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# The militarization of Russian polar politics

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# Summary

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- Although Russia does not have a defined common approach to the polar regions, its postures in the Arctic and in Antarctica overlap. They are securitized and increasingly militarized, with direct consequences for other polar nations.
  - In the Arctic, Russia's main threat perception relates to the fear of encirclement by NATO and its allies. In the context of Russia's renewed war against Ukraine since February 2022, the Finnish and Swedish applications to join NATO and the likely expansion of the alliance are a case in point. In Antarctica, Russia's posture relates to protecting its national interests from territorial claims over the continent by other Antarctic Treaty System (ATS) member states.
  - Moscow views the Arctic as a strategic continuum stretching from the North Atlantic to the North Pacific. The Kremlin's priorities are to: impose costs on other countries' access to Russia's European Arctic; protect the Northern Sea Route; defend North Pole approaches; remove tensions from the region; and extend Russia's military capabilities beyond the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation (AZRF).
  - Russia is rebuilding its military capabilities and modernizing its regional military infrastructure by using a 'double dual' approach: Arctic infrastructure is being used for civilian and military purposes (dual-use), while Russia is also blurring the lines between offensive and defensive intent (dual-purpose).
  - This ambition to exercise control and denial capabilities beyond the AZRF and the Kremlin's willingness to push military tensions towards the North Atlantic are increasing pressure on regional navigational chokepoints – namely the Greenland–Iceland–UK and Greenland–Iceland–Norway gaps – and the Svalbard archipelago. Russia also seeks to undermine US strategic dominance in northeast Asia – more specifically, the deployment of US theatre missile defence in Japan and South Korea.
  - Moscow also has an increasingly securitized understanding of the future of Antarctica and the Southern Ocean. This is reflected in policies aimed at safeguarding Russian national interests within the ATS, as well as those allowing Russia to contest the maritime and naval activities of other states in the Southern Ocean.
  - Russia's posture in polar affairs has two main consequences for Arctic coastal states and for the future of the ATS: the need to manage accidents and miscalculations in polar affairs; and increased Russia–China interaction at both poles.

- The Russian approach to China's increasing presence at both poles is pragmatic and compartmentalized. While Russia for now is developing cooperation with Beijing within the ATS, it is much more cautious when it comes to the Arctic, where China's presence is only tolerated. At both poles, the Kremlin needs to manage Beijing's attempts to shape the future of polar governance, and take steps to ensure that Russian interests are respected.
- Tension and miscalculation in polar affairs must be managed by shaping Western policy around Russia's increasingly militarized approach to the Arctic and Antarctic regions. Preserving the spirit of 'low tension' in the Arctic and stability within the ATS will require careful adjustments from Western policymakers.
- This paper recommends that Western policymakers consider Arctic and Antarctic policies as interdependent; understand the Arctic region as a strategic continuum; expand discussions on military security in the Arctic without Russia; and take action to address the lack of transparency around Russia's actions in Antarctica.



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# 01 Introduction: Drivers of Russian polar interests

**Although Russia does not have a defined common approach to the polar regions, its postures in the Arctic and Antarctica overlap, and are securitized and increasingly militarized.**

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Does Russia have a common policy approach to the Arctic and Antarctic regions? The question is all the more relevant as an increasing number of non-polar actors – including China, India, Japan and South Korea – and institutions (notably including the EU) are developing comprehensive policies on the Arctic, as well as on Antarctica and the Southern Ocean.

So far, the Kremlin has yet to formulate a single, united policy concept linking its posture and activities for both poles.<sup>1</sup> However, even if Russia does not have a defined common approach to the polar regions, its postures in the Arctic and Antarctica do overlap. They are securitized and are becoming increasingly militarized.

The drivers of Russian policies in both regions are reflected in existing strategic documents.<sup>2</sup> First, both poles are sources of economic potential. The Arctic

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<sup>1</sup> Not least because there are different agencies and departments in charge of each pole.

<sup>2</sup> For the Arctic, see Официальный интернет-портал правовой информации [Official Internet portal of legal information] (2020), 'Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 05.03.2020 No. 164 "Об Основных принципах государственной политики Российской Федерации в Арктике на период до 2035 года"' [Basic Principles of Russian Federation State Policy in the Arctic to 2035], 5 March 2020, <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202003050019>; Официальный интернет-портал правовой информации [Official Internet portal of legal information] (2020), 'Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 26.10.2020 No. 645 "О Стратегии развития Арктической зоны Российской Федерации и обеспечения национальной безопасности на период до 2035 года"' [Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of October 26, 2020 No. 645, "On the Strategy for the Development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation and Ensuring National Security for the Period until 2035"], October 2020, <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202010260033>. For a thorough analysis of these documents, see Buchanan, E. (2020), 'The overhaul of Russian strategic planning for the Arctic Zone to 2035', NATO Defense College, 19 May 2020, <http://www.ndc.nato.int/research/research.php?icode=641>;

accounts for nearly 20 per cent of Russia's GDP<sup>3</sup> and hosts the Northern Sea Route (NSR), Russia's main trade route across the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation (AZRF). Meanwhile, the Southern Ocean is Russia's main fishing ground for krill,<sup>4</sup> and the Kremlin is seeking to revitalize its distant-water fishing fleet and to increase revenues from seafood exports.<sup>5</sup>

Second, Russian polar politics are informed by the construction of external threats to national interests. In the Arctic, the main threat perception relates to the fear of 'encirclement' by NATO and its allies – a perception that has become even more topical in the context of Russia's war in Ukraine and of the potential accession to NATO membership of Finland and Sweden. The 2015 Maritime Doctrine discusses reducing the 'level of threats' to national security,<sup>6</sup> while subsequent strategic documents on the Arctic detail the existence of 'external threats' to Russian sovereignty over the AZRF, including an increased foreign military presence.<sup>7</sup> In Antarctica, Russia's agenda is to protect its perceived national interests from tentative territorial claims over the continent by Antarctic Treaty System (ATS) member states.

Third, both poles provide Russia with a unique opportunity to project power and influence through science and exploration (although Russia is no longer a leader in oceanic research). Polar politics feed Russia's sense of itself as a 'great power' – it sees the regions as extreme frontiers to be (re)conquered. Russia is presenting itself as an 'Arctic civilization',<sup>8</sup> and in this sense development of the region is a 'legacy project'<sup>9</sup> for President Vladimir Putin. The South Pole carries its own symbolic value, especially in the context of the 200th anniversary in 2020 of the

and Klimenko, E. (2020), 'Russia's new Arctic policy document signals continuity rather than change', Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 6 April 2020, <https://www.sipri.org/commentary/essay/2020/russias-new-arctic-policy-document-signals-continuity-rather-change>. For the Antarctic, see Официальный интернет-портал правовой информации [Official Internet portal of legal information] (2021), 'Распоряжение Правительства РФ от 30.06.2021 N 1767-р Об утверждении плана мероприятий по реализации Стратегии развития деятельности Российской Федерации в Антарктике до 2030 года' [Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation No. 1767-r dated June 30, 2021 on approval of the action plan for the implementation of the Strategy for the Development of the Activities of the Russian Federation in Antarctica until 2030], 30 June 2021, <http://static.government.ru/media/files/11MiwzpjXdaEO2h0tJZHhw12xAp7Mx8k.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> The Arctic represents about 20 per cent of Russian exports (mainly oil, gas, non-ferrous metals, rare earth elements and fish), 10 per cent of investments, and produces 15 per cent of Russia's seafood. See Corentin, L. (2015), 'Russia in the Arctic: Aggressive or Cooperative?', Centre for International Maritime Security, 27 November 2015, <http://cimsec.org/russia-in-the-arctic-aggressive-or-cooperative/20196>; and Khrushcheva, O. and Poberezhskaya, M. (2016), 'The Arctic in the political discourse of Russian leaders: the national pride and economic ambitions', *East European Politics*, 32(4), pp. 547–66, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21599165.2016.1231669>.

<sup>4</sup> Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation (2019), 'Проблемы и Перспективы Освоения Биоресурсов Мирового Океана в Интерессах Российской Экономики' [Problems and Prospects for the Development of the Bioresources of the World Ocean in the Interests of the Russian Economy], November 2019, <http://council.gov.ru/media/files/qZTAeU9uBSltxsGxgutA0KJZyo8p47Nm.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Gerden, E. (2018), 'Russia Introduces New Strategy to Double Fish Export Revenue by 2024', *Seafood News*, 29 October 2018, <https://www.seafoodnews.com/Story/1121447/Russia-Introduces-New-Strategy-to-Double-Fish-Export-Revenue-by-2024>.

<sup>6</sup> 2015 Russian Maritime Doctrine. For English translation, see Davis, A. (2015), 'The 2015 Maritime Doctrine of the Russian Federation', Russia Maritime Studies Institute, [https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/rmsi\\_research/3](https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/rmsi_research/3).

<sup>7</sup> Официальный интернет-портал правовой информации [Official Internet portal of legal information] (2020), "Об Основных государственной политики Российской Федерации в Арктике на период до 2035 года" [Basic Principles of Russian Federation State Policy in the Arctic to 2035].

<sup>8</sup> Nikanorov, S. (2020), 'Армия России – как арктическая цивилизация' [The Russian army is like an Arctic civilization], *Независимая газета* [Independent Newspaper], 17 March 2020, [https://www.ng.ru/armies/2020-03-17/100\\_arctic170320.html](https://www.ng.ru/armies/2020-03-17/100_arctic170320.html).

<sup>9</sup> Conley, H. A. et al. (2021), *Russia's Climate Gamble: The Pursuit and Contradiction of Its Arctic Ambitions*, Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russias-climate-gamble>.

Bellingshausen expedition – the first Russian Antarctic expedition, and what is considered by Moscow to be the ‘discovery’ of the continent. The Antarctic also represents a ‘frontier’ for Russian influence, akin to outer space and the deep sea.

Finally, at both poles, Russia must mitigate the impact of climate change. In the AZRF, this essentially means dealing with the consequences for regional security dynamics,<sup>10</sup> as well as protecting the region from the human, social and economic effects<sup>11</sup> – equally for the NSR and for military infrastructure. Climate change is also accelerating Moscow’s efforts to increase its presence in the Southern Ocean and on the continent of Antarctica to safeguard perceived national interests and to reserve the right to make a territorial claim.

Despite these similarities, Russia is approaching the two poles in different ways. A key driver pushing it to ‘reconquer’ the Arctic is homeland security, through what can be called a ‘bastionization’ of Russia’s Arctic territory. The Kremlin views the Arctic as a strategic continuum stretching from the High North in the European Arctic to the Pacific Arctic and the North Pacific. Russia’s Arctic posture is therefore informed by climate change and wider geopolitical tensions.

In strategic terms, Russia’s assessment is that climate change is increasing the human presence in the Arctic<sup>12</sup> – which means more military activity – and is creating a new *de facto* border along the AZRF that needs to be defended.<sup>13</sup> To deal with these potential vulnerabilities, Russia has made the choice to revitalize its military presence along the AZRF – essentially extending its strategic depth and perimeter control through the creation of multi-layered defence *bastions* across its Arctic territory. Russia’s posture therefore seeks to contest the presence of other actors by using interdiction capabilities.

In operational terms, Russia is rebuilding its military capabilities and modernizing its regional military infrastructure<sup>14</sup> by using a ‘double dual’ approach. Arctic

<sup>10</sup> Guy, K. et al. (2021), ‘Temperatures and Tensions Rise: Security and Climate Risk in the Arctic’, May 2021, <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/fb4d85defe18447ba0ec5955bab4a6cb>.

<sup>11</sup> With over 60 per cent of Russian territory covered with permafrost, climate change mitigation comes at a tremendous cost, such as the consequences of permafrost thaw on AZRF infrastructure, land flooding, coastal erosion, virus outbursts, gas and methane pocket explosions, environmental catastrophes, etc. See Rotnem, T. (2021), ‘Infrastructure in Russia’s Arctic: Environmental Impact and Considerations’, Kennan Cable, Wilson Center, November 2021, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/kennan-cable-no-73-infrastructure-russias-arctic-environmental-impact-and->

<sup>12</sup> Recent strategic documents acknowledge the interplay between climate change and the protection of national security interests. See Foundations of State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic in the Period to 2035 and Government of Russia (2019), ‘Утверждён план развития инфраструктуры Северного морского пути до 2035 года’ [Strategy of development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation and the provision of national security for the period to 2035], 30 December 2019, <http://government.ru/docs/38714>; Президент России [President of Russia] (2020), ‘Президент утвердил Основы государственной политики в Арктике’ [The President approved the Fundamentals of State Policy in the Arctic], 5 March 2020, <http://kremlin.ru/acts/news/62947>. See also Официальный интернет-портал правовой информации [Official Internet portal of legal information] (2020), ‘Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 02.07.2021 No. 400 “О Стратегии национальной безопасности Российской Федерации”’ [Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of July 2, 2021 No. 400 “On the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation”], July 2021, <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202107030001>.

<sup>13</sup> The Russian Security Council created an Interdepartmental Commission ‘on the issues of ensuring Russia’s interests in the Arctic’ in 2020. The commission aims to identify ‘internal and external threats to national security in the Arctic’, with a focus on military threats. See Interfax (2020), ‘Создана Межведомственной комиссии СБ РФ по вопросам обеспечения интересов России в Арктике – указ’ [The Interdepartmental Commission of the Security Council of the Russian Federation on Ensuring Russia’s Interests in the Arctic was established – decree], 26 August 2020, [https://vpk.name/news/438683\\_sozdana\\_mezhvedomstvennoi\\_komissii\\_sb\\_rf\\_po\\_voprosam\\_obespecheniya\\_interesov\\_rossii\\_v\\_arktike-ukaz.html](https://vpk.name/news/438683_sozdana_mezhvedomstvennoi_komissii_sb_rf_po_voprosam_obespecheniya_interesov_rossii_v_arktike-ukaz.html).

<sup>14</sup> See Boulègue, M. (2019), *Russia’s Military Posture in the Arctic: Managing Hard Power in a ‘Low Tension’ Environment*, Research Paper, London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2019/06/russias-military-posture-arctic>; and Buchanan (2020), ‘The overhaul of Russian strategic planning for the Arctic Zone to 2035’.



infrastructure is being used equally for civilian and military purposes (dual-use), while Russia's military capabilities are blurring the lines between offensive and defensive intent (dual-purpose). The practical implication of this is that Russia is maximizing its options in terms of technology and capabilities. For example, with new surface vessels being built to Russian navy standards, the Coast Guard – under FSB (Russian security services) jurisdiction – increasingly takes a militarized approach to its policing role.

This is compounded by a holistic approach to securitizing the AZRF which includes, among other things: employing a diversity of stakeholders, from military forces to the FSB and National Guard, in the territorial protection of Arctic infrastructure;<sup>15</sup> leveraging modern technology hardened to Arctic conditions to achieve operational superiority;<sup>16</sup> and training of the Northern and Pacific Fleets to ensure the safety of the NSR.<sup>17</sup> Recent speculation regarding the creation of a separate Arctic Fleet within the Russian navy has proved unfounded.<sup>18</sup>

In Antarctica and the Southern Ocean, Russia's main policy driver is the protection of both commercial and perceived national interests. Citing the structure of the ATS, Russia maintains that it can claim sovereign rights over parts of the continent.<sup>19</sup> Because the region is a 'frontier' space, a presence at the South Pole allows Russia to project soft power and accumulate prestige.<sup>20</sup> However, the Kremlin feels marginalized in Antarctic affairs,<sup>21</sup> notably because of geographical distance but also due to the perceived intentions of claimant states to 'geopoliticize' the ATS.

