-operations-experts-say/>.

renew importance of the GIUK gap (see Figure 3), a maritime choke point between the Arctic and North Atlantic that is back in the calculations of military strategic thinkers, especially those of Russia.²⁷³

Finally, global climate change, along with natural disasters, and marine perils such as oil spills or sea damage, are also need to be considered in assessing the risk, as the melting of the Arctic ice is a driving factor in the polar environment and, to the same extent, of geopolitical issues. All of the above have been recognized as risks in the Arctic region, and in 2011, all Arctic states, to include Russia, signed the Arctic agreement - Arctic Council Agreement on Arctic SAR - on cooperation on aeronautical and maritime SAR in the region.²⁷⁴ Moreover, in 2015, this cooperation was strengthen when a new agreement between the all Arctic states was signed, committing their coast guards to cooperate and coordinate SAR operations under the Arctic Coast Guard Forum (ACGF).²⁷⁵

Even though joint military actions in the Arctic were suspended after Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, cooperation on SAR operations has continued, to include real crisis requests (in 2014, Russia called the USCG for help with a South Korean trawler that sank on the Russian side of Bering Sea), or joint exercises under the Arctic SAR Agreement.²⁷⁶ At the same time, Russia's inability to resolve the South Korean trawler incident in a timely manner, raises the question of Russian SAR capabilities.

Even though there is an unbalanced equilibrium of the Ways, Ends, and Means which has led to considerable risk in bringing the Arctic to the United States' and NATO's attention, the research reported here finds that the new security environment, along with the economic prospective brought by the global climate change in the region, requires that

²⁷³ Rhode, "The GIUK Gap's Strategic Significance"; House of Commons, *On Thin Ice*.

²⁷⁴ O'Rourke et al., *Changes in the Arctic: Background and Issues for Congress*, 53.

²⁷⁵ Levon Sevunts, "Arctic Nations Sign Agreement on Coast Guard Cooperation," Radio Canada International (Radio Canada International, October 30, 2015), <https://www.rcinet.ca/en/2015/10/30/arctic-nations-sign-agreement-on-coast-guard-cooperation/>.

²⁷⁶ Sevunts; National Defence Government of Canada, "News Release | RCAF Participates in Search and Rescue Exercise in Alaska," Royal Canadian Air Force, RCAF, August 25, 2016, <http://www.rcaf-arc.forces.gc.ca/en/article-template-standard.page?doc=rcaf-participates-in-search-and-rescue-exercise-in-alaska/is4uad6f>.

the United States, as a leading voice, should take a stand, and deliver a deterrence strategy based on expanded cooperation between the four littoral states that are also NATO members. Furthermore, this approach can start in places where this cooperation has already been successful, like the Arctic Council and the Arctic Coast Guard Forum.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

Only when the ice breaks will you truly know who your friend is and who is your enemy.²⁷⁷

—Inuit proverb

Buying land in the Arctic is not a solution for the United States. Engaging others might be the solution for a strategy of defense and deterrence in the Arctic. This study focused on Russia's increased military and economic endeavor in the Arctic and brings into attention the ability of Arctic states to deter Russia's expansion and protect their interests through legal and peaceful means.

This thesis started by asking the question, "Which is the strategy that the United States and its allies should establish to defense and deter against Russian influence in the Arctic?" It started by examining Russia's economic interests in the Arctic, its security concerns related to the region's strategic importance for Russian policies, and its desire for international acknowledgement, which is tied to its national pride. This thesis then looked at Russia's activities, seeking to find out how and under what circumstances Russia is likely to engage in confrontation to protect its national interests in the Arctic region and reaffirm to its domestic audience its position as a great power in the international arena. The last part pointed out the compromise of bringing the Arctic to NATO's attention as a way ahead strategy, by focusing on the gradual measures that the United States and its allies have undertaken, first by acknowledging the importance of the Arctic, and then by dedicating resources for mastering it.

