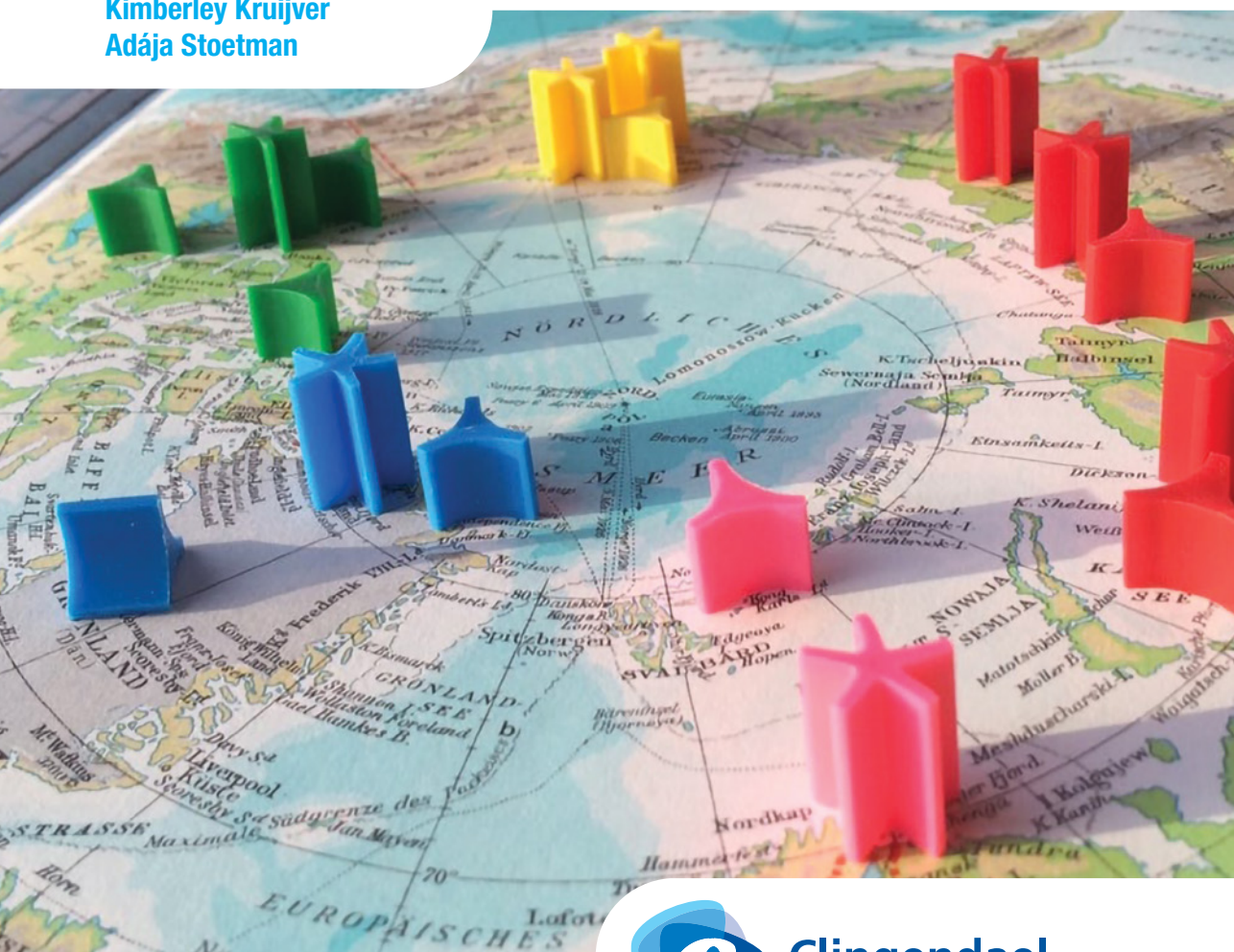


# The future of Arctic security

## The geopolitical pressure cooker and the consequences for the Netherlands

Dick Zandee  
Kimberley Kruijver  
Adája Stoitman

Clingendael Report



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# Executive summary

The Arctic environment is changing rapidly due to climate change. Despite continued cooperation between the Arctic states and other countries, the risk of the region becoming a playground for great power competition is increasing. Current trends point to a further *geopolitisation* of the area, multiplied by the melting of ice. Increasingly, Russia, China and the United States will compete in the Arctic in the context of the global power game. Moscow is stepping up its military activities and *securitisation* is increasingly characterising the American Arctic policy. Beijing is increasing its financial-economic investment in the region, which serves its long-term agenda of becoming a global superpower. The US administration has already started to respond, both by accusing Russia and China of their geopolitical activities as well as by stepping up its own involvement in the region. As a result, Arctic security is more prominently on the agenda than ever before.

Ecological, economic and political-military security are closely interrelated in the Arctic, which makes the impact of climate change in the region quite different compared to Antarctica. In this report the authors have examined the impact of the changing ecological, economic and political-military aspects of Arctic security for the Netherlands in view of the country's Polar Strategy that will be updated in 2020. The new Polar Strategy will cover the years 2021-2025. This report focusses on the impact of the changing Arctic in those years, but inevitably also takes the longer-term consequences into consideration.

The existing governance of the Arctic functions well, with the Arctic Council as the key body. However, the growing impact of the great power competition on Arctic security asks for a more dedicated forum to discuss measures to prevent the danger of increased political-military tensions and conflict in the future. The Arctic Council should not be used for that purpose – as securitisation might endanger its optimal functioning. Furthermore, its mandate excludes discussions on military matters. The Arctic Security Forces Roundtable (ASFR) is the body where high-ranking military officers of the Arctic states and of several other countries meet for talks on military security issues. However, Russia no longer participates in ASFR meetings. Furthermore, the ASFR would need adaptation in terms of its mandate, membership and participation. Thus, the best option might be to transform the ASFR into – or, alternatively have it replaced by – an *Arctic Security Cooperation Forum (ASCF)*. The main difference between the ASFR and the ASCF would be to open discussions on future conflict prevention measures and other arrangements in order to de-escalate the situation in case of growing tensions and crises in the Arctic. Next to a wider mandate, this would also imply a broader participation of experts in the ASFR meetings. One could also consider a continuation of the military-to-military meetings to deal with strictly military matters combined

with back-to-back political-military meetings focusing on Arctic security conflict prevention measures.

With regard to the economic and political-military perspectives, the Eurasian Arctic subregion is the most important for the Netherlands. In the coming decades the Northern Sea Route and, ultimately the Central Arctic Ocean, will open up. Ecologically, the Netherlands will be affected by the impact of the melting ice although this has to be related to the global climate impact including the melting of ice in Antarctica. In the near term more extreme weather – both ‘very wet’ and ‘very dry’ periods – will occur. In the longer term the rising sea level will pose a challenge to the protection of the Dutch coast and sea barriers.