<sup>15</sup> Interfax (2021), 'Спецназ Росгвардии на учении отработал нейтрализацию преступной группы и освобождение заложников на контейнерном судне в Арктике' [Special Forces of the National Guard at the exercise worked out the neutralization of a criminal group and the release of hostages on a container ship in the Arctic], 4 May 2021, [https://vpk.name/news/497079\\_specnaz\\_rosgvardii\\_na\\_uchanii\\_otrabotal\\_neutralizaciyu\\_prestupnoi\\_gruppy\\_i\\_osvobozhdenie\\_zalozhnikov\\_na\\_konteinernom\\_sudne\\_v\\_arktike.html](https://vpk.name/news/497079_specnaz_rosgvardii_na_uchanii_otrabotal_neutralizaciyu_prestupnoi_gruppy_i_osvobozhdenie_zalozhnikov_na_konteinernom_sudne_v_arktike.html).

<sup>16</sup> For example, the use of drones and other military equipment hardened to Arctic conditions. See Взгляд [View] (2020), 'Тяжелые дроны для охраны границ Арктики собрались применить в России' [Heavy drones to protect the borders of the Arctic were going to be used in Russia], 29 May 2020, [https://vpk.name/news/405904\\_tyazhelye\\_drony\\_dlya\\_ohrany\\_granic\\_arktiki\\_sobralis\\_primenit\\_v\\_rossii.html](https://vpk.name/news/405904_tyazhelye_drony_dlya_ohrany_granic_arktiki_sobralis_primenit_v_rossii.html); TASS (2020), 'Минобороны России сделает ставку на беспилотную технику в Арктике' [The Russian Defence Ministry will rely on unmanned vehicles in the Arctic], 13 July 2020, [https://vpk.name/news/418421\\_minoborony\\_rossii\\_sdelat\\_stavku\\_na\\_bespilotnuyu\\_tekniku\\_v\\_arktike.html](https://vpk.name/news/418421_minoborony_rossii_sdelat_stavku_na_bespilotnuyu_tekniku_v_arktike.html); Военно-промышленный курьер [Military Industrial Courier] (2020), 'В России восстановлена лаборатория по испытанию оружия в условиях Крайнего Севера' [A laboratory for testing weapons in the Far North has been restored in Russia], 25 December 2020, [https://vpk.name/news/473923\\_v\\_rossii\\_vosstanovlena\\_laboratoriya\\_po\\_ispytaniyu\\_oruzhiya\\_v\\_usloviyah\\_krainego\\_severa.html](https://vpk.name/news/473923_v_rossii_vosstanovlena_laboratoriya_po_ispytaniyu_oruzhiya_v_usloviyah_krainego_severa.html).

<sup>17</sup> ЦАМТО [TsAMTO] (2020), 'Арктическая группировка Северного флота заняла места якорных стоянок в бухте Тикси моря Лаптевых' [The Arctic grouping of the Northern Fleet took up anchorages in the Tiksi Bay of the Laptev Sea], 10 September 2020, [https://vpk.name/news/442963\\_arkticheskaya\\_gruppirovka\\_severnogo\\_flota\\_zanyala\\_mesta\\_yakornykh\\_stoyanok\\_v\\_buhte\\_tiksi\\_morya\\_laptevnykh.html](https://vpk.name/news/442963_arkticheskaya_gruppirovka_severnogo_flota_zanyala_mesta_yakornykh_stoyanok_v_buhte_tiksi_morya_laptevnykh.html); Известия [Izvestia] (2020), 'Северный флот высадил десант на побережье Чукотки' [The Northern Fleet landed troops on the coast of Chukotka], 22 September 2020, [https://vpk.name/news/446628\\_severnyi\\_flot\\_vysadil\\_desant\\_na\\_poberezhe\\_chukotki.html](https://vpk.name/news/446628_severnyi_flot_vysadil_desant_na_poberezhe_chukotki.html).

<sup>18</sup> There already is an 'Arctic Fleet' with assets from the Northern and Pacific Fleets (although not fully Arctic-capable). The rumour has since been dispelled but the ambition was to relieve the Northern and Pacific Fleets of their duties of protecting the NSR so they can focus on their core military missions. See TASS (2021), 'Russia looks into Navy Arctic Fleet creation – source', 7 October 2021, <https://tass.com/defense/1346611>; TASS (2021), 'Источник: в РФ рассматривается вопрос создания нового объединения ВМФ – Арктического флота' [Source: the Russian Federation is considering the creation of a new association of the Navy – the Arctic Fleet], 7 October 2021, <https://tass.ru/armiya-i-opk/12599019>.

<sup>19</sup> The ICAS Maritime Issue Tracker Team (2021), 'The Antarctic Maritime Tracker: All Claimants', 1 November 2021, <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/61be8b9eb1bb4b308acb4920e062170b>.

<sup>20</sup> Sukhankin, S. (2020), 'Is Russia Preparing to Challenge the Status Quo in Antarctica? (Part One)', *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 9 June 2020, <https://jamestown.org/program/is-russia-preparing-to-challenge-the-status-quo-in-antarctica-part-one>.

<sup>21</sup> Artamonov, A. (2020), 'Битва за Антарктиду, российский миллиардер-благотворитель и тайна загадочного озера «Восток»' [The Battle for Antarctica, the Russian Billionaire Philanthropist and the Mystery of the Mysterious Lake Vostok], *Звезда* [Star], 31 January 2020, <https://zvezdaweekly.ru/news/20201301022-Bz0oP.html>.

The increasing number of countries involved in Antarctic affairs, including China and India, is equally concerning for Russia. Moscow is thinking in terms of contingency planning: it has taken steps to reinforce Russia's presence in Antarctica to defend its commercial interests, as well as to demonstrate its perceived national interests there. Russian scientific 'research' is often code for resource-prospecting, and for intelligence and surveillance activities.

By highlighting the risks of power projection by ATS claimant states and their perceived attempts at extending territorial claims over the continent, Russia seeks to pre-empt any changes within the ATS. Should the current situation change to its disadvantage, Moscow says it reserves the right to make a territorial claim.

For reasons of length and practicality, this paper deliberately considers Russia's military postures and intentions in isolation from Western responses. To explain Russia's polar policies, the paper explores both the Arctic and the Antarctic regions, while considering in greater detail Russia's Arctic sectors from west to east.<sup>22</sup> The paper segments Russia's polar geography between, on the one hand, three Arctic sectors along the AZRF<sup>23</sup> (the European Arctic, the central Arctic and North Pole approaches, and the Pacific Arctic – with the NSR connecting them); and, on the other, Antarctica and the Southern Ocean.

The paper also examines the wider regional consequences of Russia's posture and potential security problems – the necessity of managing accidents and miscalculations in polar affairs generally and particularly in Russia–China polar interactions. Finally, it presents a set of policy recommendations aimed at mitigating risks for the US and its allies.

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<sup>22</sup> For an analysis of Russian military capabilities and infrastructure in the Arctic, see Center for Strategic and International Studies (2020), 'Ice Curtain series – military infrastructure', <https://www.csis.org/features/ice-curtain-russias-arctic-military-presence>; and Kjellén, J. (2022), 'The Russian Northern Fleet and the (Re)militarisation of the Arctic', *Arctic Review on Law and Politics*, 13(2022), pp. 34–52, <https://doi.org/10.23865/arctic.v13.3338>.

<sup>23</sup> Credit for this idea must be given to Center for Strategic and International Studies (2020), 'Ice Curtain series – military infrastructure'; and Sergunin, A. and Konyshov, V. (2017), 'Russian military strategies in the Arctic: change or continuity?', *European Security*, 26(2), pp. 171–89, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09662839.2017.1318849>.

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# 02

## The European Arctic, the Kola Bastion and the High North

**In the European Arctic, Russia seeks to exercise control and denial beyond the AZRF, and to remove tension from that zone to protect its national interests. This is increasing pressure on regional chokepoints in the North Atlantic and beyond.**

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Russia's European Arctic begins at the Barents Sea, which is the gateway to both the NSR<sup>24</sup> and the North Atlantic. The European Arctic harbours critical national infrastructure, such as Northern Fleet military installations on the Kola peninsula (most notably including Arkhangelsk, Murmansk and Severomorsk), as well as key energy infrastructure on the Yamal peninsula.

### **Russia's military posture in the European Arctic**

The Kremlin has two main priorities in ensuring Russia's sovereignty and protecting its national interests in the European Arctic: 1) imposing costs on other countries' access; and 2) removing tensions from the AZRF.

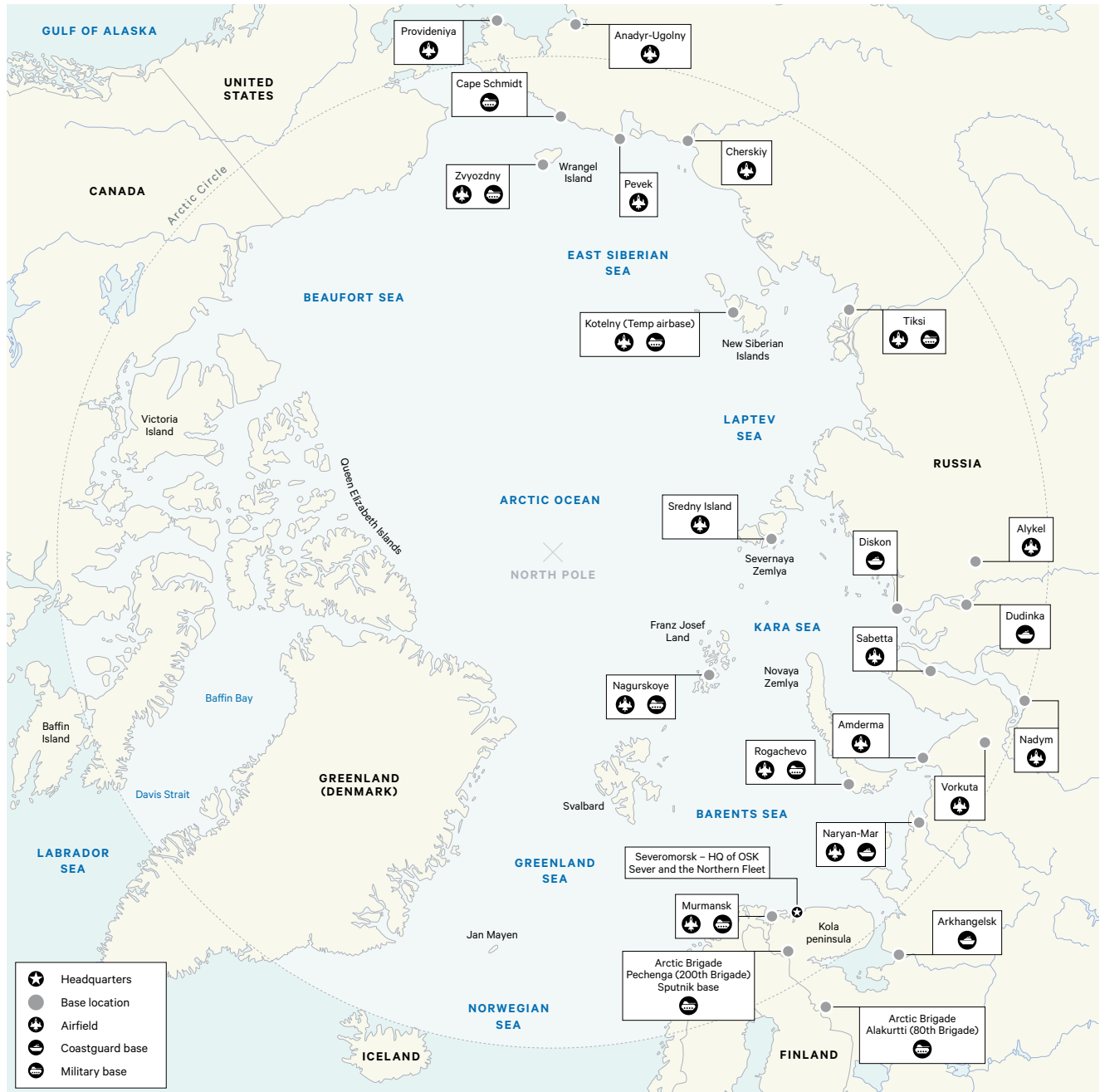
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<sup>24</sup> The NSR is defined in Russian law as stretching from the Kara Strait in the west to the East Cape of the Bering Strait in the east. See Федеральное Государственное Бюджетное Учреждение Администрация Северного Морского Пути [Federal State Budgetary Institution Administration of The Northern Sea Route] (2020), *Rules of navigation in the water area of the Northern Sea Route*, 18 September 2020, [http://www.nsra.ru/files/fileslist/137-en5894-2020-11-19\\_rules.pdf](http://www.nsra.ru/files/fileslist/137-en5894-2020-11-19_rules.pdf).

## Imposing costs on access

To protect its military infrastructure on the Kola peninsula, and notably its sea-based nuclear deterrent,<sup>25</sup> Russia is seeking to exert control over foreign military access and activity in this region and to ensure uncontested access for the Russian armed forces.<sup>26</sup>

**Figure 1.** Russian military infrastructure in the AZRF



<sup>25</sup> The Kola peninsula hosts the headquarters of the Northern Military District (OSK Sever) as well as about two-thirds of the second-strike, sea-based nuclear deterrent. It also hosts most of Russia's Arctic industrial and administrative installations.

<sup>26</sup> See Davis (2015), 'The 2015 Maritime Doctrine of the Russian Federation'.

Perimeter defence around the Kola peninsula is achieved via the *Bastion* defence concept:<sup>27</sup> an Arctic-hardened, multi-layered protective dome, effectively seeking to create an interdiction perimeter at sea and in the air around key military installations. In this, Russia does not seek ‘area denial’ but rather to impose a high cost on access within the perimeter.<sup>28</sup> The *Bastion* network extends towards the Barents and Norwegian Seas.

The *Bastion* network is intended to provide defence in depth, and freedom of navigation for the Northern Fleet and for other Russian naval assets. It protects entry into the NSR on the European side, while also guarding critical energy infrastructure located on the Yamal peninsula and other Arctic locations.

In addition to the *Bastion*, Russia seeks to extend its sea- and airspace-denial capabilities beyond the Kola peninsula and the AZRF to create an out-of-area layer of defence. This second layer aims to increase the security of strategic submarine activities, while also allowing unhampered access for Northern Fleet assets beyond the AZRF.

Russia’s intention is to place foreign military assets – particularly those of NATO and its allies – at risk of operating in a contested environment should they attempt to move closer to the AZRF. The ambition is also to disrupt access towards the North Atlantic and sea lines of communication (SLOC) around the Greenland–Iceland–UK (GIUK) and Greenland–Iceland–Norway (GIN) gaps.

Such ambitions to ensure denial beyond the AZRF are feeding off a sense of vulnerability.<sup>29</sup> The creation of a second defence layer beyond Russia’s *Bastion* is driven by fears of NATO and US regional surface missile deployments and increased submarine activity that could put the Kola peninsula at risk.

## Removing tensions from the *Bastion* and the AZRF

In Moscow’s calculations, sea ice no longer acts as a natural border in the Arctic. The impacts of climate change and increased human activity on Russia’s European Arctic have created a new *de facto* border and maritime boundary that require both perimeter control and the enforcement of sovereignty beyond the AZRF.

The Russian leadership is seeking to push any threat of military activity and escalation away from the Kola peninsula and the *Bastion*, instead moving it closer towards the Norwegian Sea and the North Atlantic. This does not mean, however, that Russia would automatically conduct ‘SLOC interdiction operations’ in the North Atlantic, and this notion should not become a new trope when discussing alleged Russian military intentions.