In examining Russia's interests in the Arctic, these findings show that Moscow's dedicated policies towards the Arctic emphasize the importance that the High North holds for Russia. Investing in the Arctic has become a domestic, economic, and political priority

²⁷⁷ Retrieved at: Heather A Conley, "The Colder War: U.S., Russia and Others Are Vying for Control of Santa's Back Yard," The Washington Post, December 23, 2011, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-colder-war-us-russia-and-others-are-vying-for-control-of-santas-back-yard/2011/12/20/gIQAWBc7DP_story.html.

for Russia, as it considers itself the natural leader and main stakeholder in the region. This view is sustained by academics such as Laruelle, who wrote that “the Arctic has transformed into a flagship for Russia’s new nationhood..., crystallized as a Kremlin strategy during the second half of the 2000s.”²⁷⁸ In trying to achieve its economic ambitions, Russia needed to prioritize safeguarding and expanding its AZRF by military means as well as by pursuing “legal affairs” in the Arctic. It is estimated that Arctic oil production will account for 26 percent of Russia’s overall output by 2035, up from 11.8 percent in 2007.²⁷⁹ Along with other economic prospects from the region, such as nonferrous and precious minerals, this demonstrates why the Arctic remains “a strategic development priority for the Russian government, despite high costs, Western sanctions and logistical issues.”²⁸⁰ Likewise, with regards at the NSR, Russia has tightened the screws on the maritime sea route, by enforcing its own laws on vessels passing through it. This has become a concern for other states, particularly the United States, for whom FONOPS is an important part of its naval strategy.²⁸¹

Russia’s activities in the Arctic, however, are part of its campaign regarding security challenges, and, as Klimenko noted, they provide Russia “strategic balance in relation to the United States and NATO.”²⁸² On the other hand, regional initiatives such as NORDFECO, along with renewed attention to the Arctic region by the United States and others, as was discussed in Chapter 5, have come now that the Western Arctic states have seen the threats that revisionist Russia has posed in the region.²⁸³

²⁷⁸ Laruelle, *Russia’s Arctic Strategies and the Future of the Far North*, 9–15.

²⁷⁹ S&P Global Platts, “Insight from Moscow: Russian Arctic Oil and Gas Development Continues Despite Climate Concerns,” S&P Global Platts, September 3, 2020, <https://www.spglobal.com/platts/en/market-insights/blogs/oil/090320-insight-from-moscow-russian-arctic-oil-and-gas-development-continues-despite-climate-concerns>.

²⁸⁰ S&P Global Platts, “Insight from Moscow: Russian Arctic Oil and Gas Development Continues Despite Climate Concerns.”

²⁸¹ The Maritime Executive, “Russia Tightens Control Over Northern Sea Route.”

²⁸² Ekaterina Klimenko, “Russia and the Arctic: An End to Cooperation?,” *SIPRI*, March 26, 2015, <https://www.sipri.org/commentary/essay/2015/russia-and-arctic-end-cooperation>.

²⁸³ NORDFECO, “About Nordic Defense Cooperation,” accessed November 13, 2020, <https://www.nordefco.org/the-basics-about-nordefco>; Connolly, *NATO and Security in the Arctic*.

Looking at the Western Arctic states' interests and dedication in the region, and the proposed solution of bringing the Arctic to NATO's attention, evidence suggests that despite the limitations and risks in doing so, the alliance's strengths can be used to increase security in the region. In the end, the United States may consider delivering a comprehensive Arctic strategy through NATO that is focused on deterrence and the defense of its members.

However, the new DOD Arctic Strategy identifies three risks that have emerged for the United States' renewed national interests in the Arctic. First, in the Arctic, Russia is in the position of being closer to the United States border, so the Arctic could offer the possibility of a direct attack on the United States homeland by Russia.²⁸⁴ Natural disasters and accidents are also taken into account, such as oil spills, thawing permafrost, or coastal erosion, which may inhibit the United States military response to project forces from its homeland. Second, Russia is "challenging the rules-based [international] order," which also applies in the Arctic, by reportedly threatening "to use force against vessels that fail to abide by Russian regulations."²⁸⁵ Russia also can use its military's ability to deny access to disputed and self-proclaimed Arctic waters and resources. Finally, the Strategy recognizes that the Arctic is susceptible "to strategic spillover from tensions, competition, or conflict arising in these other regions" of the world.²⁸⁶

Together with the risks identified in the previous chapter, and due the fact that NATO does not have control over the internal policies of its member states, an uncertainty in addressing the Arctic security has emerged. The NATO alliance cannot totally satisfy its Arctic members' interests in the region, and therefore does not appear to hold the answer to the Arctic "deadlock." Furthermore, NATO includes countries without any interest in the Arctic region. Therefore, such a measure could probably destabilize the alliance and discourage it from becoming more involved in Arctic security issues, particularly if Article 5 is brought into the discussion.