Economically, little change is expected in the next five years: at the moment using the Northern Sea Route (NSR) by commercial shipping is considered as too costly. Nevertheless, also here the trend is towards increased use and, once the NSR is better navigable, sailing along Russia’s northern coast or even through the Arctic Ocean will become commercially attractive. The Dutch economy – which continues to be dependent on overseas trade to a large extent – will benefit from a more accessible NSR, which applies specifically to the Port of Rotterdam as Europe’s largest harbour.

The geopolitisation of the Arctic will impact Dutch foreign and security policy. Depending on how the great power competition will unfold in the future, The Hague will have to deal with emerging political-military questions requiring a strategic response – to be formulated together with allies and partners. As a non-Arctic country the Netherlands could – together with France, Germany and the UK – promote the establishment of an Arctic forum to discuss and agree on a set of conflict prevention measures. At the same time, Dutch interests are best served by a multi-layered strategy of proactively contributing to international forums dealing with Arctic matters – the Arctic governance bodies, and the EU and NATO – as well as increasing its own national investment and activities in the region. Therefore, regarding the political-military aspects there are two implications for The Hague: (1) to start discussing with the most interested partner countries how best to address these aspects and in what forum – which has to include Russia as it is a key stakeholder; (2) to take the military consequences into account in its long-term defence policy.

The troubled relationship between the Netherlands and Russia on other security issues of international concern will make it difficult for The Hague to step up ties with Moscow on Arctic security cooperation. Furthermore, in order to promote Arctic security and stability the Netherlands will need to consider how to balance its position in NATO – and the practical military support to Allies such as Canada and Norway – with the policy focussed on non-military cooperation in scientific matters, the environment and search and rescue. Promoting Arctic security cooperation by proposing discussions on how to mitigate the potential impact of the geopolitisation of the Arctic can provide the bridge between these two interests.

# 1 Introduction

The ice of the Arctic is melting. New sea routes become navigable, although it will most probably take many years before cargo ships can sail through them without the assistance of icebreakers. Natural resources – oil and gas in particular – are becoming more accessible. The changing Arctic environment offers new economic opportunities, while at the same it poses challenges to preserve the natural habitat of the region. Last but not least, the Arctic is increasingly becoming part of the geopolitical strife among the great powers: China, Russia and the United States (US). Arctic security as an issue is more prominently on the agenda than ever before.

In 2020 the existing Netherlands Polar Strategy 2016-2020 will be reviewed. Ecological, economic and political-military security are closely interrelated in the Arctic, which makes the impact of climate change in the region quite different compared to Antarctica. As an important trading nation and a proponent of protecting the natural environment – underpinned by keeping the Arctic stable and secure – the Netherlands has a great interest in the region. This report assesses the changes in the Arctic security situation and how they may impact the Netherlands. The focus is on the next five years, but is not limited to that timeframe. After all, strategies have to look beyond the short term to provide guidance to decision-makers for preparing themselves for the more distant future. Three specific research questions are asked:

- What will be the foreign and security policy consequences of the geopolitical trends in the Arctic?
- What impact might these consequences have on the security interests of the Netherlands in ecological, economic and political-military terms?
- What could the Netherlands (including in cooperation with its partners) do to mitigate the risks and to exploit opportunities?

In order to answer these questions the report starts with a chapter analysing the major trends in the Arctic region from a security perspective. The next chapter assesses the strategies, policies and involvement in the Arctic by Arctic states<sup>1</sup>, as well as China and other countries – France, Germany and the United Kingdom (UK). This is followed by a chapter on the governance of the Arctic region, including the question of if and how political-military security should be dealt with. The subsequent chapter specifically addresses Dutch interests and how the changing Arctic security situation may affect its strategy. The 2014 report of the Dutch Advisory Council on International Affairs,

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

'The future of the Arctic region', has served as the benchmark for the assessment in this chapter.<sup>2</sup> Have the Dutch interests changed in the last six years and are the conclusions drawn in 2014 still valid today? If not, what has changed? The last chapter of the report lists the conclusions and provides recommendations.

The report is based on a methodology mix of literature study and interviews with a wide variety of experts in the (Western) Arctic states<sup>3</sup>, France, Germany, the Netherlands, the UK, the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). These interviews were conducted under the Chatham House Rule and, thus, none of the names of the interviewees or their affiliation is mentioned in the report.<sup>4</sup> Two Arctic experts have provided a written contribution with a focus on geopolitical and legal issues respectively. The authors would like to thank Andreas Østhagen and Timo Koivurova for their valuable contributions, the content of which remains their responsibility.

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2 *The future of the Arctic: cooperation or confrontation?* Adviesraad Internationale Vraagstukken, No. 90, September 2014 (hereafter referred to in the footnotes as 'AIV').

3 Except France and Iceland.

4 The authors are grateful to Tjadina Herbert for her valuable contributions to the report.



## 2 Arctic security trends

The situation in the Arctic region<sup>5</sup> is characterised by the inherent interconnectedness of the Arctic ecosystem and social, economic and global interests.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, ‘the Arctic’ is not one homogeneous area, but consists of sub-regions facing these challenges on different levels. This is explained in more detail in the contribution by Andreas Østhagen (see Annex 1). This chapter examines the Arctic’s various security trends and the interests of the actors involved, keeping in mind their interrelatedness.

### Ecological trends

According to meteorologists of the KNMI<sup>7</sup>, the Arctic region is warming three times faster than the global annual average.<sup>8</sup> The rise in temperature has already led to the melting of glaciers and Arctic ice, a shift from permanent to seasonal sea ice and the shortening of the snow season.<sup>9</sup> Because lighter surfaces (ice and snow) will be increasingly replaced by darker ones (water and land), which absorb at least 80 percent of the previously reflected heat, the process of global warming is accelerating.<sup>10</sup> This phenomenon is also known as polar or Arctic amplification. The thickness of the Arctic ice in September has been reduced by 40% since 1980. The number of square kilometres of Arctic sea ice has dropped from 7 million in 1980 to 4.3 million today.<sup>11</sup>