<sup>27</sup> Derived from Soviet strategy, the *Bastion* defence concept is composed of a mix of air defence, sea-denial and coastal defence systems that ensure the survivability of nuclear-powered ballistic-missile submarines for patrols and operations in the region. See Wezeman, S. (2016), *Military Capabilities in The Arctic: A New Cold War in the High North?*, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, October 2016, p. 22, <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/Military-capabilities-in-the-Arctic.pdf>; and Danish Defence Intelligence Service (2018), *Intelligence Risk Assessment 2018: An Assessment of Developments Abroad Impacting on Danish Security*, [https://www.fe-ddis.dk/globalassets/fe/dokumenter/2020/risk-assessments/-risk\\_assessment2018-.pdf](https://www.fe-ddis.dk/globalassets/fe/dokumenter/2020/risk-assessments/-risk_assessment2018-.pdf).

<sup>28</sup> See Kofman, M. (2019), ‘It’s Time to Talk about A2/Ad: Rethinking the Russian Military Challenge’, War on the Rocks, 5 September 2019, <https://warontherocks.com/2019/09/its-time-to-talk-about-a2-ad-rethinking-the-russian-military-challenge>.

<sup>29</sup> Conley et al. (2021), *Russia’s Climate Gamble*.



The extension of Russia's reach and disruption activities towards the North Atlantic is designed to support perimeter control over the Kola peninsula, with the aim of increasing threat perception for NATO and its allies in the region. This increases the risk of escalation not only in the North Atlantic, but also in the Baltic Sea region, to ensure defence in depth for Kola-based installations.<sup>30</sup> Thus the defence and enforcement of sovereignty explains why Moscow has been remilitarizing the AZRF, with an emphasis on military infrastructure in the European Arctic.<sup>31</sup>

## **The extension of Russia's reach and disruption activities towards the North Atlantic is designed to support perimeter control over the Kola peninsula, with the aim of increasing threat perception for NATO and its allies in the region.**

The High North is an area where Russia practises such force projection. This is achieved through the assets of the Northern Fleet, which is the mainstay of Russian capabilities in the region. The Northern Fleet was upgraded to a joint-level strategic command in January 2021, effectively creating a new geographical military district (OSK Sever).<sup>32</sup> This upgrade illustrates the increased importance of the Arctic in Russian strategic thinking.<sup>33</sup>

## **Potential navigational chokepoints and flashpoints in the High North**

Russia's ambition to exercise control and denial beyond the AZRF as well as its willingness to push military tension towards the North Atlantic is increasing pressure on regional chokepoints – namely the GIUK and GIN gaps – and the Svalbard archipelago, with direct consequences for NATO and its allies.

### **The GIUK and GIN gaps and North Atlantic SLOC**

Russia's extension of its disruptive capabilities beyond the AZRF is putting greater pressure on the North Atlantic chokepoints, particularly around the GIUK gap

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<sup>30</sup> Pezard, S., Tingstad, A., Van Abel, K. and Stephenson, S. (2017), *Maintaining Arctic Cooperation with Russia: Planning for Regional Change in the Far North*, Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, p. 29, [https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1700/RR1731/RAND\\_RR1731.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1700/RR1731/RAND_RR1731.pdf); Regehr, E. (2021), 'Combat "Spillover" – into and out of the Arctic', Simons Foundation, Arctic Security Briefing Papers, March 2021, <https://www.thesimonsfoundation.ca/highlights/combat-spillover-and-out-arctic>.

<sup>31</sup> Kjellén (2022), 'The Russian Northern Fleet and the (Re)militarisation of the Arctic'.

<sup>32</sup> Официальный интернет-портал правовой информации [Official Internet portal of legal information] (2020), 'Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 05.06.2020 No. 374 "О военно-административном делении Российской Федерации"' [Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of 5 June 2020 No. 374 "On the military-administrative division of the Russian Federation"], 5 June 2020, <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202006050025?index=0&rangeSize=1>.

<sup>33</sup> Headquartered in Severomorsk, OSK Sever ensures the protection of the Kola peninsula, as well as operations in the European Arctic and along the NSR.

and the GIN gap between Svalbard, Bear Island (Bjørnøya) and mainland Norway. Further east, Russian assets have the potential to threaten the North Atlantic SLOC and NATO deployments with contestation.

This region is ‘effectively the border between Russian and NATO-dominated seas’.<sup>34</sup> This has direct consequences in terms of freedom of navigation for NATO and its allies, notably regarding reinforcement and resupply from North America to theatres of operation in Europe, especially those in the Baltic Sea area.

This situation is compounded by risks linked to the security of transatlantic underwater telecommunication cables that Russia could target,<sup>35</sup> as well as to the deployment of advanced weapons systems capable of reaching NATO and US military assets in Greenland (Thule), Iceland (Keflavik naval air station) and northern Europe (Bodø air station in Norway).

Russian capabilities, however, should not be overestimated. The GIUK gap does not feature in current Russian military thinking and Russia does not have either the air superiority or the intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) assets to conduct interdiction operations over long distances in the North Atlantic.<sup>36</sup>

Russia is not seeking to ‘close the gap’ or to conduct out-of-area interdiction operations around the SLOC. But that does not mean Russian military assets will not be able to contest the operating environment in the region and create issues for NATO and its allies.

## The Svalbard flashpoint

Alleged Russian operations against the Svalbard archipelago are feeding persistent myths of ‘land grabs’ and other invasion scenarios<sup>37</sup> that have been consistently debunked by the expert community.<sup>38</sup>

That said, the Russian leadership does not hide its resentment of Norway’s management of the archipelago and interpretation of the 1920 Svalbard Treaty, notably with regard to fishing. Russian naval assets have been increasingly patrolling the area around the archipelago and Svalbard is a potential site for diversionary, false-flag or grey-zone operations.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Pincus, R. (2020), ‘Towards a New Arctic: Changing Strategic Geography in the GIUK Gap’, *The RUSI Journal*, 27 May 2020, <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/rusi-journal/towards-new-arctic-changing-strategic-geography-giuk-gap>.

<sup>35</sup> Sacks, B. J., Pezard, S., Tingstad, A. and Sorensen, C. (2021), ‘Exploring Gaps in Arctic Governance: Identifying Potential Sources of Conflict and Mitigating Measures’, Washington, DC: RAND Corporation, 2021, [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RRA1007-1.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1007-1.html).

<sup>36</sup> Exchanges during a closed-door roundtable organized at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in June 2021.

<sup>37</sup> Stormark, K. (2017), ‘Russian forces exercised attack on Svalbard’, AldriMer, 18 October 2017, <https://www.aldrimer.no/russian-forces-exercised-attack-on-svalbard>.

<sup>38</sup> Buchanan, E. and Boulègue, M. (2019), ‘Is Russia Preparing For An Invasion of This Important Piece of the Arctic?’, *The National Interest*, 13 October 2019, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/russia-preparing-invasion-important-piece-arctic-87961>.

<sup>39</sup> Nilsen, T. (2021), ‘Moscow aims to enhance presence in Svalbard as part of hybrid-strategy, expert warns’, *The Barents Observer*, 7 December 2021, <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2021/12/moscow-aims-enhance-presence-svalbard-part-hybrid-strategy-expert-warns>.

From the Kremlin's perspective, the archipelago represents the 'hill overlooking the battlefield'<sup>40</sup> in terms of sea-denial and -interdiction operations from the Barents Sea down to the Norwegian Sea and the North Atlantic. Svalbard is also a strategic location to place air defence systems and sensor capabilities.

The risk remains that Russian forces could conduct an amphibious operation on Bear Island – situated about halfway between mainland Norway and the main islands of the Svalbard archipelago – to deploy sea and air defence capabilities. Such an intervention would hamper the movement and operation of regional NATO and allied assets, while also hindering reinforcements.<sup>41</sup> However, this remains unlikely: although Russia would increase its strategic depth and the access and safety of Northern Fleet assets by invading the archipelago, it would also trigger Article 5 of the Washington Treaty on NATO collective defence.

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<sup>40</sup> Remarks made during a workshop held under the Chatham House Rule in January 2019.

<sup>41</sup> Boulègue (2019), *Russia's Military Posture in the Arctic*.

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# 03

## The central Arctic, the NSR and the North Pole

**Russia seeks to protect the NSR and to defend North Pole approaches from the perceived threat of NATO's expansion. Such ambitions go against the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and could also put NATO and US interests at risk.**

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Geographically, Russia's central Arctic comprises the long stretch of the AZRF along the NSR and the four main archipelagos (Novaya Zemlya, Franz Josef Land, Severnaya Zemlya and the New Siberian Islands) from the Kara Sea to the Laptev Sea and to the East Siberian Sea. This vast area is also the gateway for Russia's access to the North Pole.

### **Russia's military posture in the central Arctic**

The central Arctic constitutes a soft underbelly where Russia's sense of military vulnerability is strongest. Here, the Kremlin has two key priorities: 1) controlling and protecting the NSR; and 2) defending Russia's North Pole approaches.

### **Controlling and protecting the Northern Sea Route**

The administration, development and protection of the NSR and its economic assets are of paramount importance to the Kremlin. Russia wants to ensure its full and comprehensive control over the access and passage of surface vessels, as well as to regulate any 'foreign activity' in the sea and air approaches of the central Arctic.

Control over access explains why Moscow is seeking to strengthen rules on transit through the NSR and is taking a militarized view of traffic passing through it. This stance is linked to recent legislation regarding management of the NSR, which aims to give it exceptional legal status. Provisions that have been proposed to date<sup>42</sup> effectively turn Russia's central Arctic into a 'hugely expansive area' under Russian control and no longer a maritime area managed through the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) under freedom of navigation principles and norms.<sup>43</sup>

## Control over access explains why Moscow is seeking to strengthen rules on transit through the Northern Sea Route and is taking a militarized view of traffic passing through it.

For almost a decade, Moscow has been strengthening its operational control over passage through the NSR. A list of stringent rules and regulations seek to restrict access, passage and navigation of foreign-flagged vessels in the NSR. Passage through the NSR for foreign flags also entails heavy fees, tolls and bureaucracy – these rules greatly benefit internal lobbies and vested interests, most notably including the sole operator of the NSR, Rosatom.<sup>44</sup>

Such 'rules' are clearly in violation of UNCLOS provisions on freedom of navigation and 'innocent passage'.<sup>45</sup> Yet, Moscow justifies them by keeping a unique interpretation of Article 234 of UNCLOS, also known as the 'Ice clause'. Article 234 refers to the right of a coastal state to increase its control over 'ice-covered areas within the limits of the exclusive economic zone'.<sup>46</sup> Russia's extension of its control over the surface of ice-covered waters along the AZRF relies solely on its own interpretation of Article 234 by introducing exclusive and discriminatory regulations

<sup>42</sup> For example, the 2013 law that forces foreign vessels to use a Russian icebreaker escort as well as giving advance notification of passage; and 2017 provisions that, among other things, forbid foreign vessels from transit while carrying Russian energy resources and insist that any ship transiting through the NSR must be built in a Russian shipyard. Meanwhile, only Russian-built icebreakers can provide assistance along the NSR and ship operators must also be Russian. These rules also mean the powerful NSR administration reserves the right to turn down vessels seeking transit, thereby enforcing an internal control regime. For further detail, see Klimenko, E. (2014), 'Russia's Evolving Arctic Strategy: Drivers, Challenges and New Opportunities', Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, SIPRI Policy Paper No. 42, <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2014/sipri-policy-papers/russias-evolving-arctic-strategy-drivers-challenges-and-new-opportunities>; and Chabros, M. (2020), *The Arctic Icebreaker: Russia's Security Policy in the Far North*, Report, Warsaw: Warsaw Institute, <https://warsawinstitute.org/the-arctic-icebreaker-russias-security-policy-in-the-far-north>.

<sup>43</sup> Flake, L. E. (2015), 'Forecasting Conflict in the Arctic: The Historical Context of Russia's Security Intentions', *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 28(1), pp. 72–98, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13518046.2015.998122>; Flake, L. E. (2017), 'Contextualizing and Disarming Russia's Arctic Security Posture', *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 30(1), pp. 17–29, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13518046.2017.1271647>.

<sup>44</sup> Luzin, P. (2021), 'Political and corporate complexity on the Northern Sea Route', *Riddle*, 3 February 2021, <https://www.ridl.io/en/political-and-corporate-complexity-on-the-northern-sea-route>; Moe, A. (2020), 'A new Russian policy for the Northern sea route? State interests, key stakeholders and economic opportunities in changing times', *The Polar Journal*, 10(2), pp. 209–27, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2154896X.2020.1799611>.

<sup>45</sup> United Nations (2022), 'Part VII – High Seas', [https://www.un.org/depts/los/convention\\_agreements/texts/unclos/part7.htm](https://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/part7.htm); United Nations (2022), 'Part II – Territorial Sea and Contiguous Zone', [https://www.un.org/depts/los/convention\\_agreements/texts/unclos/part2.htm](https://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/part2.htm).

<sup>46</sup> United Nations (2022), 'Part 12 XII – Protection and Preservation of the Marine Environment', [http://www.un.org/depts/los/convention\\_agreements/texts/unclos/part12.htm](http://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/part12.htm).



that go against UNCLOS. Finally, recent constitutional changes giving primacy to national law over international law<sup>47</sup> further create the impression that the NSR is indeed under Russian domestic regulatory control.

## Defending North Pole approaches

Russia has a militarized understanding of access to and passage through the NSR. Its military presence in the central Arctic enhances perimeter defence and the defence of approaches from both sides of the AZRF, giving Russia increased situational and domain awareness over the NSR.<sup>48</sup>

Russia's attitude towards the central Arctic and the North Pole explains the multiplication and hardening of air-defence capabilities, early-warning systems and domain-awareness capabilities deployed on the archipelagos across the NSR. Russia's disparate network of forward bases, airfields and outposts there represents a mix of civilian and military installations for search and rescue (SAR) operations, maritime domain awareness (MDA) and border protection.<sup>49</sup> Currently, priority is given to strengthening existing infrastructure, rather than developing new installations.<sup>50</sup>

In line with the *Basic Principles of Russian Federation State Policy in the Arctic to 2035*,<sup>51</sup> official rhetoric claims that the network of civilian and military installations aims to 'respond promptly to possible threats to the safety of navigation'<sup>52</sup> and to 'increase the security' of the NSR.<sup>53</sup> However, for over a decade, the refurbishment and building of military infrastructure along the NSR has been 'designed primarily for performing air-space defence functions'.<sup>54</sup>

Installations were built with off-the-shelf military hardware to save costs and time, but their primary function is to support Northern and Pacific Fleet operations in terms of transit, protection, logistics and resupply along the lifelines of the AZRF. Russia has also been laying trans-Arctic fibre-optic cables along the NSR to link military installations across the AZRF<sup>55</sup> – which could be used to monitor submarine activity<sup>56</sup> – and has recently deployed Arktika-M remote-sensing satellites to enhance domain awareness.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Reuters (2020), 'Russia Approves Bill Allowing National Law to Trump International Relations', 28 October 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-politics-law-idUSKBN27D1AF>.

<sup>48</sup> Center for Strategic and International Studies (2020), 'Ice Curtain series – military infrastructure'.

<sup>49</sup> Most bases are co-located with Coast Guard and Border Guard units.

<sup>50</sup> Interfax (2017), 'Минобороны заявило о завершении строительства военных объектов в Арктике' [The Ministry of Defence announced the completion of the construction of military facilities in the Arctic], 25 December 2017, <https://www.interfax.ru/russia/593362>.