²⁸⁴ Department of Defense, *Department of Defense Arctic Strategy*, 6.

²⁸⁵ Department of Defense, 6.

²⁸⁶ Department of Defense, 6.

However, the Arctic has been dismissed far too long by the Western states and institutions. With all of the challenges mentioned above, NATO needs to balance between dedicating excessive attention to the region and neglecting to address security issues related to the Arctic, since is the only institution fit to deal with the military issues of the region. A new organization should be excluded from the discussion, as the Arctic is often perceived by the media and public opinion as “a new Wild West,” but extended cooperation outside of NATO should be considered as it is the case of Finland and Sweden.²⁸⁷

A. WAY AHEAD

As mentioned in Chapter 5, and identified as one of the risks, some countries, such as the United Kingdom have encouraged bringing the Arctic to NATO’s attention, others such as Canada and Iceland discourage that.²⁸⁸ A security dilemma, may unfold in this matter, as NATO expands and increases its influence in parallel with Russia’s increased national interest in the Arctic. On the same note, according to Klimenko, Russia’s focus after 2014 has been changed towards other regions such as the Black Sea (Crimea) or the Barents Sea, leaving the Arctic on the side.²⁸⁹

The findings in this study suggest that a clear path for the Arctic is not easy to be seen. As a matter of fact, the increasing number of exercises by NATO and its allies on the one side, and Russia on the other might be a sign of distrust and preparation for an adversarial approach in the Arctic issue.

1. NATO as a Course of Action

Russia has expressed its opposition to the possible presence of NATO in the Arctic. In a speech to the Barents Summit in Norway, June 2013, Russia’s Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev made this point expressing Russia’s view: “Today independent experts are

²⁸⁷ Laruelle, “Russia’s Arctic Policy,” xv; Wieslander, “What Makes an Ally?”

²⁸⁸ House of Commons, *On Thin Ice*; DeGeorge, “Iceland Is Key to NATO — but Iceland’s Prime Minister Worries About Militarization in the North Atlantic”; DeGeorge, “Canada Should Discourage Arctic NATO Operations, Experts Say.”

²⁸⁹ Ekaterina Klimenko, *Russia’s Arctic Security Policy: Still Quiet in the High North?*, SIPRI Policy Paper 45 (Stockholm: SIPRI, 2016).

concerned that NATO may use emergency and disaster preparedness measures to cover its indirect attempts to militarize the Arctic.”²⁹⁰ Furthermore, as Sergunin and Konyshev pointed out when summarizing the December 2014 Russian military doctrine signed by Putin, “NATO’s military buildup in the Arctic,” and Russia’s neighbors in the region are considered “the main external dangers to Russia’s security.”²⁹¹ This views remain relevant nowadays, when Russia view its NATO neighbors in the Arctic as “direct threats to our [Russia’s] national security,” as Medvedev stated at the Russian Security Council in October 2020 when the new Russian Arctic Commission was established.²⁹²

However, solutions can be provided, as Russia has shown in the past, when it was willing to engage in dialogue with the United States and NATO. After the Cold War, Russia joined the North Atlantic Council (1991), and relations were strengthened in 2002 with the establishment of the NATO-Russia Council (NRC), where security issues and cooperation in areas of common interests, such as the Arctic, were addressed.²⁹³ Even so, these dialogues were suspended after Russia’s illegal intervention in Ukraine in 2014 and the Western states’ imposition of sanctions on Russia.²⁹⁴

2. Search and Rescue

Even though this cannot be taken for granted, a cooperative pattern has been noticed in institutions such as the Arctic Council or the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, where Russia

²⁹⁰ Flake, “Russia’s Security Intentions in a Melting Arctic.”

²⁹¹ Alexander Sergunin and Valery Konyshev, “Russian Military Strategies in the Arctic: Change or Continuity?,” *European Security* 26, no. 2 (April 3, 2017): 171–89, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2017.1318849>.

²⁹² Atle Staalesen, “Moscow Signals It Will Make National Security a Priority in Arctic Council,” *The Independent Barents Observer*, accessed November 21, 2020, <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2020/10/moscow-signals-it-will-make-security-situation-priority-arctic-council>.; The Security Council is a special commission, part of Russian Security Council, that will promote Russian national interests, and includes military-political issues in the Arctic region, with the former president and prime minister now, Dmitry Medvedev as head chief.

²⁹³ NATO, “Relations with Russia,” October 9, 2020, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_50090.htm.