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- 5 See Figure 1: the Arctic region is defined as the area around the North Pole, north of the Arctic Circle (latitude 66 degrees, 32 minutes North). It includes the Arctic Ocean, the territories of the eight Arctic States and their Extended Economic Zones: Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark (including Greenland and the Faroe Islands), Finland, Iceland, Norway, the Russian Federation, Sweden and the United States. This definition was adopted by all Arctic states with the establishment of the Arctic Council in 1996 and is de facto accepted by all observer states. Other definitions, based on average temperature or tree growth, exist but are less commonly used.
  - 6 Ulf Sverdrup, Elina Wilson Rowe, Karsten Friis, Geir Hønneland and Mike Sfraga, *A Governance and Risk Inventory for a Changing Arctic – Background Paper for the Arctic Security Roundtable at the Munich Security Conference 2020*, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs & Wilson Center, February 2020.
  - 7 Koninkrijk Nederlands Meteorologisch Instituut (Royal Netherlands Meteorological Institute).
  - 8 Richard Bintanja & Sybren Drijfhout, [Weer en klimaat in het noordpoolgebied](#), KNMI Specials 05, januari 2020.
  - 9 *Arctic Climate Change Update 2019 – An Update to Key Findings of Snow, Water, Ice and Permafrost in the Arctic (SWIPA)*, Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme, [2017 \(hereafter referred to as ‘AMAP’\)](#).
  - 10 This process is referred to as ‘the albedo feedback’. AIV, p. 9; Haruhiko Kashiwase, Kay I. Ohshima, Sohey Nihashi and Hajo Eicken, ‘Evidence for ice-ocean albedo feedback in the Arctic Ocean shifting to a seasonal ice zone’, in: *Scientific Reports*, 7(8170), 2017, pp. 1-10.
  - 11 Bintanja and Drijfhout, *Weer en klimaat in het noordpoolgebied*.

**Figure 1 The Arctic region (Extended Economic Zones)<sup>12</sup>**



Various studies have tried to estimate when the first ice-free months will occur. If the global emission trajectory remains as it is, and if states fail to reduce greenhouse gas emissions as needed to reach the objective of the 2016 Paris Agreement, ice-free conditions are likely to appear in the coming decades. Due to natural climate fluctuations the projection of the first occurrence of a seasonally ice-free Arctic Ocean comes with a 21-year uncertainty window (2032-2053).<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> The Arctic Institute, [EEZ](#), July 2016.

<sup>13</sup> Alexandra Jahn, Jennifer E. Kay, Marika M. Holland & David M. Hall, *How predictable is the timing of a summer ice-free Arctic?*, Stockholm: SIPRI, 2016, p. 7.

Climate change also impacts Arctic ecosystems. Due to the increase in temperature the land-based ice in Greenland is melting, which causes sea levels to rise more quickly.<sup>14</sup> The 2019 figures by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) point to a worse-case scenario of a sea level rise of 1.1 meter by 2100 compared to 1986-2005. It is predicted that Greenland's melting ice will have contributed 10-30 cm to that rise.<sup>15</sup> In addition, permafrost is thawing in Alaska, Canada and Siberia. Coastal erosion will most likely be intensified by the melting sea ice, which protects the Arctic coasts from storms.<sup>16</sup> These permafrost areas hold vast amounts of carbon, which may be released in the form of methane and carbon dioxide if the permafrost warms up. Recent observations show record-high average temperatures in the 10-20 meters below the ground surface, with the highest rise in the colder regions of the northern Arctic.<sup>17</sup> The release of these greenhouse gases would exacerbate global warming. Moreover, a combination of changing weather conditions, including an increase in lightning strikes, and the changing terrestrial landscape, including the expansion of tundra, has caused an increase in wildfires over the last few years.<sup>18</sup> In general, the weather in the Arctic is becoming more extreme, with more storms, more rain and snowfall in winter and droughts in summer.<sup>19</sup>

Studies also indicate that there is a relation between Arctic climate change and extreme weather events elsewhere, such as the record-breaking winter temperatures in eastern US<sup>20</sup> and northern Eurasia in 2018<sup>21</sup>. In the local biosphere, climate change has significantly affected the biodiversity of various insect and animal species as well as local plant vegetation and the marine environment.<sup>22</sup> Although the warmer weather conditions may lead to an increase in the number of animal species that are present, the survival of native ones will be threatened. When southern oceans become warmer, the local fish population will migrate northwards, creating economic opportunities for fishing in the north.<sup>23</sup> The livelihoods of Indigenous Peoples with a traditional and nomadic lifestyle are most affected. Opportunities for hunting, access to certain

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14 'Summary for Policymakers', in: *IPCC Special Report on the Ocean and Cryosphere in a Changing Climate*, 2019.

15 Bintanja and Drijfhout, *Weer en klimaat in het noordpoolgebied*.

16 UK Ministry of Defence, *Global Strategic Trends – The Future Starts Today*, sixth edition, p. 260.

17 AMAP, p. 6.

18 *Ibid.*

19 AIV, p. 10.

20 Judah Cohen, Karl Pfeiffer and Jennifer Francis, 'Warm Arctic episodes linked with increased frequency of extreme winter weather in the United States', *Nature Communications* 9(869), 2018.

21 Larry O'Hanlon, 'Scientists identify weather event behind extreme cold in Europe and Asia during February 2018', *Geospace*, 17 September 2019; Bill Chaisson, *Eurasian Cold Air Outbreaks under Different Arctic Stratospheric Polar Vortex Strength*, State of the Planet | Earth Institute, 28 February 2019.

22 AMAP, p. 6; UK Ministry of Defence, *Global Strategic Trends*, p. 260.

23 UK Ministry of Defence, *Global Strategic Trends*, p. 260.

food sources and water, as well as liveable areas will be diminished.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, the increasing desire of Arctic states to gain access to the region also affects the habitats of the Indigenous Peoples. For example, Finnish attempts to establish an Arctic railroad from Kirkenes into Central Europe has resulted in a heated conflict with the Sami group, in which the latter eventually expressed their 'veto'.<sup>25</sup> However, Canada's measures to strengthen its presence in the national Arctic territories have gone hand in hand with increasing support to the local Inuit.<sup>26</sup>

## Economic trends

The other side of the Arctic amplification coin represents international economic opportunities. First, because of the melting sea ice, a greater area of Arctic waters will become navigable. This will create new shipping routes between Asia, Europe and North America: (1) the Northern Sea Route (NSR) or North East Passage (NEP) along the Russian coast of Siberia, (2) the North West Passage (NWP) through the Canadian Arctic Archipelago and (3) the Transpolar Route via the North Pole. The latter is the shortest lane, but for the near future is also not navigable. The NSR and NWP can reduce the travel times and fuel costs between Northern Europe and Northeast Asia by approximately 40%.<sup>27</sup> The NSR is already up and running, with its peak season in between July and October, and has experienced substantial increases in traffic over the last decade.<sup>28</sup> Over 18 million tons of goods were transported on the NSR in 2018, signifying an increase of almost 70% compared to the previous year.<sup>29</sup> Last year, around 25 million tons of goods were shipped along the NSR.<sup>30</sup> Overall, vessel traffic in both the NWP and NSR is projected to grow.<sup>31</sup>

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24 AMAP, p. 9.