<sup>51</sup> Официальный интернет-портал правовой информации [Official Internet portal of legal information] (2020), 'Указ Президента Российской Федерации от 05.03.2020 No. 164 "Об Основах государственной политики Российской Федерации в Арктике на период до 2035 года"' [Basic Principles of Russian Federation State Policy in the Arctic to 2035].

<sup>52</sup> Interfax (2020), 'Российские военные предлагают снизить военную напряженность в Арктике' [Russian military proposes to reduce military tension in the Arctic], 14 December 2020, [https://vpk.name/news/470528\\_rossiiskie\\_voennye\\_predlagayut\\_snizit\\_voennuyu\\_napryazhennost\\_v\\_arktike.html](https://vpk.name/news/470528_rossiiskie_voennye_predlagayut_snizit_voennuyu_napryazhennost_v_arktike.html).

<sup>53</sup> Lenta (2020), 'В Арктике появятся Центры управления в кризисных ситуациях' [Crisis management centres to appear in the Arctic], 11 February 2020, <https://lenta.ru/news/2020/02/11/crisis>.

<sup>54</sup> Baev, P. (2021), 'The Arctic as a Test for a "Stable and Predictable" Russia', PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo No. 725, 5 December 2021, <https://www.ponarseurasia.org/the-arctic-as-a-test-for-a-stable-and-predictable-russia>.  
<sup>55</sup> *Izvestia* (2018), 'Арктику опутают кабелями' [The Arctic gets entangled with cables], 23 April 2018, <https://iz.ru/733829/aleksei-ramm-evgenii-dmitriev-bogdan-stepovoi/arktiku-oputaiut-kabeliami>.

<sup>56</sup> Goble, P. (2021), 'New Undersea Cables Could Become a Flashpoint in the Arctic', *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 26 January 2021, <https://jamestown.org/program/new-undersea-cables-could-become-a-flashpoint-in-the-arctic>.

<sup>57</sup> TASS (2021), 'Expert: Second Arktika-M satellite launch to assure entire Northern Sea Route coverage', 16 September 2021, <https://tass.com/economy/1338641>.

The NSR is only navigable seasonally, not year-round, and does not represent a convenient transit route for military vessels. This means passage through the NSR still largely has an expeditionary purpose for Russian fleets. Nevertheless, training increasingly focuses on the protection of NSR assets,<sup>58</sup> including amphibious assault landings,<sup>59</sup> and on controlling its airspace.

Finally, control over the NSR gives Russia increased defence in depth against a multitude of perceived threats.<sup>60</sup> With an emphasis on air defence,<sup>61</sup> early warning and domain awareness, Russia seeks to defend North Pole approaches from US strategic bomber overflights across the North Pole, from US ballistic-missile defence in the region<sup>62</sup> and from increased subsurface presence.

## Chokepoints and flashpoints of tension in the central Arctic

Russia's posture and deployments in the central Arctic have the direct consequence of slowly shaping a security dilemma for Russia over the continued management of the NSR under current provisions, as well as putting NATO and US interests at risk.

### Upholding the 'Ice clause'

As climate change continues to adversely affect the AZRF, Moscow will find it increasingly hard to justify the exceptionality of the domestic status of the NSR under UNCLOS Article 234. Indeed, seasonal sea-ice reduction across the AZRF will make the 'Ice clause' irrelevant, therefore undermining Russia's interpretation of the NSR's status and exclusionary navigational rules.

The Kremlin might fear increasing challenges to Russia's exclusive passage and internal navigation rights by the US and NATO. Recent strategic documents denounce attempts by foreign states to 'revise basic provisions of international treaties'<sup>63</sup> and to 'use climate change as a pretext to limit and contain Russian development and control' over the AZRF.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Interfax (2021), 'Российские корабли провели учения по защите Севморпути' [Russian ships held exercises to protect the Northern Sea Route], 22 September 2021, [https://vpk.name/news/543639\\_rossiiskie\\_korabli\\_proveli\\_ucheniya\\_po\\_zashite\\_sevmorputi.html](https://vpk.name/news/543639_rossiiskie_korabli_proveli_ucheniya_po_zashite_sevmorputi.html).

<sup>59</sup> Interfax (2021), 'Морской десант Северного флота провел учения по обороне побережья Якутии' [Naval assault forces of the Northern Fleet conducted exercises to defend the coast of Yakutia], 30 September 2021, [https://vpk.name/news/545571\\_morskoi\\_desant\\_severnogo\\_flota\\_provel\\_ucheniya\\_po\\_oborone\\_poberezhya\\_yakutii.html](https://vpk.name/news/545571_morskoi_desant_severnogo_flota_provel_ucheniya_po_oborone_poberezhya_yakutii.html).

<sup>60</sup> *Izvestia* (2020), 'Под северным «Небо-М»: Арктику закроют новейшие радиолокаторы' [Under the northern "Nebo-M": the Arctic will be closed by the latest radars], 18 November 2018, [https://vpk.name/news/463565\\_pod\\_severnym\\_nebo-m\\_arkтику\\_zakroyut\\_noveishie\\_radiolokatory.html](https://vpk.name/news/463565_pod_severnym_nebo-m_arkтику_zakroyut_noveishie_radiolokatory.html).

<sup>61</sup> Lenta (2020), 'Названы средства защиты России от атаки США через Северный полюс' [The means of protecting Russia from a US attack through the North Pole have been outlined], 22 June 2020, [https://vpk.name/news/412900\\_nazvany\\_sredstva\\_zashity\\_rossii\\_ot\\_ataki\\_ssha\\_cherez\\_severnyi\\_polyus.html](https://vpk.name/news/412900_nazvany_sredstva_zashity_rossii_ot_ataki_ssha_cherez_severnyi_polyus.html).

<sup>62</sup> Sergunin, A. and Gjørsv, G. H. (2020), 'The Politics of Russian Arctic shipping: evolving security and geopolitical factors', *The Polar Journal*, 10(2), pp. 251–72, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2154896X.2020.1799613>.

<sup>63</sup> Government of Russia (2019), 'Утверждён план развития инфраструктуры Северного морского пути до 2035 года' [Strategy of development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation and the provision of national security for the period to 2035].

<sup>64</sup> National Security Strategy 2021, <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/0001202107030001>.

‘Great power’ propaganda pieces are regularly published in the Russian press, claiming that the US or NATO will soon challenge Russia’s interpretation of the ‘Ice clause’ by conducting freedom of navigation operations (FONOPs) through the NSR, with the ambition to ‘storm’ the NSR<sup>65</sup> or even to ‘privatize’ the Arctic.<sup>66</sup>

## The Kremlin might fear increasing challenges to Russia’s exclusive passage and internal navigation rights by the US and NATO.

This situation would reportedly allow NATO (and the US in particular) to test innocent passage/freedom of navigation under international maritime law through surface or submarine deployments (see Chapter 6). FONOP concerns are particularly prevalent with regard to the Kara Strait in the European Arctic, as well as the Laptev and Sannikov Straits by the New Siberian Islands.<sup>67</sup>

### Risks for NATO and US regional installations

Russia’s posture and aggressive rhetoric over the NSR are creating risks for NATO and US installations in the region, as well as in the North Atlantic SLOC and the GIUK and GIN gaps. Indeed, according to defence minister Sergei Shoigu, Russia’s main objective is ‘to not let [the Americans] into our Arctic’.<sup>68</sup>

Russia creates risks for NATO and US assets primarily through its air coverage in the central Arctic, especially with aviation groups<sup>69</sup> and naval aviation,<sup>70</sup> hypersonic delivery systems,<sup>71</sup> naval coastal infrastructure,<sup>72</sup> anti-submarine warfare (ASW) and electronic warfare capabilities.<sup>73</sup> Russia is currently strengthening its air superiority assets (mostly Su-34 fighters/bombers<sup>74</sup> and MiG-31 interceptors) and its air defence divisions across the NSR (notably the 3rd Air Defence Division in Tiksi).<sup>75</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Khodarenok, M. (2020), ‘Борьба за Север: НАТО опробует «штурм» Севморпути» [Struggle for the North: NATO will test the ‘storm’ of the Northern Sea Route], *Gazeta*, 8 September 2020, <https://www.gazeta.ru/army/2020/09/08/13241528.shtml>.

<sup>66</sup> *Military Industrial Courier* (2020), ‘На Северном флоте ответили попыткам НАТО «приватизировать» Арктику» [The Northern Fleet answered NATO’s attempts to ‘privatize’ the Arctic], 14 September 2020, [https://vpk.name/news/443561\\_na\\_severnom\\_flote\\_otvetili\\_popytkam\\_nato\\_privatizirovat\\_arkтику.html](https://vpk.name/news/443561_na_severnom_flote_otvetili_popytkam_nato_privatizirovat_arkтику.html).

<sup>67</sup> Exchange during a closed-door expert workshop at Chatham House in February 2022.

<sup>68</sup> *Ria Novosti* (2020), ‘Россия разместила в Арктике еще одну дивизию ПВО» [Russia deploys another air defence division in the Arctic], 28 February 2020, <https://ria.ru/20200228/1565317266.html>.

<sup>69</sup> *Izvestia* (2020), ‘Крылья Арктики: как российские самолеты и вертолеты вернулись на Север» [Wings of the Arctic: how Russian planes and helicopters returned to the North], 9 September 2020, [https://vpk.name/news/461001\\_krylya\\_arkтики\\_kak\\_rossiiskie\\_samolety\\_i\\_vertolety\\_vernulis\\_na\\_sever.html](https://vpk.name/news/461001_krylya_arkтики_kak_rossiiskie_samolety_i_vertolety_vernulis_na_sever.html).

<sup>70</sup> *Izvestia* (2021), ‘Север под крылом: пилотам палубных истребителей нашли место службы» [The North under the wing: carrier-based fighter pilots found a job], 12 April 2021, [https://vpk.name/news/498659\\_sever\\_pod\\_krylom\\_pilotam\\_palubnyh\\_istrebitelei\\_nashli\\_mesto\\_sluzhby.html](https://vpk.name/news/498659_sever_pod_krylom_pilotam_palubnyh_istrebitelei_nashli_mesto_sluzhby.html).

<sup>71</sup> *Gazeta.ru* (2021), ‘«Гиперзвуковые учения»: что “атаковали” российские МиГ-31 в Арктике» [“Hypersonic exercises”: what Russian MiG-31s “attacked” in the Arctic], 12 April 2021, [https://vpk.name/news/499125\\_giperzvukovye\\_ucheniya\\_chno\\_atakovali\\_rossiiskie\\_mig-31\\_v\\_arktike.html](https://vpk.name/news/499125_giperzvukovye_ucheniya_chno_atakovali_rossiiskie_mig-31_v_arktike.html).

<sup>72</sup> *Rossiskaya Gazeta* (2021), ‘Северный флот усилят под водой и подкрепят береговой инфраструктурой» [The Northern Fleet will be strengthened under water and supported by coastal infrastructure], 14 April 2021, [https://vpk.name/news/500187\\_severnoy\\_flot\\_usilyat\\_pod\\_vodoi\\_i\\_podkrepyat\\_beregovoi\\_infrastrukturui.html](https://vpk.name/news/500187_severnoy_flot_usilyat_pod_vodoi_i_podkrepyat_beregovoi_infrastrukturui.html).

<sup>73</sup> *Izvestia* (2021), ‘Полярный лет: охотники за субмаринами стартуют на Северный полюс» [Polar flight: submarine hunters set off for the North Pole], 21 June 2021, [https://vpk.name/news/516775\\_polyarnyi лет\\_ohotniki\\_za\\_submarinami\\_startuyut\\_na\\_severnoy\\_polyus.html](https://vpk.name/news/516775_polyarnyi лет_ohotniki_za_submarinami_startuyut_na_severnoy_polyus.html).

<sup>74</sup> *Izvestia* (2021), ‘Истребители Су-34 доказали способность работать в Арктике» [Su-34 fighters have proven their ability to operate in the Arctic], 20 April 2021, [https://vpk.name/news/501442\\_istrebitelei\\_su-34\\_dokazali\\_sposobnost\\_rabotat\\_v\\_arktike.html](https://vpk.name/news/501442_istrebitelei_su-34_dokazali_sposobnost_rabotat_v_arktike.html).

<sup>75</sup> Staalesen, A. (2019), ‘Deployment of S-400 in Arctic bases creates air defense shield over northern Russia’, *The Barents Observer*, 11 December 2019, <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2019/12/deployment-s-400-arctic-bases-creates-air-defense-shield-over-northern-russia>.

Russian military capabilities are an issue for US and NATO assets at the Thule air base in northwest Greenland (which is within reach for Russian combat aircraft),<sup>76</sup> the US Eielson Air Force base in Alaska, the US naval air station at Keflavik in Iceland and the Bodø air station in Norway, among others. Furthermore, the deployment of the Sopka-2 radar complex is a critical piece of Russia's surveillance architecture in the central Arctic region, enabling detection of US military activity from Alaska, as well as threats coming from across the North Pole.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Wegge, N. (2020), 'Arctic Security Strategies and the North Atlantic States', *Arctic Review on Law and Politics*, 11, 2020, pp. 360–82, <https://doi.org/10.23865/arctic.v11.2401>; Danish Defence Intelligence Service (2018), *Intelligence Risk Assessment 2018*.

<sup>77</sup> Bermudez Jr., J. S., Conley, H. A. and Melino, M. (2020), 'Ice Curtain: Why Is There a New Russian Military Facility 300 Miles from Alaska?', Center for Strategic and International Studies, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/ice-curtain-why-there-new-russian-military-facility-300-miles-alaska>.

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# 04

## The Pacific Arctic, the Bering Strait and northeast Asia

**Russia's policy in the Pacific Arctic seeks to protect NSR approaches and potentially to extend interdiction capabilities beyond the AZRF. Its ambitions have direct consequences for the security of the Bering Strait and for the Sea of Okhotsk.**

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Russia's Pacific Arctic surface stretches north from the Chukchi Sea to the Bering Strait and the entrance to the Bering Sea in the far east. Further south, access is protected by installations on the Kamchatka peninsula and on the Sea of Okhotsk, close to Japan and South Korea. The Bering Strait represents the gateway to the NSR in the North Pacific.

### **Russia's military posture in the Pacific Arctic**

The Kremlin has two main priorities in ensuring sovereignty and protecting its national interests in the Pacific Arctic: 1) protecting the NSR; and 2) extending Russia's military capabilities beyond the AZRF.

#### **Protecting NSR approaches**

In the Pacific Arctic, a two-part logic applies, similar to that on the Kola peninsula. Russia seeks comprehensive control over access for foreign military assets around its perimeter, while in the far-sea zone it is extending its capabilities to disrupt foreign military activity at longer ranges both at sea and in the air.



The Pacific Fleet is the mainstay of Russia's force in the Pacific Arctic region and along the Far Eastern seaboard down to the Kamchatka peninsula and the Sea of Okhotsk. Headquartered in Vladivostok, the Pacific Fleet has an area of responsibility that stretches from the Far Eastern seaboard to the Bering Sea and the Bering Strait, and protects access to the Chukchi Sea along the AZRF and the NSR. The Pacific Fleet is responsible for around one-third of Russia's second-strike, sea-based nuclear deterrent.

In the Kremlin's narrative, recent American actions in the region are validating Moscow's threat perception and vindicating Russian force posture. In June 2020, Russia dispatched an air-wing to 'escort' US B-52H bombers flying in airspace close to the Sea of Okhotsk.<sup>78</sup> Also, in October 2020, Russia announced it had picked up the signal of two US B-1B strategic bombers over the Bering Sea.<sup>79</sup> More recently, in October 2021, Russia said it prevented a US Navy destroyer from entering Russian waters in the Sea of Japan.<sup>80</sup>

Moscow believes that such activity must be met with a strong response, which increases the risk of escalation in the North Pacific. The situation is compounded by the fact that Russia seeks to undermine US strategic dominance in northeast Asia, and, more specifically, the deployment of theatre missile defence in Japan and South Korea.<sup>81</sup> Such deployments arguably prevent the Kremlin from increasing its defence in depth further south and around the Sea of Okhotsk.