²⁹⁴ NATO.

“is a determined actor.”²⁹⁵ Furthermore, as was mentioned in Chapter 5, Russia has always cooperated in joint SAR operations, since the signing of the 2011 Arctic agreement on Arctic SAR and culminating with the establishment of the ACGF.²⁹⁶

Training and cooperation through joint exercises took place regularly, including the last Norway–Russia Exercise Barents 2018 as part of its annual series;²⁹⁷ the 2019 Finland–Norway–Sweden–Russia Barents Rescue Exercise part of its series;²⁹⁸ and joint exercises such as the Arctic Chinook, led by Canada under the Arctic agreement on Arctic SAR.²⁹⁹ This behavior is a positive sign of Russia’s favoring regional cooperation, especially in areas such as emergency situations, maritime safety and SAR. Therefore, steps towards this cooperation should be taken into account in the approach of the Western states towards the Arctic and Russia.

B. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Even though Russia’s current militarization does not necessarily suggest preparedness for offensive actions in the Arctic, accidental escalations due to climate change, maritime or economic rights may occur, and tensions elsewhere in the world between Russia and the United States in particular may spill over into the Arctic region.³⁰⁰ A new approach to looking at Article 5 in the context of the Arctic should be assessed, along with the willingness of NATO members that are not Arctic states to dedicate resources and planning towards the region. A leading role in this matter should come from

²⁹⁵ Laruelle, *Russia’s Arctic Strategies and the Future of the Far North*, 14.

²⁹⁶ Sevunts, “Arctic Nations Sign Agreement on Coast Guard Cooperation”; Laruelle, *Russia’s Arctic Strategies and the Future of the Far North*, 14.

²⁹⁷ Thomas Nilsen, “After Weeks with Separate War Games, Norway and Russia Again Meet at Sea for Joint Sar Exercise,” *The Independent Barents Observer*, June 2, 2018, <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/node/4006>.

²⁹⁸ BEAC, “Barents Rescue,” Barents Euro-Arctic Cooperation, 2019, <https://www.barentscooperation.org/en/Barents-Regional-Council/Barents-Success-Stories/Barents-Rescue>.

²⁹⁹ Government of Canada, “News Release | RCAF Participates in Search and Rescue Exercise in Alaska.”

³⁰⁰ Klimenko, “The Geopolitics of a Changing Arctic”; Wezeman, “Military Capabilities in the Arctic.”

the United States as it is a rival of Russia and has already recognized the Great Power Competition emerging in the Arctic region.³⁰¹

Even with the risks already noticed, a NATO Arctic Strategy should be delivered, or at least discussed, to ensure that there is a common understanding of the region's security challenges. The NRC could be a good start, as Russia can be invited to address its concerns, and furthermore, it will promote transparency about NATO's intentions. On the same note, NATO should strengthen training, partnership, and operations in the Arctic, not only within its Arctic member states, but also with its close partners like Finland and Sweden or NATO members that are not Arctic states.

Promoting and developing scientific cooperation should be encouraged. Despite ongoing competition, on this matter, Russia has openly shared its discoveries, with the United Nations CLCS, and with countries such as Canada and Denmark.³⁰² This cooperation-enhanced dialogue between the Arctic countries, has eased the clarification of overlapping disputes in the Arctic and can improve the understanding of the Arctic Ocean and its prospects.

Security wise, the United States and NATO should review the possible places in the region susceptible to infringements, such as the GIUK gap, the Svalbard Archipelago, the area near the Kola Peninsula, the NSR or even the disputed North Pole. The evidence suggests that the areas just mentioned are in the calculations of Russia's thinkers. Security policies to address them need to be considered by all Arctic states and not only them: for example, the GIUK gap, is of strategic importance for the United Kingdom.

As a final thought, to ensure stability and security in the region, a comprehensive and coherent approach should be considered by all Arctic states. A strategy in this matter should not be excluded from the Western calculation to deter Russia's presence in the Arctic and, in some cases, foreign intrusion. This policy needs to deliver enduring security in response to military competition. It also needs to be backed by the military strength and

³⁰¹ Conley et al., *America's Arctic Moment*.

³⁰² Laruelle, *Russia's Arctic Strategies and the Future of the Far North*, 14.

will of NATO. It should take into account the actual status quo in the region, the commitment of the alliance's members, the international community views on the Arctic, and last but not least, global climate change which has brought new geopolitical challenges.

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