25 Thomas Nilsen, 'The dream of an Arctic railway fades as Sami herders signal 'veto'', *Arctic Today*, 5 March 2020.

26 *Canada's Arctic and Northern Policy Framework*, The Government of Canada, 2019.

27 Charles M. Perry and Bobby Andersen, *New Strategic Dynamics in the Arctic Region. Implications for National Security and International Collaboration*. Cambridge, MA: Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, February 2012, p. 8.

28 Todd C. Stevenson, Jeremy Davies, Henry P. Huntington and Whit Sheard, 'An examination of trans-Arctic vessel routing in the Central Arctic Ocean', in: *Marine Policy* 100, 2019, pp.83-89; Scott R. Stephenson, Lawson W. Brigham and Laurence C. Smith, 'Marine accessibility along Russia's Northern Sea Route', in: *Polar Geography* 37(2), 2014, 111-133.

29 '[Norway, Russia Dispute Arctic Shipping Route's Development](#)', *The Moscow Times*, 26 August 2019.

30 Tom Vennink, '[In het noordelijkste stadje van Rusland kunnen ze niet wachten tot de ijskappen smelten](#)', *De Volkskrant*, 10 februari 2020.

31 Stevenson e.a., An examination of trans-Arctic vessel routing in the Central Arctic Ocean.

So far, the routes have predominantly been used for local transport purposes<sup>32</sup>, mainly by oil and gas tankers<sup>33</sup>, but they are increasingly deemed to have global-trade potential. Russian President Putin has declared the NSR a top priority and aims for annual shipments to reach 80 million tons by 2024. The feasibility of this goal is, however, debatable, as even the Russian Ministry of Natural Resources cast its doubts and re-estimated the maximum amount of shipping at 52 million tons.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, in the US part of the Arctic, vessel traffic is projected to grow somewhere between 100% and 500% by 2025.<sup>35</sup> Summertime tourism has increased in the last two decades and is expected to continue to grow.<sup>36</sup> In this respect, thirteen new ice-capable cruise vessels were launched in 2019 by various operators around the world and at least 28 are to be commissioned by 2022.<sup>37</sup> However, due to the seasonal limitations of these routes the number of shipping companies that plan to sail ships into the area remains low and most of the current ships in the area are support and service vessels.<sup>38</sup> Economic ventures in the Arctic will likely remain difficult. Last year, the tonnage of goods shipped along the NSR was equal to the amount passing through the Suez Canal on a weekly basis.<sup>39</sup> The weather conditions are extremely volatile and the costs (incurred by the lack of adequate infrastructures, high insurance premiums, limited Search and Rescue (SAR) capacities, the need for icebreakers and oil-spill prevention) as well as the environmental risks will probably remain high in the foreseeable future.<sup>40</sup>

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32 Community re-supply and resource extraction.

33 Stephenson, Brigham and Smith, Marine accessibility along Russia's Northern Sea Route.

34 Atle Staalesen, '[Ministry hints Putin's Arctic ambitions are not realistic](#)', *The Barents Observer*, 18 January 2019.

35 *A 10-Year Projection of Maritime Activity in the U.S. Arctic Region*, US Committee on the Marine Transportation System (CMTS), 2015.

36 IPCC, Summary for Policymakers.

37 Malte Humpert, 'France's Ponant to offer North Pole cruises starting in 2021', *Arctic Today*, 22 May 2019.

38 Atle Staalesen, 'There is no ice left on Northern Sea Route', *The Barents Observer*, 28 August 2019.

39 Tom Vennink, *De Volkskrant*, 10 februari 2020.

40 UK Ministry of Defence, *Global Strategic Trends*, p. 263; AIV, p. 15; Eeva Turunen, '[Resources in the Arctic 2019](#)', *Nordregio*, January 2019; Stevenson e.a., *An examination of trans-Arctic vessel routing in the Central Arctic Ocean*.

**Figure 2 The three Arctic sea routes<sup>41</sup>**



Second, the Arctic is known to contain abundant resources. The US Geological Survey estimated in 2008 that the Arctic seabed contains about 13% of the world’s remaining undiscovered oil, 30% of undiscovered natural gas, and 20% of undiscovered natural gas liquids.<sup>42</sup> Most of the areas known to contain gas and oil resources, approximately 90%, are located on states’ continental shelves and are therefore already within their uncontested Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ).<sup>43</sup> Oil and gas reserves are predominantly located offshore, which makes extraction difficult and requires expensive ‘state of the art’ technology. Therefore, the extraction of Arctic gas remains economically less attractive than other (shale) alternatives.<sup>44</sup> Apart from oil and gas, various minerals and coal resources are also to be found in the area. Overall, Arctic resources are becoming more accessible due to thawing ice, yet their exploitation and development remain dependent on technological innovations, global supply and demand dynamics, market prices and political agreements. In terms of resource locations and the security challenges that come with extraction and economic potential, the Arctic region presents a varied picture (see Figure 3). In the Norwegian and Russian parts of the Barents Sea,