## Extending interdiction capabilities

As with the *Kola Bastion*, Russia seeks to extend its interdiction ambitions beyond the AZRF in the North Pacific. This is particularly visible further south in the Sea of Okhotsk. In 2014, the United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (UNCLCS) confirmed a Russian claim allowing it to extend its continental shelf under the seabed in the Sea of Okhotsk, giving Russia access to the subsea and sea floor some 200 nautical miles from its coastline.<sup>82</sup>

Yet, the UNCLCS findings were deliberately interpreted by Moscow as a way to exert the same control over surface waters as it would have over internal waters, in order to close off the surface of the entire open sea to foreign vessels, civilian and military alike. In other words, the Sea of Okhotsk was turned into an 'internal

<sup>78</sup> Trevithick, J. (2020), 'Russia Sent Three Types Of Fighters To Intercept B-52s Flying Rare Mission Into Sea Of Okhotsk', *The Drive*, 19 June 2020, <https://www.thedrive.com/the-war-zone/34220/russia-sent-three-types-of-fighters-to-intercept-b-52s-flying-rare-mission-into-sea-of-okhotsk>.

<sup>79</sup> *Izvestia* (2020), 'Российские истребители перехватили два бомбардировщика ВВС США' [Russian fighter jets intercept two US Air Force bombers], 22 October 2020, [https://vpk.name/news/456988\\_rossiiskie\\_istrebiteli\\_perehvatili\\_dva\\_bombardirovshika\\_vvs\\_ssha.html](https://vpk.name/news/456988_rossiiskie_istrebiteli_perehvatili_dva_bombardirovshika_vvs_ssha.html).

<sup>80</sup> Isachenkov, V. (2021), 'Russia Says It Pushed US Destroyer From Area Near Its Waters', U.S. News, 15 October 2021, <https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2021-10-15/russia-says-it-pushed-us-destroyer-from-area-near-its-waters#:~:text=The%20ministry%20said%20the%20Russian,of%20the%20Russia%2DChina%20maneuvers>.

<sup>81</sup> US regional deployments refer to the land-based Aegis Ashore missile defence system with Japan as well as the Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) system in South Korea. Both US deployments have jointly been denounced and criticized by Russia and China, which partly explains increased bilateral military activity in the North Pacific.

<sup>82</sup> United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (2014), *Recommendations of the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf in Regard to the Partial Revised Submission Made by the Russian Federation in Respect of the Sea of Okhotsk on 28 February 2013*, 11 March 2014, [https://www.un.org/depts/los/clcs\\_new/submissions\\_files/rus01\\_rev13/rusrevrec.pdf](https://www.un.org/depts/los/clcs_new/submissions_files/rus01_rev13/rusrevrec.pdf).

Russian sea'.<sup>83</sup> Since then, Russia has been increasing its military presence through the deployment of sea- and air-denial capabilities on the ground, on the Kamchatka peninsula and on the disputed Kuril Islands/Northern Territories, as well as at sea.

**The UNCLCS findings were deliberately interpreted by Moscow as a way to exert the same control over surface waters as it would have over internal waters, in order to close off the surface of the entire open sea to foreign vessels, civilian and military alike.**

However, Russia has no ambitions – nor does it have the military capabilities – to replicate the multi-layered protective dome deployed on the Kola peninsula and to create an 'Okhotsk Bastion'. Indeed, Russia's strategic posture is much weaker in the North Pacific than in the North Atlantic: neither Pacific Fleet assets nor the Kamchatka installations are in particularly good condition, while climate change is impacting infrastructure.<sup>84</sup>

The idea of sustaining, let alone projecting, a *Bastion* protective dome covering sea approaches to the North Pacific seems a distant prospect. This does not mean, however, that Russia is unable to contest and disrupt the presence of US forces and its regional allies.

## Chokepoints and flashpoints in the Pacific Arctic

Beyond the AZRF, the deployment of a coastal and near-sea defensive line from the Kuril Islands/Northern Territories and the Sea of Okhotsk up to the Bering Sea and the Chukchi Sea speaks of real – but limited – ambitions regarding control and denial in the North Pacific. This has direct security consequences for the US and its regional allies in two key navigational chokepoints.

### The Bering Strait chokepoint

Like the GIUK and GIN gaps in the European Arctic, the Bering Strait could be threatened by Russian deployments. It may become – although to a lesser extent than in the European Arctic – another point of contention between Russia and the US over both freedom of navigation/innocent passage and access to and from the Pacific Arctic.<sup>85</sup>

There are ongoing discussions in Russia regarding the management of the Bering Strait. The 1990 USSR–US Maritime Boundary Agreement created the 'Baker–Shevardnadze line' across the Bering Strait, effectively marking the border

<sup>83</sup> Blank, S. (2017), 'The Arctic and Asia in Russian Naval Strategy', *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, 29(4), pp. 575–97, <http://doi.org/10.22883/kjda.2017.29.4.005>.

<sup>84</sup> Conley et al. (2021), *Russia's Climate Gamble*.

<sup>85</sup> Pincus (2020), 'Towards a New Arctic: Changing Strategic Geography in the GIUK Gap'.

between Russia and the US in the Chukchi and Bering Seas.<sup>86</sup> However, following the collapse of the USSR, Russia did not ratify the agreement and only agreed to observe it temporarily.

There are now worrying signs that the Kremlin may seek to contest both the line itself and future rights to passage through the Bering Strait.<sup>87</sup> Nevertheless, the latter remains an unrealistic prospect, as Russia has no capacity to conduct SLOC interdiction operations in the Bering Sea.

However, the Kuril–Chukchi defensive line could become a significant issue for US assets in terms of uncontested access to the North Pacific SLOC and to the coast off Alaska. This is compounded by the fact that Russia intends to expand its fishing industry in the Chukchi Sea, with an increase in the number of civilian and coastguard surface vessels close to the Bering Strait and to US territorial waters possible.<sup>88</sup>

### **Tension over the Kuril Islands/Northern Territories and the Sea of Okhotsk**

Increased military activity on and around the Kuril Islands/Northern Territories puts more pressure on Japanese national security and greatly reduces the prospect of any form of bilateral settlement between Japan and Russia.<sup>89</sup> Air defence identification zone (ADIZ) violations and airspace incursions, especially over Japan, are now commonplace.<sup>90</sup>

The presence of Russian out-of-area assets in the North Pacific is compounded by the deepening of military and defence cooperation between Russia and China in recent years. The two countries now regularly conduct joint aviation and bomber patrols over the Sea of Japan and the East China Sea, close to the Japanese ADIZ.<sup>91</sup>

These activities are not benign and increasingly show signs of contestation in the form both of planned violations of the regional airspace over the Sea of Japan and of incursions into the airspace of Japan and South Korea. For example, in July 2019, Russia and China conducted their first joint long-range military aviation patrol.

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<sup>86</sup> United Nations (1990), 'Agreement between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the maritime boundary, 1 June 1990', <https://www.un.org/depts/los/LEGISLATIONANDTREATIES/PDFFILES/TREATIES/USA-RUS1990MB.PDF>.

<sup>87</sup> See Kaczynski, V. M. (2007), 'US-Russian Bering Sea Marine Border Dispute: Conflict over Strategic Assets, Fisheries and Energy Resources', *Russian Analytical Digest*, 1 May 2007, No. 20, pp. 6–8, [https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/30693/Russian\\_Analytical\\_Digest\\_20.pdf](https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/30693/Russian_Analytical_Digest_20.pdf); Finanz.ru (2020), 'Россия готовит территориальные претензии к США по Берингову проливу' [Russia is preparing territorial claims against the United States over the Bering Strait], 27 January 2020, <https://www.finanz.ru/novosti/aktsii/rossiya-gotovit-territorialnye-pretenzii-k-ssha-po-beringovu-prolivu-1028846458>.

<sup>88</sup> Conley et al. (2021), *Russia's Climate Gamble*.

<sup>89</sup> Lo, B. (2020), 'The Return: Russia and the Security Landscape of Northeast Asia', IFRI, March 2020, <https://www.ifri.org/en/publications/etudes-de-lifri/russieneireports/return-russia-and-security-landscape-northeast-asia>.

<sup>90</sup> Russia Matters (2019), 'Russian Plane Draws Shots from South Korea in First Air Patrol with China: Belfer Experts Weigh In', 25 July 2019, <https://www.russiamatters.org/blog/russian-plane-draws-shots-south-korea-first-air-patrol-china-belfer-experts-weigh>.

<sup>91</sup> McCurry, J. and agencies (2020), 'Japan and South Korea scramble jets to track Russian and Chinese bomber patrol', *Guardian*, 22 December 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/dec/22/russia-and-china-fly-joint-bomber-patrol-over-the-pacific>; Grevatt, J. (2021), 'China, Russia conduct joint air patrol over Sea of Japan', *Janes*, 22 November 2021, <https://www.janes.com/defence-news/news-detail/china-russia-conduct-joint-air-patrol-over-sea-of-japan>.

The exercise escalated into a reconnaissance-in-force operation<sup>92</sup> when they overtly violated both the Japanese and South Korean ADIZs.<sup>93</sup> Provocatively, Russian and Chinese assets flew over the disputed Dokdo/Takeshima islands.

In October 2021, the *Maritime Interaction* bilateral drills in the Sea of Japan showcased deeper military cooperation between Russia and China, notably in terms of joint air defence and ASW. More significantly, their respective naval forces conducted their first joint patrol through the Tsugaru Strait.<sup>94</sup>

Such military activities with China have clear advantages for Russia as it seeks to increase its defence in depth in the North Pacific,<sup>95</sup> not least as a sign of contestation against any US theatre missile defence presence.

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<sup>92</sup> Blank, S. (2019), 'Joint Bomber Patrol Over the Pacific: The Russo-Chinese Military Alliance in Action', *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 30 July 2019, 16(109), <https://jamestown.org/program/joint-bomber-patrol-over-the-pacific-the-russo-chinese-military-alliance-in-action>.

<sup>93</sup> Shin, H. (2021), 'South Korea scrambles jets as Chinese and Russian warplanes enter air defense zone', *Japan Times*, 19 November 2021, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2021/11/19/asia-pacific/south-korea-china-russia-aircraft-air-defense-zone>.

<sup>94</sup> Takenaka, K. (2021), 'China, Russia navy ships jointly sail through Japan strait', Reuters, 19 October 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/china-russia-navy-ships-jointly-sail-through-japan-strait-2021-10-19>.

<sup>95</sup> Lo (2020), 'The Return: Russia and the Security Landscape of Northeast Asia'.

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# 05 Antarctica, the Southern Ocean and the South Pole

**Moscow has an increasingly securitized understanding of the future of Antarctica and the Southern Ocean. This is reflected in policies aimed at safeguarding Russian interests within the ATS, as well as policies allowing Russia to contest the maritime and naval activities of other states in the Southern Ocean.**

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As Russia strengthens its presence in the Southern Ocean, the Kremlin has developed increasingly securitized views of the region's future and of the ATS. Despite the absence of a genuine polar strategy, Russia understands the Antarctic as a space for geopolitical, geo-economic and geo-scientific competition in which its interests need to be safeguarded and protected – just as in the Arctic – including via military means.

## **Russia's approach to Antarctica and the Southern Ocean**

Russia views the South Pole in geopolitical terms due to the increased number of actors present in Antarctic affairs – notably including China – and overlapping interests between claimant and non-claimant states like Russia. The Kremlin



**Figure 2.** Main Russian, Chinese and US installations in the Antarctic region



is seeking to ensure Russia's future place within the ATS: approved in June 2021, Russia's new Antarctic action plan for 2030<sup>96</sup> continues to reflect such ambitions.

Moscow is preparing for the future and its actions equate to contingency planning. In security terms, this translates into the strengthening of Russia's maritime presence and activities on the Antarctic continent, often with suspected military and intelligence purposes.

<sup>96</sup> Официальный интернет-портал правовой информации [Official Internet portal of legal information] (2021), 'Распоряжение Правительства РФ от 30.06.2021 N 1767-р Об утверждении плана мероприятий по реализации Стратегии развития деятельности Российской Федерации в Антарктике до 2030 года' [Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation No. 1767-r dated June 30, 2021 on approval of the action plan for the implementation of the Strategy for the Development of the Activities of the Russian Federation in Antarctica until 2030].

Beyond the future of the ATS, two main issues stand out. First, there are Russia's efforts to obtain stronger regulations for marine protected areas (MPAs) in the Southern Ocean under the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR Convention). The Kremlin does not oppose the creation of MPAs,<sup>97</sup> but wants to ensure that activities within them are strictly monitored and are consistent with UNCLOS and International Maritime Organization regulations.<sup>98</sup>

## **Russia portrays itself as seeking to prevent a 'free for all' approach that would undermine official conservation goals. In reality, this demonstrates its fear of missing out if other states increase their footprint in the Southern Ocean.**

Russia portrays itself as a guardian of MPA regulations seeking to prevent a 'free for all' approach from claimant and non-claimant states that would undermine official conservation goals. In reality, this demonstrates its fear of missing out if other states increase their footprint in the Southern Ocean. Moscow wants to ensure MPAs cannot be used by claimant states as a springboard for extended territorial claims and increased control over the continent.

Second, Russia has been using fishing activities as an excuse to regulate the presence of foreign actors in the Southern Ocean. As it does on MPA regulations, Moscow regularly denounces what it alleges are instances of discrimination over Russia's restricted access to regional bioresources, mostly for the purposes of krill and toothfish fishing.<sup>99</sup> Russia has a self-serving, 'all or nothing'<sup>100</sup> approach to fishing rights: if Moscow cannot have unrestricted access to fishing grounds, nobody else should either. Blocking future developments in Antarctic fishing allows Russia to alleviate its concerns over territorial claims.

However, Russia still suffers major limitations in distant-water fishing: its current fleet is a shadow of that during the Soviet era, and annual fishing volumes have dropped since then. Recent plans to increase national production of seafood<sup>101</sup> (and of krill in particular) are unlikely to change the situation dramatically.

<sup>97</sup> Lukin, V. V. (2014), 'Russia's current Antarctic policy', *The Polar Journal*, 15 July 2014, 4(1), pp. 199–222, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2154896X.2014.913926>.

<sup>98</sup> For example, Russia seeks strong regulations over commercial activities, the size and boundaries of MPAs, their duration, etc. – officially for conservation reasons. It also regularly questions the legal grounds on which the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) can manage MPAs. See Carter, P., Brady, A.-M. and Pavlov, E. (2016), 'Russia's "smart power" foreign policy and Antarctica', *The Polar Journal*, 6(2), pp. 259–72, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2154896X.2016.1257102>, as well as recent annual CCAMLR reports, <https://www.ccamlr.org/en/meetings/26>.

<sup>99</sup> Federation Council of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation (2019), 'Проблемы и Перспективы Освоения Биоресурсов Мирового Океана в Интересах Российской Экономики' [Problems and Prospects for the Development of the Bioresources of the World Ocean in the Interests of the Russian Economy].

<sup>100</sup> Christian, C. and Kozyrev, V. (2016), 'Russia and the Oceans', *Russian Analytical Digest*, 7 October 2016, ETH Zurich, No. 190, <https://ethz.ch/content/specialinterest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/en/services/digital-library/publications/publication.html/fe82bcd9-ae86-453f-bb9f-b720931b0cfd>.