41 Julian E. Barnes, ‘Arctic Passage Opens Challenges for U.S. Military’, *The Wall Street Journal*, 12 January 2014.

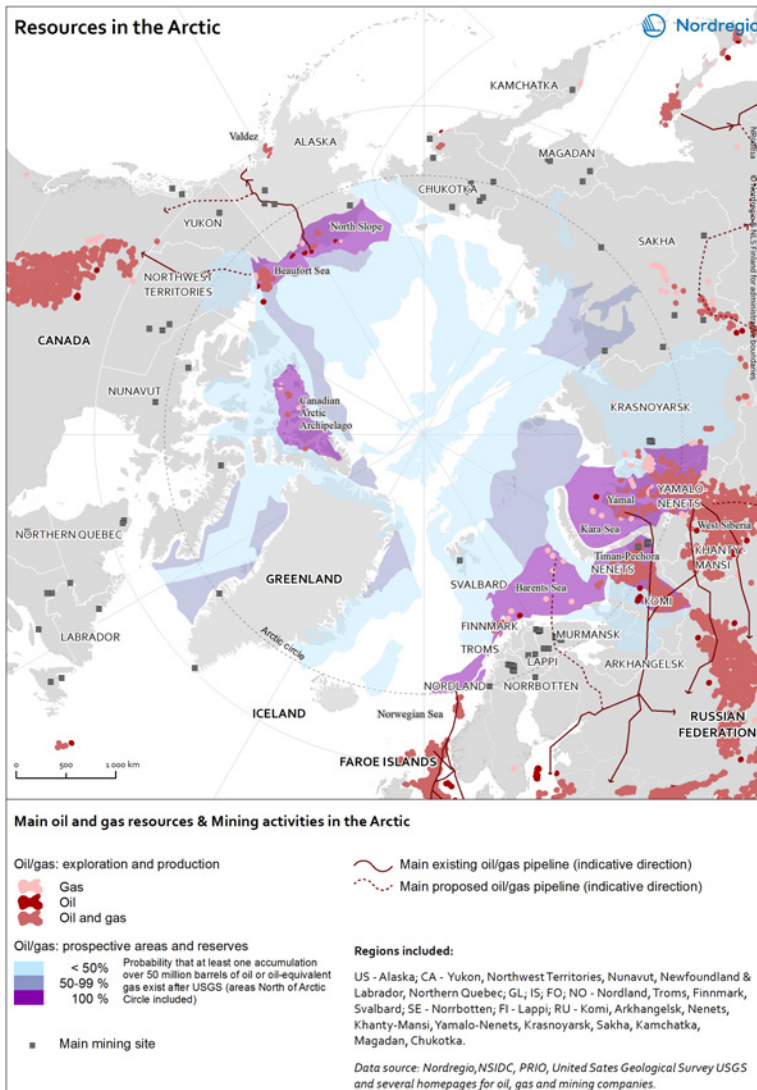
42 *U.S. Geological Survey: Assessment of Undiscovered Oil and Gas in the Arctic, 2009*.

43 Alex Williams, Aisling O’Sullivan Darcy and Angela Wilkinson, *The future of Arctic enterprise: Long-term outlook and implications*, Oxford: Smith School of Enterprise and the Environment, November 2011; Andreas Østhagen, *The New Geopolitics of the Arctic: Russia, China and the EU*, Brussels: Wilfried Martens Centre, April 2019, p. 4.

44 AIV, p. 12.

for example, oil and gas are already being exploited, whereas in other areas struggles with ice cover and infrastructural problems continue.<sup>45</sup>

**Figure 3 Arctic resources<sup>46</sup>**



45 Østhaugen, *The New Geopolitics of the Arctic: Russia, China and the EU*, p. 4; Turunen, [Resources in the Arctic 2019](#).

46 Turunen, [Resources in the Arctic 2019](#).



Third, opportunities for commercial fishing in the international waters of the Central Arctic Ocean (CAO) are likely to increase in the coming years, because climate change is causing major fish stocks (e.g. cod and halibut) to migrate further north as their habitats in lower latitudes become warmer.<sup>47</sup> However, economic competition or significant Arctic fisheries are unlikely to develop, because the most commercially important sub-Arctic species live within the EEZs.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, in October 2018 the EU and nine other countries<sup>49</sup> signed the International Agreement to Prevent Unregulated High Seas Fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean, prohibiting commercial fishing in the CAO for the next 16 years.<sup>50</sup>

**Figure 4 The Central Arctic Ocean<sup>51</sup>**



47 Nikolas Sellheim, 'Canada becomes Third Party to Ratify Commercial Fishing Regulation in the Central Arctic Ocean', *The Polar Connection*, 3 June 2019; Fiona Harvey, 'Commercial fishing banned across much of the Arctic', *The Guardian*, 3 October 2018.

48 *Fisheries Management and the Arctic in the Context of Climate Change*, Directorate-General for International Policies, Brussels: European Union, June 2015. Half of the US' fishing stocks originate within its EEZ of the coast of Alaska, a number similar to the other Arctic states. See: James Stavridis, *Sea Power The History and Geopolitics of the World's Oceans*, New York: Random House, 2017, pp. 332-333.

49 US, Canada, Russia, Norway, Greenland/Denmark, China, Japan, Iceland, South Korea, and the European Union (which includes 28 member states (pre-Brexit)).

50 Erik J. Molenaar, 'Participation in the Central Arctic Ocean Fisheries Agreement', in: Akiho Shibata, Leilei Zou, Nikolas Sellheim and Maria Scopeletti (Eds.), *Emerging Legal Orders in the Arctic*, Routledge, 2019.

51 Sellheim, Canada becomes Third Party to Ratify Commercial Fishing Regulation in the Central Arctic Ocean.



## Political-military trends

Whereas climate change in the Arctic acts as the catalyst for various local and global security trends, the international geopolitical dimension forms the framework within which these developments take place. Together, the ecological, economic and political-military trends put pressure on the Arctic, prompting stakeholders to set out their strategies before the ice melts. Recently, the Expert Group of the International Military Council on Climate and Security described the emerging opportunities in the Arctic as an “emerging bounty” which “falls within a complex, multiparty web of contested territorial waters and exclusive economic zones, inevitably inviting strategic competition, security posturing and potential confrontation.”<sup>52</sup>

During the Cold War, the Arctic was a centre of Soviet-American tensions, as nuclear missiles stood ready at each side of the North Pole and nuclear submarines were hidden beneath the Arctic ice.<sup>53</sup> The end of the Cold War meant that the Arctic region lost most of its geostrategic relevance and the era was characterised by cooperation and low tensions, sometimes referred to as the “Arctic spirit”.<sup>54</sup> However, due to growing great power competition, the region is now firmly back on the international geopolitical map.<sup>55</sup> It is not new, however, that countries use the Arctic to play geopolitical games, as Russia demonstrated when it planted its flag on the North Pole in 2007.<sup>56</sup> In the face of growing tensions between Russia and its Arctic neighbours, as well as the increased focus on the Arctic from outside the region, there is a risk that tensions will spill over.<sup>57</sup>

Several global trends have the potential to influence the so far cooperative relations in the Arctic. Increased rivalry between China and the US, the continuing troubled relationship between Western states and Russia as well as the overall weakening of the international order characterise global politics.<sup>58</sup> The American-European relationship has struggled since the election of Donald Trump to the White House.<sup>59</sup> Divisions within NATO, the US withdrawal from several arms control agreements and the rise of China

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52 *The World Climate and Security Report 2020*, The Expert Group of the International Military Council on Climate and Security (IMCCS), February 2020, p. 28.

53 Louise van Schaik and Ties Dams, *The Arctic Elephant: Europe and the Geopolitics of the High North*, Clingendael Policy Brief, November 2019.

54 *Event Summary “Cooperation in the Arctic Spirit” – Report from the Roundtable on Arctic Security in Stavanger*, Munich Security Conference, 28 August 2018.

55 Harri Mikkola, *The Geostrategic Arctic: Hard Security in the High North*, Helsinki: FIIA, 2019.

56 Tom Parfitt, ‘Russia plants flag on North Pole seabed’, *The Guardian*, 2 August 2007.

57 Ekatarina Klimenko, *The Geopolitics of a Changing Arctic*, Stockholm: SIPRI, December 2019; Ulf Sverdrup e.a., *A Governance and Risk Inventory for a Changing Arctic*, February 2020, p. 2.

58 Ulf Sverdrup e.a., *A Governance and Risk Inventory for a Changing Arctic*, p. 3.

59 Dick Zandee, *Resetting NATO and European strategic autonomy*, Clingendael Alert, December 2019.

are a few examples that signify a change in the international multilateral landscape, whose effects can already be felt in the Arctic context.<sup>60</sup>

In 2018, China released its Arctic White Paper, which refers to China as a “near-Arctic state” and describes the trans-Arctic shipping routes as the “Polar Silk Road” concept.<sup>61</sup> Interestingly, this idea had already been coined by a Russian minister, in 2011, to seek much needed partners in its aim to develop the Russian Arctic coast.<sup>62</sup> Although China and Russia view each other with mistrust, they have created a flexible strategic partnership to pragmatically cooperate on a case-by-case basis.<sup>63</sup> The US and EU sanctions imposed on Russia’s energy sector in 2014 include Arctic offshore oil and gas exploration. Since Russia lacks the technological knowhow to exploit shale and Arctic fields on its own, China has presented itself as a ‘near-Arctic’ cooperation partner which has led Gazprom Neft to seek joint ventures with Chinese corporations, including the China National Petroleum Company.<sup>64</sup> The US-China trade war is also affecting the Sino-Russian partnership, as the US has blacklisted the Chinese shipping company COSCO which cooperated in the Russian Yamal LNG projects.<sup>65</sup> Strategic (economic) cooperation between China and Russia is increasing, with the Chinese providing the funding and the Russians the geostrategic location for resource exploitation as well as access to the NSR. Both countries have also sought partnerships in the development of satellite navigation and military exercises in the North Pacific.

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60 Brigitte Dekker, Sico van der Meer, Maaïke Okano-Heijmans, *The multilateral system under stress Charting Europe’s path forward*, Clingendael Report, August 2019.

61 *China’s Arctic Policy*, State Council of the People’s Republic of China, January 2018; Lyle J. Goldstein, ‘What Does China Want with the Arctic?’, *The National Interest*, 7 September 2019.

62 Henry Tillman, Yang Jian and Egill Thor Nielsson, ‘The Polar Silk Road: China’s New Frontier of International Cooperation’, *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies* 4(3), 2018, p. 347.

63 Camilla T. N. Sørensen and Ekaterina Klimenko, *Emerging Chinese-Russian Cooperation in the Arctic: Possibilities and Constraints*, Stockholm: SIPRI, June 2017, p. 25; Anita Parlow, ‘Does a Russia-China alignment in the Arctic have staying power?’, *Arctic Today*, 27 June 2019.

64 Nastassia Astrasheuskaya, ‘US and EU sanctions take toll on Russian oil and gas exploration’, *Financial Times*, 11 November 2019.

65 Sabina Zawadzki and Ekaterina Kravtsova, ‘U.S. sanctions on COSCO hit LNG tankers in Russia’s Arctic’, *Reuters*, 30 September 2019.

Russia has gradually strengthened its military presence in the High North<sup>66</sup> since 2010 by creating new Arctic units, refurbishing old airfields and infrastructure, and establishing new military bases along its Arctic coastline.<sup>67</sup> To a certain extent, these measures can be explained by the need to replace outdated infrastructure and to support legitimate security interests of Russia as an Arctic coastal state.<sup>68</sup> On the other hand, Russia is extending its military activities beyond the coastal areas into the Central Arctic area. In 2019 the Northern Fleet Joint Strategic Command (JSC) has been repurposed to include Arctic-specific military technology and training; Russia resumed patrolling the airspace in the North Pole area after a 30-year absence.<sup>69</sup> There is also a concerted effort to establish an integrated network of air defence and coastal missile systems, early warning radar and electronic warfare equipment.<sup>70</sup> A new Anti-Access Area Denial (A2/AD) system<sup>71</sup> has been built up, covering the northern part of Scandinavia and the sea area to its north.<sup>72</sup> Moreover, Russia currently has the world's largest fleet of icebreakers, numbering 36 ships spread across the Arctic Ocean.<sup>73</sup> It is now planning to expand its flotilla with nine new nuclear-powered icebreakers in order to keep the NSR navigable throughout the year.<sup>74</sup> On top of this, three larger, militarised icebreakers of the new Leader class are planned to be delivered in 2027.<sup>75</sup> China recently acquired its second, and first domestically built, icebreaker and has ambitions for a nuclear-

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66 Many publications use the term 'the High North' interchangeably with 'the Arctic'. However, whereas 'the Arctic' refers to a clear geographically demarcated area, 'the High North' is a concept that is not often defined. The notion originally stems from Norwegian policy, where it refers to a subregion: 'the European Arctic'. This area stretches from Greenland in the West to the Norwegian/Russian border in the Barents Sea in the East, and encompasses areas of strategic importance such as the Greenland-Iceland-UK (GIUK) Gap and Svalbard. This report uses the term either when it refers to the European Arctic or when an original publication employs the term.

67 Nurlan Aliyev, *Russia's Military Capabilities in the Arctic*, Talinn: International Centre for Defence and Security, 25 June 2019.

68 Information from interviews.

69 Thomas Nilsen, 'Russia's Top General Indirectly Confirms Arctic Deployment of the Unstoppable Kinzhal Missile', *The Barents Observer*, 19 December 2019; Sergey Sukhankin, 'Russia's Two-pronged Approach to Militarizing the Arctic', *Jamestown Foundation Eurasia Daily Monitor* 16(70), May 2019.

70 *Russia Military Power: Building a Military to Support Great Power Aspirations*, Defense Intelligence Agency, Washington, DC.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2017.

71 A weapon system or a strategy used to prevent an adversary from occupying or traversing an area of land, sea or air.

72 Information from interviews.

73 Matthew Kupfer and Matthew Bodner, 'Hot Air, Cold War: How Russia Spooks Its Arctic Neighbors', *The Moscow Times*, 19 May 2017.

74 *Strategy of the development of the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation and the national security up to 2020*, The Government of the Russian Federation, 2013; 'Russia Moves to Expand Its Arctic Icebreaker Fleet, Already the World's Largest', *The Moscow Times*, 20 September 2019.