<sup>101</sup> Stupachenko, I. (2019), 'Russia wants to double revenues from seafood exports by 2024', *SeaFoodSource*, 12 February 2019, <https://www.seafoodsource.com/news/supply-trade/russia-wants-to-double-revenues-from-seafood-exports-by-2024>.

## Russian capabilities and infrastructure in Antarctica

Under the ATS, Antarctica is officially a demilitarized and nuclear-free continent, where military activity is strictly regulated and limited to ‘peaceful purposes’.<sup>102</sup> This, of course, leaves room for interpretation. With regard to Russia, the main concerns over its potential military activity relate to two key areas: ground-based space research and Antarctic stations; and expeditions that can have military and intelligence purposes.

Space research and the placement of satellite technology assets on the continent are often considered a form of military activity in disguise, notably for ISR purposes and communications. Through the state corporation Roscosmos, Russia has been increasing the deployment of remote-sensing capabilities, satellite relays<sup>103</sup> and ground-based Global Navigation Satellite System (GLONASS) installations in Antarctica.<sup>104</sup>

As GLONASS is a dual-use system, there are suspicions that Russia is using it for military and intelligence purposes – mostly to track missiles and to increase command and control (C2) capabilities. In the context of the 2021 Antarctic action plan, the reopened Russkaya station is set to host GLONASS installations in the coming years. A worrying sign would be the covert deployment of electronic warfare or anti-satellite capabilities on the continent,<sup>105</sup> both of which would be clear violations of the ATS.

Russia’s network of stations in Antarctica – inherited from Soviet times – is in relatively bad condition and suffers from crippling infrastructure problems.<sup>106</sup> Of the 10 Russian research stations on the continent, only five are reported to be working year-round.<sup>107</sup> The modernization and refurbishment of these stations is integral to the 2021 national action plan. Wintering complexes planned at the Mirny and Vostok stations to accommodate future expeditions could also be used for military purposes and for military training for operating in extreme weather conditions.

<sup>102</sup> British Antarctic Survey (undated), ‘The Antarctic Treaty Explained’, <https://www.bas.ac.uk/about/antarctica/the-antarctic-treaty/the-antarctic-treaty-explained>.

<sup>103</sup> JSC Russian Space Systems (2018), ‘Россия создаст в Антарктиде центр приема космической информации’ [Russia will create a centre for receiving space information in Antarctica], 21 February 2018, [https://vpk.name/news/207259\\_rossiya\\_sozdast\\_v\\_antarktide\\_centra\\_priema\\_kosmicheskoi\\_informacii.html](https://vpk.name/news/207259_rossiya_sozdast_v_antarktide_centra_priema_kosmicheskoi_informacii.html).

<sup>104</sup> Mikhachenko, N. (2019), ‘На связи Антарктида: зачем РФ расконсервирует станцию «Русская»’ [Antarctica is in touch: why the Russian Federation will reopen the Russkaya station], *Izvestia*, 25 October 2019, <https://iz.ru/935967/natalia-mikhachenko/na-svazi-antarktida-zachem-rf-raskonserviruet-stantciiu-russkaia>.

<sup>105</sup> Sukhankin, S. (2020), ‘Is Russia Preparing to Challenge the Status Quo in Antarctica? (Part Two)’, *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 24 June 2020, 17(91), <https://jamestown.org/program/is-russia-preparing-to-challenge-the-status-quo-in-antarctic-part-two>.

<sup>106</sup> Sivtsova, A. (2020), ‘Trouble at the Vostok Station’, *Meduza*, 22 December 2020, <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2020/12/22/trouble-at-the-vostok-station>.

<sup>107</sup> These are Bellingshausen, Mirny, Novolazarevskaya, Progress and Vostok. See Noviy Izvestia (2018), ‘Битва за Антарктиду: Россия сдаёт позиции Китаю’ [Battle for Antarctica: Russia is losing ground to China], 16 July 2018, <https://newizv.ru/article/general/16-07-2018/bitva-za-antarktidu-rossiya-sdaet-pozitsii-kitayu>.

Navy-led oceanographic research trips, such as the 2016 *Admiral Vladimirsky* expedition,<sup>108</sup> are another cause for concern. Indeed, hydrographic surveys conducted in the Southern Ocean could be equally used for naval intelligence and surveillance purposes, notably to track submarine activities outside the perimeter covered by the ATS.

Russia is also investing in technologies hardened to extreme weather conditions that could be employed by the armed forces, while defence industry companies have been conducting growing numbers of aerial drone tests on the continent.<sup>109</sup>

## Antarctic flashpoints

Russia's current posture and the growth in dual-purpose activities are both considered fundamental to safeguard the country's interests within the ATS, as well as allowing it to contest the maritime and naval activities of other states in the Southern Ocean. However, such Russian activities increase the risk of miscalculation and confrontation.

### Antarctic governance and the future of the ATS

The question remains whether Russia would become a revisionist party to the ATS if it did not consider its national interests to be protected. This represents a potential flashpoint within the legal architecture of the Antarctic region.

## As elsewhere in the world, Moscow holds misconceived grievances regarding its role and place in Antarctic affairs.

As elsewhere in the world, Moscow holds misconceived grievances regarding its role and place in Antarctic affairs. The Russian leadership thinks the country has been marginalized and that the ATS is 'unfair' to Russia.<sup>110</sup> Russian policymakers often denounce the 'geopoliticization' of the ATS and the possibility for claimant states to make pre-emptive extended claims over Antarctica.<sup>111</sup> These grievances are further reflected in media propaganda, which claims the West intends to 'capture' the continent from Russia.<sup>112</sup>

<sup>108</sup> The Maritime Executive (2015), 'Russian Navy Research Ship Heads to Antarctica', 6 November 2015, <https://www.maritime-executive.com/article/russian-navy-research-ship-heads-to-antarctica>.

<sup>109</sup> *Military Industrial Courier* (2021), 'Наши беспилотники летают и при минус 52' [Our drones even fly at minus 52], 15 April 2021, <https://vpk-news.ru/news/61729>; and TASS (2021), 'Российские беспилотники ZALA испытали в Антарктиде' [Russian ZALA drones tested in Antarctica], 16 April 2021, [https://vpk.name/news/500625\\_rossiiskie\\_bespilotniki\\_zala\\_ispytali\\_v\\_antarktide.html](https://vpk.name/news/500625_rossiiskie_bespilotniki_zala_ispytali_v_antarktide.html).

<sup>110</sup> Ria Novosti (2020), 'Медведев рассказал о стратегических интересах России в Антарктиде' [Medvedev spoke about Russia's strategic interests in Antarctica], 29 January 2020, <https://ria.ru/20200129/1564025091.html>.

<sup>111</sup> TASS (2020), 'Lavrov: any modifications of Antarctic Treaty must be approached carefully', 2 February 2020, <https://tass.com/politics/1115439>.

<sup>112</sup> *Military Industrial Courier* (2019), 'Пентагон назвал дату начала войны за Антарктиду' [The Pentagon has announced the start date of the war for Antarctica], 19 August 2019, [https://vpk.name/news/314173\\_pentagon\\_nazval\\_datu\\_nachala\\_voiny\\_za\\_antarktidu.html](https://vpk.name/news/314173_pentagon_nazval_datu_nachala_voiny_za_antarktidu.html).

This narrative means that Russia will oppose any attempts by claimant and non-claimant states to modify the ATS. Russia is not a revisionist party in Antarctica but would not exclude the possibility of acting first should the ATS show signs of disunity or collapse.<sup>113</sup>

Such contingency planning is best exemplified by the growing number of geological and seismological surveys<sup>114</sup> carried out by the state holding company Rosgeologia in the Weddell Sea, the Riiser-Larsen Sea and off Queen Maud Land. These expeditions are designed to give Russia a better understanding of the offshore hydrocarbon potential of those areas and possibility of future extraction. Other expeditions are conducting hydrographic surveys of mineral potential, notably for rare earth metals and uranium.

This issue has also been crystallizing around fears that the 1991 Protocol on Environmental Protection (also known as the Madrid Protocol)<sup>115</sup> could collapse. In 2048, the ban on mineral extraction in Antarctica will potentially be open for review. There is little chance, however, that Russia would seek a renegotiation of the Madrid Protocol, and it certainly would not initiate such a review alone. Nevertheless, Russia is ensuring that if such a situation arises, it will have positioned itself to benefit from the extraction of Antarctic natural resources.<sup>116</sup>

Legally speaking, such activities fall into the doctrine of *uti possidetis*, which means that Russia is intending 'conquest and subjugation'<sup>117</sup> against claimant states or should the Madrid Protocol be contested. Russia is unlikely to abandon the ATS. Moscow, however, reserves the right to do so if it perceives a need to fight for Russian interests in Antarctica.

## Managing incidents at the South Pole

As Russia becomes more assertive in its Antarctic posture and increases its presence there through expeditions, bases and suspected dual-purpose activities, the potential for accidents that could lead to miscalculation and escalation grows.

The 'Novo incident' in 2018 is an example of this. Under ATS provisions, Norway conducted an official inspection of the Novo and Perseus runways at the Novolazarevskaya air base. During this inspection, however, Russia deliberately blocked access to the Perseus runway, raising concerns over the nature of Russian activities at the base. The Norwegian report noted the 'level of activity at the air

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<sup>113</sup> Kupriyanov, A. (2019), 'России пора начинать готовиться к борьбе за ресурсы Антарктиды' [It's time for Russia to start preparing for the fight for the resources of Antarctica], *Profil*, 2 September 2019, <https://profile.ru/politics/rossii-pora-nachinat-gotovitsya-k-borbe-za-resursy-antarktity-171502>.

<sup>114</sup> Walters, T. (2021), 'Using Cape Town as a launchpad, Russia boasts of supergiant oil fields in Antarctic wilderness', *Daily Maverick*, 25 October 2021, <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2021-10-25-using-cape-town-as-a-launchpad-russia-boasts-of-supergiant-oil-fields-in-antarctic-wilderness>.

<sup>115</sup> Secretariat of the Antarctic Treaty (undated), 'The Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty', <https://www.ats.aq/e/protocol.html>.

<sup>116</sup> Kubiak, M. (2020), 'Russian drilling in the Antarctic', Warsaw Institute, 1 June 2020, <https://warsawinstitute.org/russian-drilling-antarctic>.

<sup>117</sup> The doctrine means that 'when a state acquires control of an antagonist state's territory during a conflict, if the agreement or treaty ending the conflict is silent as to the disposition of the territory or the territorial claim, the territory belongs to the acquiring state'. See <https://definitions.uslegal.com/u/uti-possidetis>; and Robinson, D. (2020), *Poles Part: Russia's Activities To Advance Polar Sovereignty Claims*, Montgomery: Air War College, 27 March 2020, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/AD1107491.pdf>.

base’, citing a ‘potential tendency toward a larger number of aircraft’.<sup>118</sup> This not only increases the risk of aerial incidents in the region, but also raises questions regarding military and intelligence activities.

A more recent example is the case of the Russian fishing vessel *Palmer*. In January 2020, a New Zealand patrol aircraft spotted the *Palmer* fishing illegally in protected waters in the Ross Sea. New Zealand accused the crew of falsifying its vessel monitoring system and required that the *Palmer* be added to the list of illegal, unregulated and unreported vessels.<sup>119</sup> However, Russia threatened to use its veto power at the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) as leverage, and the *Palmer* retained its fishing licence.

Although they do not yet form a systematic pattern, these examples show that Russia is contesting what it considers efforts by claimant states to delegitimize Russian interests and activities in Antarctica and the Southern Ocean. Such incidents are likely to increase in number and magnitude in the coming years, which would give Moscow an excuse to strengthen its regional presence and posture – or even to become an active ‘spoiler’ within the ATS.

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<sup>118</sup> Secretariat of the Antarctic Treaty (2018), *Report of the Norwegian Antarctic Inspection under Article VII of the Antarctic Treaty and Article 14 of the Environmental Protocol*, February 2018, [https://documents.ats.aq/ATCM41/att/ATCM41\\_att023\\_e.pdf](https://documents.ats.aq/ATCM41/att/ATCM41_att023_e.pdf).

<sup>119</sup> Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (2020), *Report of the Thirty-Ninth Meeting of the Commission*, Virtual Meeting, 27–30 October 2020, <https://www.ccamlr.org/en/system/files/e-cc-39-rep.pdf>.



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# 06

## Policy impact and consequences

**Russia's increasingly militarized posture in polar affairs has two main consequences for Arctic coastal states and for the future of the ATS: it creates the potential for accidents and miscalculations, and will require policies to deal with Russia–China interaction at both poles.**

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### **Miscalculation, accidents and tactical errors**

Russian stakeholders remain convinced that NATO is deliberately moving closer to Russia's Arctic and that ATS claimant states are not respecting Moscow's interests in the Antarctic region. This situation increases the risk of miscalculation and tactical errors, which could lead to unwanted escalation.

#### **Polar miscalculations**

At the South Pole, risks of miscalculation are linked to Russia's increased presence and assertive posture regarding other parties to the ATS (see Chapter 5). These are longer-term prospects but could force the Kremlin to adopt a comprehensive and combined approach to both poles. Indeed, a similar pattern is slowly emerging between security issues in the Arctic and Antarctic regions – largely as a result of increased human activity.

In the Arctic, the equation is simple: under the impact of climate change, greater human access to, and presence in, Arctic waters (whether for commercial, civilian or military purposes) will increase the number and frequency of accidents and incidents both at sea and in the air. This will, in turn, raise the risk of miscalculation.

A greater number of surface vessels, underwater systems and aerial platforms in the European Arctic and Pacific Arctic – coupled with extreme weather events and the non-linear nature of climate change – will make day-to-day activities such

as patrols and constabulary missions harder to manage. The Arctic is also not immune to environmental and safety risks, notably from nuclear-powered vessels and those carrying nuclear missiles.<sup>120</sup> This is equally true for the Southern Ocean.

The situation is made worse by the reduction in official channels of communication with Russia since 2014 and further deterioration since early 2022. Russia's behaviour and lack of restraint generally are also causes for concern – from its lack of transparency in dealing with serious environmental events<sup>121</sup> to its military activities in peacetime. The latter include dangerous manoeuvres against Norwegian assets;<sup>122</sup> ADIZ violations against Japan and South Korea; GPS-jamming in northern Finland and Norway during the NATO 'Trident Juncture' exercise in 2018;<sup>123</sup> snap missile drills;<sup>124</sup> and other military activity taking place beyond the AZRF.<sup>125</sup> These activities particularly impact the overall security of the Barents, Norwegian and Bering Seas (see Chapters 2–4 for discussion of existing chokepoints).

The risk of miscalculation is compounded by Russia's need to 'respond' to the expansion of NATO in the European Arctic (Finland and Sweden potentially joining the alliance being a case in point)<sup>126</sup> and NATO's supposed activities directed against the AZRF, as well as the increased US presence in the Pacific theatre.<sup>127</sup> For the US, NATO and their allies, an additional risk is that their regional military assets could be threatened by Russian systems, and particularly by naval aviation groups and air-superiority assets, long-range missile systems and strategic bomber overflights.

## Managing escalation

Military tension in the Arctic is slowly building around demonstrations of access and presence through naval and aerial missions. For example, in May 2020, the US and the UK conducted a maritime security operation in the Barents Sea.<sup>128</sup> Russia denounced this operation as provocative and responded by deploying

<sup>120</sup> Such incidents could involve nuclear icebreakers, nuclear-powered submarines (see the Russian Umka-2021 exercises) and military vessels carrying nuclear weapons. See Goodman, S. and Kertysova, K. (2020), 'The nuclearisation of the Russian Arctic: new reactors, new risks', European Leadership Network, 26 June 2020, <https://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/policy-brief/the-nuclearisation-of-the-russian-arctic-new-reactors-new-risks>.