75 Thomas Nilsen, 'In a Last Move as PM, Medvedev Secured Funding for First Leader-class Icebreaker', *The Barents Observer*, 17 January 2020.

powered variant. The US (Coast Guard) merely has one heavy and medium icebreaker in operation.<sup>76</sup> The Polar Security Cutter (PSC) Program aims to replace them by three heavy and three medium versions, of which the first PSC is planned to be delivered by 2024.<sup>77</sup>

During a time when Russia is showing assertiveness on several fronts, its behaviour in the Arctic has so far been largely cooperative.<sup>78</sup> It does not have an Arctic military strategy *per se*, and its official documents discuss its military activities in the Arctic only in broad terms.<sup>79</sup> Similarly, global uncertainty exists concerning China's actions in the South China Sea, where it has claimed territory and established military bases on several islands. This is in stark contrast to Beijing's formal positive stance towards the applicability of international law in the Arctic.<sup>80</sup> Both countries are being carefully watched by the western Arctic states.<sup>81</sup>

Another potential geopolitical challenge is related to the debates over questions of sovereignty and international law, sparked by the emergence of previous ice-covered territories. Unlike, for example, Antarctica, there is no comprehensive treaty for the Arctic. The five Arctic coastal states<sup>82</sup> do not regard this as a necessity, arguing that existing territorial disputes can also be resolved without such a treaty. Despite the absence of an Arctic treaty, there are several international agreements that guide the activities in the Arctic (see Annex 3). The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) forms the overarching legal framework, under which Arctic states have submitted territorial claims<sup>83</sup>, including the delimitation of maritime borders. For a more detailed examination, see the contribution by Timo Koivurova (Annex 2). The main legal issues are related to the extended continental shelves, the interpretation

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76 Paul C. Avey, 'The Icebreaker Gap Doesn't Mean America is Losing in the Arctic', *War on the Rocks*, 28 November 2019.

77 *Polar Security Cutter*, Acquisition Directorate of the United States Coast Guard.

78 Stacy Closson, *Russian Foreign Policy in the Arctic: Balancing Cooperation and Competition*, Washington, DC.: Wilson Center, June 2017.

79 Nazrin Mehdieva, *Russia's Arctic Papers: The evolution of Strategic Thinking on the High North*, Rome: NATO Defense College, 19 November 2018.

80 'China and the Arctic' & 'China's Policy Goals and Basic Principles on the Arctic, in: *China's Arctic Policy*, State Council of the People's Republic of China, January 2018.

81 *Testimony of Sherri Goodman before the Senate Subcommittee on Security of the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation "Expanding Opportunities, Challenges, and Threats in the Arctic: A Focus on the US Coast Guard Arctic Strategic Outlook"*, The United States Senate, 12 December 2019; also affirmed in interviews.

82 Canada, Denmark (Greenland), Norway, Russia and the United States.

83 The United States has submitted territorial claims, but not in the UNCLOS context as the US is not a signatory party to the Convention.

of the Spitsbergen Treaty and the North West Passage.<sup>84</sup> Many of these issues remain unresolved, but are unlikely to trigger large conflicts, because of their limited economic and political significance.<sup>85</sup> It should be noted that vessels sailing through the NWP and NEP are dependent on Canada and respectively Russia for support with e.g. Search and Rescue (SAR). In that sense, freedom of the sea does not imply zero contact between the flag state of the ship and the coastal state. Since Russia regards parts of the route as internal waters, it has claimed the right to regulate commercial shipping passing through these waters. Currently, Russia requires every ship that transits to hire Russian icebreaker escorts, to have a Russian pilot on board, to give advance notice and to pay a fee. Furthermore, it has adopted legislation that prohibits foreign vessels from transporting oil and gas along the NSR. In contrast, the US views the route as international waters and thus labels Russia's regulatory requirements as illegal.<sup>86</sup>

The melting of Arctic ice is not the primary factor driving the *geopolitisation* of the region. The global competition between the big powers – China, Russia and the US – is increasingly affecting Arctic security. Thus, “the worse the relations between these actors *globally* are, the more tensions are likely to occur in the Arctic, materialising through increasingly bellicose statements, sanctions and military posturing and exercises.”<sup>87</sup> Enhanced military posturing in the Arctic does not automatically result in increased political-military tensions and conflict; e.g. Armed Forces/Coast Guards will have to conduct more policing, monitoring and SAR operations. Nevertheless, from a security perspective it is important that “military developments are balanced, transparent and predictable”<sup>88</sup>, which raises the question whether the existing Arctic security governance is sufficient to deal with this challenge.

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84 For the details: see Annex 2.

85 Østhagen, *The New Geopolitics of the Arctic*, p. 5.

86 *Changes in the Arctic: Background and Issues for Congress*, Congressional Research Service, Washington DC., January 2020.

87 See the contribution by Andreas Østhagen at Annex 1.

88 Ulf Sverdrup e.a., *A Governance and Risk Inventory for a Changing Arctic*, p. 11.

## 3 Arctic actors

In order to assess Arctic security, it is also important to take a closer look at the views and activities of the Arctic actors. The attitudes of the Arctic states are the product of a variety of factors, among which is the geographical location of the country concerned. Logically, the Arctic states with most territory in or near the Arctic have the biggest set of interests. They form the first category in this chapter, followed by China and three European countries (France, Germany and the UK); the Netherlands is treated separately in the chapter 5. Finally, the two major multilateral organisations (the EU and NATO) are discussed.

One could argue that the ecological dimension offers the most scope for international cooperation, as it is in the interest of all actors to learn how climate change impacts affect the unique ecological conditions and in what way climate change in the Arctic has repercussions for other parts of the world. Environmental protection and the sustainable development of the Arctic are flagged as key elements in the Arctic policies of all the researched states. Local livelihoods and key industries are reliant on the Arctic's natural environment and resources. Thus, they are at risk due to the changing environmental conditions. In addition, especially the Arctic states emphasise the vulnerability of traditional communities at risk of migrating. Two observations can be made regarding the security dimension of the states' ecological interests: first, the ecological trepidations mostly concern *safety* risks (e.g. oil spills and nuclear shipping incidents) instead of *security* risks (defined as political and/or military tensions and conflict); second, the ecological interests are generally connected to their economic interests. In the actors' assessment below the focus is on the political-military and economic elements of their Arctic security strategies, policies and activities.