<sup>121</sup> Recently, events such as the 2019 Nyonoksa radiological incident, the 2020 Norilsk spill and the 2021 Siberian wildfires.

<sup>122</sup> Nielsen, T. (2018), 'Norway says Russia's mock attack on Vardø radar troubles stability in the north', *The Barents Observer*, 13 March 2018, <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2018/03/oslo-such-behavior-does-not-promote-good-neighborly-relations>.

<sup>123</sup> Reuters (2018), 'Finland says GPS signal disruption during NATO war game came from Russia', 15 November 2018, <https://af.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idAFKCN1NK2IP>.

<sup>124</sup> RFE/RL (2018), 'Russia Plans Missile-Firing Exercise Off Norway Amid NATO Drills', 29 October 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/russia-plans-missile-firing-exercise-off-norway-amid-nato-drills/29570878.html>.

<sup>125</sup> Nilsen, T. (2020), 'Russian anti-sub aircraft on combat training further south in the GIUK gap than normal', *The Barents Observer*, 29 February 2020, <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2020/02/russian-anti-sub-aircraft-combat-training-further-south-normal-over-norwegian-sea>.

<sup>126</sup> Rasmussen, S. E. (2022), 'Sweden, Finland to Lodge NATO Bid', *Wall Street Journal*, 17 May 2022, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/sweden-finland-to-lodge-nato-bid-11652807054>.

<sup>127</sup> Ria Novosti (2021), '"Они уже у границ": зачем Россия перебрасывает бомбардировщики в Арктику' ["They are already at the borders": why Russia is transferring bombers to the Arctic], 28 May 2021, [https://vpk.name/news/511395\\_oni\\_uzhe\\_u\\_granic\\_zachem\\_rossiya\\_perebrasyvaet\\_bombardirovshiki\\_v\\_arktiku.html](https://vpk.name/news/511395_oni_uzhe_u_granic_zachem_rossiya_perebrasyvaet_bombardirovshiki_v_arktiku.html).

<sup>128</sup> Navy Recognition (2020), 'US Navy and British Royal Navy conduct military exercise in Barents Sea', 9 May 2020, <https://www.navyrecognition.com/index.php/news/defence-news/2020/may-2020/8392-u-s-navy-and-british-royal-navy-conducts-military-exercise-in-barents-sea.html>.

Northern Fleet surface vessels.<sup>129</sup> At the same time, recent Russian violations of the Japanese and South Korean ADIZs indicate a similar intent to demonstrate uncontested access for Russia (see Chapter 4).

Such activities are likely to multiply in the short term, potentially leading to an escalatory dynamic between Russia and NATO partners and allies. From Russia's point of view, Western-led operations in the Arctic and Antarctica encourage the Kremlin's self-constructed perception of encirclement by NATO and US forces and consequent remilitarization of both regions.

In turn, the situation forces other coastal states to act to counter the Russian threat – especially in the context of the Russia–Ukraine conflict. Indeed, an important risk factor is linked to potential horizontal escalation<sup>130</sup> into and out of the region, notably from the European Arctic to the Baltic Sea and to the North Atlantic, as well as to northeast Asia and the Sea of Japan in the Pacific theatre.

There are further Russian insecurities around the status of the NSR and the perception in Moscow that Russia's interpretation of the 'Ice clause' (see Chapter 3) will soon be contested by US-led FONOPs using surface assets or submarines.<sup>131</sup> The reality, however, is quite different, and US-led naval FONOPs through the NSR are unlikely in the short to medium term. The US Navy has acknowledged the cost and risks linked to such operations, and the expert community is advising caution and restraint.<sup>132</sup>

The situation in the Antarctic region is different but equally serious. An increased number of claimant and non-claimant states developing their presence in the Southern Ocean – not least for commercial and resource-prospecting purposes – will undoubtedly bring policing and/or military escorts to protect vessels and other assets.

The gradual destruction of the ATS provisions that enshrine the demilitarization of Antarctica and the Southern Ocean could then follow. Such a situation would have dire consequences for the wider security of the continent and the Southern Ocean, with the risk of creating a 'free for all' among claimant states.

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<sup>129</sup> Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation (@mod\_russia) via Twitter (2020), '#Briefing #Rudskoy: They included 3 #US #DDGdestroyers, which are the basis of the maritime component of the European segment of the global US missile defence system, as well as a universal supply transport of the #USNavy and the #BritishNavy's DDG frigate', 1 June 2020, [https://twitter.com/mod\\_russia/status/1267481949813301248](https://twitter.com/mod_russia/status/1267481949813301248).

<sup>130</sup> Pezard, Tingstad, Van Abel and Stephenson (2017), *Maintaining Arctic Cooperation with Russia*.

<sup>131</sup> Independent Military Review (2021), 'Арктика как поле боя' [The Arctic as a battlefield], 29 March 2021, [https://vpk.name/news/495262\\_arktika\\_kak\\_pole\\_boya.html](https://vpk.name/news/495262_arktika_kak_pole_boya.html).

<sup>132</sup> See Petersen, M. B. and Pincus, R. (2021), 'Arctic Militarization and Russian Military Theory', FPRI, 30 June 2021, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2021/06/arctic-militarization-and-russian-military-theory>; and Sacks, Pezard, Tingstad and Sorensen (2021), 'Exploring Gaps in Arctic Governance'.

## Russia–China polar relations

China's policy towards the Arctic and Antarctica is well covered by the expert community.<sup>133</sup> It is, however, paramount to look at the relationship between Russia and China at both the North and South Poles and to assess its impact for the security of regional stakeholders.

Russia's approach to China at both poles is pragmatic and compartmentalized. While for now it is developing cooperation within the ATS, Russia is much more cautious when it comes to the Arctic, where the Chinese presence is merely tolerated. At both poles, Russia needs to manage China's attempts to shape the future of polar governance, and take steps to ensure that Russian interests are respected.

### Bilateral relations in the Arctic

China has been an observer at the Arctic Council since 2013 and published its first Arctic white paper in January 2018.<sup>134</sup> The document caused much consternation internationally, as it defined China as a 'near Arctic state' and presented the idea of a 'Polar Silk Road' linked to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).<sup>135</sup> Since then, Beijing has been increasing its presence across the region.<sup>136</sup>

This leaves Russia in a difficult position. The Kremlin needs China as a user of the NSR for liquefied natural gas (LNG) and energy exports. China has been operating in the NSR since 2015,<sup>137</sup> and LNG cargoes to China represent roughly 20 per cent of transits each year. Beijing is also a key partner in both regional LNG projects<sup>138</sup> and the Power of Siberia gas pipeline.<sup>139</sup> However, Russia remains mistrustful of China's intentions in the Arctic. So far, China has been using the NSR but has not provided infrastructure investments to help Russia develop it.

Moscow is suspicious over China's willingness to change norms and regulations in Arctic affairs. Beijing is interested in creating a China-friendly normative environment in the Arctic and turning the region into a part of the 'global

<sup>133</sup> For the Arctic, see Sørensen, C. (2019), *China as (Near-) Arctic Great Power – Drivers and Perspectives*, thinkchina.dk, [https://www.thinkchina.ku.dk/documents/ThinkChina\\_Policy\\_Brief\\_China\\_as\\_Near-Arctic\\_Great\\_Power\\_Drivers\\_and\\_Perspectives.pdf](https://www.thinkchina.ku.dk/documents/ThinkChina_Policy_Brief_China_as_Near-Arctic_Great_Power_Drivers_and_Perspectives.pdf); and Doshi, R., Dale-Huang, A. and Zhang, G. (2021), 'Northern expedition: China's Arctic activities and ambitions', Brookings, April 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/northern-expedition-chinas-arctic-activities-and-ambitions>. For Antarctica, see Buchanan, E. (2021), 'China's Antarctic interest signals a new Cold War front', *Financial Review*, 12 April 2021, <https://www.afr.com/policy/foreign-affairs/china-s-antarctic-interest-signals-a-new-cold-war-front-20210411-p57iaj>; and Liu, N. (2019), 'What Are China's Intentions in Antarctica?', *The Diplomat*, 14 June 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/06/what-are-chinas-intentions-in-Antarctic>.

<sup>134</sup> The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China (2018), 'China's Arctic Policy', 26 January 2018, [http://english.gov.cn/archive/white\\_paper/2018/01/26/content\\_281476026660336.htm](http://english.gov.cn/archive/white_paper/2018/01/26/content_281476026660336.htm).

<sup>135</sup> Klimenko, E. (2018), 'Shipping along the Arctic's Northern Sea Route will be determined by Russia–China cooperation in the region', Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 7 February 2018, <https://www.sipri.org/commentary/expert-comment/2018/shipping-along-arctics-northern-sea-route-will-be-determined-russia-china-cooperation-region>.

<sup>136</sup> China operates the Yellow River research station on Svalbard and the Aurora Observatory in Iceland. It is also seeking to open a third Arctic base in Greenland. Beijing also launched several Arctic expeditions, including with the research vessel *XueLong 2* launched in 2019.

<sup>137</sup> Northern Sea Route Information Office (no date), 'Statistics', <http://arctic-lio.com/?cat=27>.

<sup>138</sup> Filimonova, N. and Krivokhizh, S. (2018), 'China's Stakes in the Russian Arctic', *The Diplomat*, 18 January 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/01/chinas-stakes-in-the-russian-arctic>.

<sup>139</sup> Ria Novosti (2020), "Газпром" продолжает переговоры с CNPC по поставкам газа в Китай [Gazprom continues negotiations with CNPC on gas supplies to China], 2 March 2020, [https://ria.ru/east\\_economy/20150428/1061483829.html#ixzz42lccNOZL](https://ria.ru/east_economy/20150428/1061483829.html#ixzz42lccNOZL).

commons'.<sup>140</sup> These diverging positions directly clash with Russia's view regarding national interests (a view shared by Canada and Norway to a large extent). Privately,<sup>141</sup> the Russian leadership is critical of China's self-proclaimed 'near Arctic' status for fear of the precedent that might create, while also working to prevent the Polar Silk Road from overlapping with the NSR or even from 'absorbing' it in the future.

The situation is exacerbated by Russian negative perceptions of Chinese military interests in the Arctic, including the fact that a new fleet of Chinese nuclear-powered icebreakers is currently being built to People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) specifications.<sup>142</sup> Icebreakers could be used as escorts for Chinese ships transiting through the Arctic, as well as to support Chinese submarines conducting nuclear-deterrence operations against the presence of American nuclear-powered ballistic-missile submarines and to challenge the US regional presence overall.

China began conducting naval operations in the Arctic in 2015, when PLAN ships sailed through the Bering Sea.<sup>143</sup> More recently, the PLAN deployed several ships close to the Aleutian Islands in September 2021.<sup>144</sup> There are also worrying signs that China might be interested in conducting submarine operations in the Arctic: indeed, Beijing raised the topic with Russia of stationing its submarines across the AZRF.<sup>145</sup> That would leave the central Arctic Ocean at risk of contestation.

## China's presence in the Arctic is increasingly at odds with Russia's current posture of control, and their relationship is defined as much by competition as by cooperation.

Finally, Russia suspects – as do other Arctic states – that Chinese Arctic bases and expeditions are dual-use in nature. The PLAN could thus be broadening its knowledge of the region, notably through intelligence-gathering and domain awareness for military operations, under the guise of 'ocean science' (including navigation, atmospheric conditions, and cold-water and under-ice operations). In support of this research, China launched its first polar observation satellite in 2019.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Sørensen, C. (2018), *China as an Arctic Great Power: Potential Implications for Greenland and the Danish Realm*, Danish Defence College, Policy Brief, February 2018, <https://www.fak.dk/globalassets/fak/dokumenter/publikationer/-china-as-an-arctic-great-power---2018-.pdf>.

<sup>141</sup> Wishnick, E. (2021), 'Will Russia Put China's Arctic Ambitions on Ice?', *The Diplomat*, 5 June 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/06/will-russia-put-chinas-arctic-ambitions-on-ice>.

<sup>142</sup> Even though Chinese icebreakers can equally be used for Antarctic operations and in the Southern Ocean – which is equally concerning for Russia.

<sup>143</sup> DefenseNews via Agence France-Presse (2015), 'Pentagon: 5 Chinese Naval Ships Spotted In Bering Sea', 2 September 2015, <https://www.defensenews.com/global/asia-pacific/2015/09/02/pentagon-5-chinese-naval-ships-spotted-in-bering-sea>.

<sup>144</sup> Pickrell, R. and Woody, C. (2021), 'US Coast Guard cutters shadowed Chinese warships sailing near remote US territory in Alaska', 14 September 2021, <https://www.businessinsider.com/us-coast-guard-shadowed-chinese-warships-near-alaska-2021-9>.

<sup>145</sup> Lajeunesse, A. and Choi, T. (2021), 'Here there be dragons? Chinese submarine options in the Arctic', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 23 June 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402390.2021.1940147>.

<sup>146</sup> China National Space Administration via Xinhua (2019), 'China's first polar observation satellite supports polar research', 11 October 2019, <http://www.cnsa.gov.cn/english/n6465652/n6465653/c6807818/content.html>.

China's presence in the Arctic is increasingly at odds with Russia's current posture of control, and the relationship is defined as much by competition as by cooperation. Russia can use its influence as a 'gatekeeper' to the Arctic for China and access provider to the NSR. However, the impact of climate change and the potential opening of the projected Transpolar Route in the central Arctic Ocean could render the NSR irrelevant for Chinese commerce. For those reasons, 'China's role will determine the future of the NSR'.<sup>147</sup>

## Bilateral relations in Antarctica

The South Pole is also seeing increased interaction between Russia and China. China became a consultative party to the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting in 1985,<sup>148</sup> which gave Beijing veto powers and, most importantly, the right to make a territorial claim. Later, China became a CCAMLR member in 2007 and defined its Antarctic policy priorities in a 2017 white paper.<sup>149</sup>

Activities in the Southern Ocean and Antarctica have been linked to the BRI, with the pragmatic aim of exploiting resources at the South Pole on a 'first come, first served' basis. China operates the largest distant fishing fleet in the world, giving it a particular interest in fish stocks and marine resources.<sup>150</sup> The growing number of Chinese expeditions<sup>151</sup> (including tourism) and surveys in Antarctica also indicates an interest in exploiting natural resources there in the long term – mainly hydrocarbon reserves, rare earths and minerals, and fresh water from ice.

Russia and China have found common ground in opposing the creation of marine protected areas (MPAs) in the Southern Ocean under the CAMLR Convention. Both countries actively campaigned against the creation of the Ross Sea MPA in 2016 and continue to block the establishment of others. They also share the view that claimant states could use the structures of the ATS – in particular, CCAMLR – to strengthen their claims over territory.

Despite some level of agreement between Russia and China over Antarctic affairs, the Kremlin remains concerned regarding Beijing's policy of pre-emptive commercial dominance in the Southern Ocean. As Moscow wants to take a defining role in the future of the ATS, it cannot let China act without consulting Russia first.

<sup>147</sup> Klimenko (2018), 'Shipping along the Arctic's Northern Sea Route will be determined by Russia–China cooperation in the region'.

<sup>148</sup> Secretariat of the Antarctic Treaty (undated), 'Parties', <https://www.ats.aq/devAS/Parties?lang=e>.

<sup>149</sup> Chinese Antarctic priorities have not yet been developed into a fully fledged strategy. See Liu (2019), 'What Are China's Intentions in Antarctica?'.

<sup>150</sup> Chen, Z. (2021), 'Will ranking China's distant-water fishing firms encourage sustainable practices?', China Dialogue Ocean, 10 September 2021, <https://chinadialogueocean.net/18512-chinas-distant-water-fishing-firms/#:~:text=China%20has%20the%20world's%20largest,and%20the%20fishing%20industry%20itself>.

<sup>151</sup> In terms of presence on the continent, China currently operates two year-round research stations in Antarctica (Great Wall on King George Island and Zhongshan on Larsmann Hill), plus two summer camps (Kunlun on Dome A in East Antarctica and Taishan on Princess Elizabeth Land). A third year-round base is under construction on Inexpressible Island in Terra Nova Bay.



Indeed, perhaps also reflecting future Russian intentions, the Kremlin equates a Chinese presence at the South Pole with ambitions to make territorial claims and achieve sovereign rights. This is compounded by the fact that China could use its economic leverage over South American claimants like Argentina<sup>152</sup> or Chile to obtain concessions over the management of the ATS.<sup>153</sup>

Like other countries, Russia is also concerned that Chinese activities at the South Pole might encompass military purposes. The PLA is increasingly involved in Antarctic affairs, notably through the icebreaker programme.<sup>154</sup> Furthermore, China installed Beidou satellite stations at the Great Wall and Zhongshan bases in 2010, and at Kunlun/Dome A in 2013.<sup>155</sup> As Beidou stations also serve military purposes, there are risks that satellite installations and remote-sensing capabilities could be used for intelligence-gathering, surveillance and missile-tracking.<sup>156</sup>

Finally, China is seeking to establish an Antarctic Specially Managed Area (ASMA) around the Kunlun station within Dome A, the highest point on the continent.<sup>157</sup> An ASMA within Dome A would essentially create an exclusion zone in which China could use its satellite station for dual-use, ground-based satellite tracking.<sup>158</sup> The proposal has so far been rejected by other ATS members.

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<sup>152</sup> For an example of such leverage, see the recent disagreement between the UK and China over the Falklands: PA Media (2022), 'Truss says Falklands part of 'British family' after China backs Argentina', *Guardian*, 7 February 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2022/feb/07/truss-says-falklands-part-of-british-family-after-china-supports-argentinias-claim>.

<sup>153</sup> Caro, C. and Bachmann, S. (2020), 'China in the Arctic and Antarctic: A Threat?', *The National Interest*, 19 September 2020, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/china-arctic-and-antarctic-threat-169311>.

<sup>154</sup> Brady, A.-M. (2020), 'Antarctic as a Site of Strategic Competition: Optimal Responses for Australia and New Zealand' in Press, D., Brady, A.-M., Scott, K. and Jabour, J. (2020), *Antarctic 2050: Strategic Challenges and Responses*, Australian Civil-Military Centre, <https://www.acmc.gov.au/resources/publications/antarctica-2050-strategic-challenges-and-responses>.

<sup>155</sup> Brady, A.-M. (2017), *China as a Polar Great Power*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>156</sup> Brady, A.-M. (2017), *China's expanding Antarctic interests: Implications for Australia*, Barton, ACT: Australian Strategic Policy Institute, p. 7, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep04257.9>.

<sup>157</sup> Liu, N. (2019), 'The heights of China's ambition in Antarctica', *The Interpreter*, Lowy Institute, 11 July 2019, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/heights-china-s-ambition-Antarctic>.

<sup>158</sup> Hatakya, S. (2020), 'Legal Implications of China's Proposal for an Antarctic Specially Managed Area (ASMA) at Kunlun Station at Dome A', *The Yearbook of Polar Law Online*, 12(1), pp. 75–86, [https://doi.org/10.1163/22116427\\_012010007](https://doi.org/10.1163/22116427_012010007).

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# 07 Conclusion and policy recommendations

**Tension and miscalculation in polar affairs must be managed by shaping Western policy around Russia's increasingly militarized posture in the polar regions. Preserving the spirit of 'low tension' in the Arctic and stability within the ATS will require adjustments on the part of Western policymakers.**

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The polar regions are no longer insulated from the wider geopolitical challenges caused by deteriorating Western relations with Russia. There is now an increased risk that the current era of 'low tension' at both the North and South Poles will come to an end.

This geopoliticization of polar issues presents a common thread: great power competition is slowly starting to shape the way non-security issues – including climate change – are framed and discussed, both in the Arctic and within the ATS. The situation is now compounded by the growing role of China in polar affairs: through its Polar Silk Road concept, Beijing is seeking to disrupt polar governance norms.

Heightened insecurity in polar affairs, along with the potential for direct military competition, impacts the security interests of the US, NATO and other Western nations. For Russia, issues at both poles could become increasingly linked and could push the Kremlin towards a more aggressive and militarized approach to defend Russia's perceived national interests.

While anticipating the impact of climate change and future polar competition, Moscow is thinking in terms of contingency planning. This means pre-empting the consequences of rising tensions in the Arctic and positioning itself in Antarctica to prepare for the future.

Tension and miscalculation in polar affairs must be managed by taking stock of Russia's increasingly militarized posture in the Arctic and Antarctic regions. To that end, this paper offers the following general and targeted policy recommendations for Western policymakers:

#### **Develop Arctic and Antarctic policies in conjunction**

- Western analysis should systematically take into account the interdependence between Arctic and Antarctic policies. While Russia might not have (yet) established an overarching polar strategy, other potential disruptors like China have done so. Thinking in those terms will help Western governments to establish a more comprehensive picture of the polar security environment.
- Similarly, patterns of cooperation in both poles should be more thoroughly discussed by Arctic and Antarctic stakeholders to understand and replicate lessons learned and best practices (for example, incidents at sea (INCSEA) agreements in the Arctic or marine bio-conservation measures in Antarctica).

#### **Prevent insecurity from driving polar politics**

- Geopolitical tension is not inevitable in the polar regions, nor should it become a self-fulfilling prophecy. At the level of official state rhetoric, policymakers engaged in polar politics must avoid bombastic statements.<sup>159</sup> These are harmful and erode the spirit of cooperation in both regions.

#### **Change the analytical approach to Russia's posture in the Arctic**

- The 'double dual' nature (see Chapter 1) of Russian military infrastructure and capabilities in the Arctic is blurring the line between offensive and defensive purposes. The remilitarization of the Russian Arctic therefore becomes both defensive in nature and offensive in intent, as Moscow plans for all contingencies including escalation. This situation is compounded by risks linked to horizontal escalation to and from the Arctic theatre.
- Too often, Western discussions around the Russian Arctic focus solely on the European High North. The US and its allies in the region must instead analyse Russia's Arctic as a strategic and interconnected continuum stretching from the North Atlantic to the North Pacific. This approach will help to provide a comprehensive operating picture and allow them to reassess Russia's posture.

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<sup>159</sup> Recent statements by Western policymakers have not been conducive to the maintenance of a 'low tension' environment, especially in the European High North. See, for example, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's 2019 Arctic Council speech: Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting (2019), 'Secretary of State Michael R. Pompeo At the Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting', 7 May 2019, <https://oaarchive.arctic-council.org/handle/11374/2409>; discussions around the '4th battle of the Atlantic' in Burgess, R. (2020), 'Foggo: Fourth 'Battle of the Atlantic' Underway', *Sea Power*, 25 June 2020, [https://seapowermagazine.org/foggo-fourth-battle-of-the-atlantic-underway/#:~:text=Foggo%2C%20soon%20to%20complete%20his,era%20of%20Great%20Power%20Competition;or%20the%20statement%20by%20the%20French%20Ministry%20for%20the%20Armed%20Forces,referring%20to%20the%20Arctic%20as%20the%20second%20Middle%20East%20:French%20Ministry%20of%20the%20Armed%20Forces%20\(2019\),%20Publication%20de%20la%20plaque%20tte%20La%20France%20et%20les%20nouveaux%20enjeux%20strat%C3%A9giques%20en%20Arctique%20%20Publication%20de%20l'informational%20notice%20France%20and%20the%20new%20strategic%20challenges%20in%20the%20Arctic%20%20Press%20release%207%20November%202019,https://www.defense.gouv.fr/actualites/publication-plaquette-france-nouveaux-enjeux-strategiques-arctique](https://seapowermagazine.org/foggo-fourth-battle-of-the-atlantic-underway/#:~:text=Foggo%2C%20soon%20to%20complete%20his,era%20of%20Great%20Power%20Competition;or%20the%20statement%20by%20the%20French%20Ministry%20for%20the%20Armed%20Forces,referring%20to%20the%20Arctic%20as%20the%20second%20Middle%20East%20:French%20Ministry%20of%20the%20Armed%20Forces%20(2019),%20Publication%20de%20la%20plaque%20tte%20La%20France%20et%20les%20nouveaux%20enjeux%20strat%C3%A9giques%20en%20Arctique%20%20Publication%20de%20l'informational%20notice%20France%20and%20the%20new%20strategic%20challenges%20in%20the%20Arctic%20%20Press%20release%207%20November%202019,https://www.defense.gouv.fr/actualites/publication-plaquette-france-nouveaux-enjeux-strategiques-arctique); or the statement by the French Ministry for the Armed Forces, referring to the Arctic as the 'second Middle East': French Ministry of the Armed Forces (2019), 'Publication de la plaque "La France et les nouveaux enjeux stratégiques en Arctique"' [Publication of the informational notice: "France and the new strategic challenges in the Arctic"], press release, 7 November 2019, <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/actualites/publication-plaquette-france-nouveaux-enjeux-strategiques-arctique>.

### Manage tension with Russia in the Arctic

- Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has shattered all hopes of continued cooperation with the Kremlin in the context of Russia's chairmanship of the Arctic Council and the Arctic Coast Guard Forum until May 2023. Indeed, in early March 2022, the so-called 'Arctic 7' (Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and the US) condemned Russia's aggression and unanimously paused their participation in all Arctic Council meetings.<sup>160</sup>
- The risk for Arctic nations is that Russia might pivot to a wider variety of more 'friendly' states interested in Arctic affairs, such as India or the United Arab Emirates,<sup>161</sup> to leverage its interests and break out of its current isolation in international affairs.
- Any opportunity that existed to constructively engage Moscow in parallel discussions over military security in the Arctic has now gone. Russia cannot be allowed to rejoin the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable or the Arctic Chiefs of Defence Staff meetings – at least for as long as the current leadership remains in the Kremlin.
- Creating a new framework to engage with Russia on military security issues in the Arctic would also be ill-advised. It is doubtful that Russia can be trusted to implement existing regional agreements, including bilateral INCSEA agreements.

### Create a military security architecture for the Arctic

- With Russia's renewed war in Ukraine in mind, the Arctic 7 will now have to deal increasingly with the risk of miscalculation and tactical errors, even in day-to-day 'soft security' activities such as patrols and constabulary missions or SAR. This is especially relevant in the context of the Finnish and Swedish applications to join NATO and the likely expansion of the alliance.
- It is vital now that the Arctic 7 define the 'rules of the road' for military activity in the region, exploring the continuum between military and 'soft security' affairs, creating Arctic-specific military-to-military channels of communication and properly defining the role of NATO in the European Arctic.<sup>162</sup>

### Avoid a 'FONOP vicious circle' in the Arctic

- Demonstrations of uncontested access at sea and in the air in the Arctic are slowly becoming a 'new normal'. This tit-for-tat, action/reaction military dynamic reinforces the existing security dilemma between Russia and NATO and other coastal nations.

<sup>160</sup> U.S. Department of State (2022), 'Joint Statement on Arctic Council Cooperation Following Russia's Invasion of Ukraine', press release, 3 March 2022, <https://www.state.gov/joint-statement-on-arctic-council-cooperation-following-russias-invasion-of-ukraine>.

<sup>161</sup> Buchanan, E. (2022), 'The Ukraine War: Arctic Council Steps into Uncharted Territory', Arctic Circle, 15 March 2022, <https://www.arcticcircle.org/journal/arctic-council-steps-into-uncharted-territory>.

<sup>162</sup> Depledge, D., Boulègue, M., Foxall, A. and Tulupov, D. (2019), *Why we need to talk about military activity in the Arctic: Towards an Arctic Military Code of Conduct*, briefing note, Arctic Yearbook, [https://arcticyearbook.com/images/yearbook/2019/Briefing-Notes/4\\_AY2019\\_BN\\_Depledge.pdf](https://arcticyearbook.com/images/yearbook/2019/Briefing-Notes/4_AY2019_BN_Depledge.pdf); Boulègue, M. and Depledge, D. (2021), 'New military security architecture needed in the Arctic', Chatham House Expert Comment, 4 May 2021, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2021/05/new-military-security-architecture-needed-arctic>; Boulègue, M. and Depledge, D. (2021), 'Arctic Hard Security Taskforce: Summary of the 10 December expert workshop', *North American and Arctic Defence and Security Network*, 10 March 2021, <https://www.naadsn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Activity-Report-Arctic-Hard-Security-Taskforce.pdf>; Depledge, D. (2020), 'NATO and the Arctic', *The RUSI Journal*, 165(5–6), pp. 80–90, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03071847.2020.1865831>.

- The greatest risk of tactical errors and miscalculation in the Arctic is undoubtedly posed by incidents at sea during day-to-day activities, from patrols to demonstrations of freedom of navigation. A ‘FONOP vicious circle’ – which would consist of successive demonstrations of access and presence from NATO and Russian forces through naval and aerial operations – cannot be allowed to develop. Risks can be mitigated by refraining from unnecessary escalation.
- However, the Kremlin cannot be allowed to believe that Russia ‘owns’ the approaches of the Barents Sea or the Bering Sea, nor that the Russian armed forces could contest the operating environment, deny US and NATO regional presence or achieve military superiority in contested spaces. This can be achieved by increasing the regional presence of MDA capabilities, as well as by pushing back systematically against Russia’s narrative.

#### **Invest in Arctic-specific technologies**

- Arctic partners must invest in cold weather-enabling and polar-specific capabilities that contest Russia’s sense of military superiority in the region – this should include MDA, ASW and mine counter-measure capabilities and maritime patrol aviation, as well as hardening military infrastructure and systems against Russian electronic warfare. With specific reference to the Pacific Arctic, this could be achieved in the US by restarting an extended form of continuous bomber presence.

#### **Address Russia’s lack of transparency in Antarctica**

- Parties to the ATS must regularly renew their pledge to use the Antarctic continent and the Southern Ocean for ‘peaceful purposes only’ – namely, keeping the South Pole demilitarized, denuclearized and free from military activities. Suspicions over military activities carried out on Russian bases and during scientific expeditions must be addressed more thoroughly.
- Under the ATS, more frequent inspections of Russian stations are needed. This policy must apply additionally to Chinese bases, where military activity is also suspected. It is paramount that the US, NATO and allies take action to reaffirm ATS commitments on the demilitarization of the continent.

## List of abbreviations and acronyms

ADIZ	air defence identification zone
ASMA	Antarctic Specially Managed Area
ASW	anti-submarine warfare
ATS	Antarctic Treaty System
AZRF	Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CCAMLR	Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources
FONOP	freedom of navigation operation
FSB	Russian security services
GIN	Greenland–Iceland–Norway
GIUK	Greenland–Iceland–UK
GLONASS	Global Navigation Satellite System
INCSEA	incidents at sea
ISR	intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance
MDA	maritime domain awareness
MPA	marine protected area
NSR	Northern Sea Route
PLAN	People’s Liberation Army Navy
SAR	search and rescue
SLOC	sea lines of communication
UNCLCS	United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea



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Cover image: The Russian nuclear icebreaker *Yamal* cutting through the Arctic Ocean ice at the North Pole.

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