### The Arctic states

#### Canada

The Canadian Arctic policy is premised on the preservation of Northern communities and was created in close collaboration with Indigenous Peoples. It envisions the North as a potentially major exporting region and destination for foreign investment, with the natural resource sector, tourism and commercial fisheries being the most promising industries.<sup>89</sup> Large-scale resource development has the most straightforward economic

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89 Canada's Arctic and Northern Policy, 2019.

potential, as the Beaufort Sea and Canadian Arctic Islands are estimated to contain a third of the country's conventional oil and gas deposits.<sup>90</sup> No offshore drilling is currently taking place due to a legal prohibition. While the government is concerned about the social and environmental cost of Arctic drilling, debates on the necessity of resource extraction to compete with Russia and the US have resurfaced, especially with the current moratorium due to expire in 2021.<sup>91</sup> Meanwhile, investments in iron mines on Baffin Island are projected to increase annual exports from four to thirty million tonnes.<sup>92</sup>

In terms of Arctic shipping, Canada's NWP is less operational than the NEP. Icebreaker support is lacking, although it is expected to be enhanced by the commissioning of new icebreaker vessels. The development of coastal infrastructure is prioritised, as there are currently only three deep-water ports in the Canadian Arctic, all of which are located on Baffin Island.<sup>93</sup> In contrast to Russia's policy on the NEP, Canada allows for free transit along the NWP with no funding mechanism to finance needed support services.<sup>94</sup> Still, Canada insists on its jurisdiction over the waterway and the right to deny foreign vessels, which signals a possibility for tensions with the US and others who would rather see the NWP as an international strait.<sup>95</sup> So far, however, Canada and the US have 'agreed to disagree' on the matter. In practice, there have been no problems and the US merely uses the NWP as an exception.<sup>96</sup>

Canada's Arctic policy puts emphasis on demonstrating its sovereignty. Changes in the region have called for an increased presence of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) and Coast Guard in the Canadian presence in the Arctic over the long term while working co-operatively with allies and partners.<sup>97</sup> The CAF's footprint in the Arctic is growing. Six new Arctic and Offshore Patrol Ships (AOPSS) for the Canadian Navy have been

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90 *Oil and Gas in Canada's North - Active Exploration and New Development*, The Government of Canada, February 2012; Turunen, [Resources in the Arctic 2019](#); Kells Boland, 'The Russian Northern Sea Route and a Canadian Arctic Seaway', in: *Canada's Arctic Agenda: Into the Vortex*, edited by John Higginbotham and Jennifer Spence, Waterloo, ON.: Centre for International Governance Innovation, 2019.

91 Heather Exner-Pirot, 'Canada's Northern Economic Development Paradigm and Its Failures', in: *Canada's Arctic Agenda: Into the Vortex*, edited by John Higginbotham and Jennifer Spence, Waterloo, ON.: Centre for International Governance Innovation, 2019; 'Canada 'falling behind' because of Arctic oil drilling moratorium', *CBC*, 14 March 2019.

92 Boland, *The Russian Northern Sea Route and a Canadian Arctic Seaway*.

93 Canada's Arctic and Northern Policy, 2019; Boland, *The Russian Northern Sea Route and a Canadian Arctic Seaway*, p. 35.

94 Boland, *The Russian Northern Sea Route and a Canadian Arctic Seaway*, p. 37.

95 Ken Crist and David Biette, *Canada and the Arctic: The Issue of Northern Sovereignty*, Wilson Center, 11 December 2007.

96 Information from interviews.

97 Jim Dorschner, 'High North', *Jane's Defence Weekly* 57(8), 19 February 2020, p. 30.

ordered.<sup>98</sup> The Canadian Coast Guard is to be expanded by two AOPSS, sixteen multi-purpose vessels and six new icebreakers.<sup>99</sup> To improve SAR capabilities in the Arctic, Canada announced the enlargement of its fleet of *Cormorant* helicopters.<sup>100</sup>

Where Canada has typically opposed a more active NATO in the Arctic, fearing it would unnecessarily provoke Russia, recent policies show a greater willingness to include NATO as a response to a militarising Arctic region. To illustrate this, Canada has participated in the NATO-led 'Trident Juncture' exercise and has invited NATO allies to join Canadian military exercises in the Arctic.<sup>101</sup> Bilaterally, Canada has focused on cooperation with its North American Arctic allies: the US and Greenland (Denmark).<sup>102</sup> In the European Arctic, Canada has sought closer military ties with Norway and Denmark.<sup>103</sup> Operation 'Nanook' is a series of joint, inter-Agency and multinational activities, including exercises with the participation of Denmark, the US and other Arctic Allies.<sup>104</sup> Relations with Russia are more delicate. Canada aims to keep the Arctic as a neutral area by recommencing bilateral dialogue on the topics of Indigenous Peoples, scientific cooperation, environmental protection, shipping and SAR.<sup>105</sup> Meanwhile, Sino-Canadian relations are balanced between the economic benefits related to collaboration with China on the one hand, and concerns related to the potential for espionage, environmental damage and the loss of Canadian economic sovereignty on the other.<sup>106</sup>

To maintain the long-standing peace and stability in the region, Canada aims to broaden its international engagement on Arctic issues. The Arctic Council is considered the leading forum.<sup>107</sup> Its mandate should not be changed to include political-military issues.<sup>108</sup> The ASFR is not regarded as an option either as the return of Russia to the meeting table is unlikely. In the Canadian view the Arctic states alone should start

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98 Dorscher, High North, p. 30.

99 The Military Balance 2020, International Institute for Security Studies, London, p. 42.

100 Ibid.

101 Rob Huebert, 'Canada and NATO in the Arctic: Responding to Russia?', in: *Canada's Arctic Agenda: Into the Vortex*, edited by John Higginbotham and Jennifer Spence, Waterloo, ON.: Centre for International Governance Innovation, 2019.

102 Canada's Arctic and Northern Policy, 2019.

103 P. Whitney Lackenbauer, 'Global Arctic Leadership in an Era of Cooperation and Competition', in: *Canada's Arctic Agenda: Into the Vortex*, edited by John Higginbotham and Jennifer Spence, Waterloo, ON.: Centre for International Governance Innovation, 2019, p. 71.

104 Dorscher, High North, p. 31.

105 Canada's Arctic and Northern Policy, 2019; Lackenbauer, Global Arctic Leadership in an Era of Cooperation and Competition, p. 71.

106 Lackenbauer, Global Arctic Leadership in an Era of Cooperation and Competition, p. 71.

107 Canada's Arctic and Northern Policy, 2019; Lackenbauer, Global Arctic Leadership in an Era of Cooperation and Competition, p. 69.

108 Information from interviews.



discussions on political-military topics, perhaps in a format that is related to but not part of the Arctic Council. Later on it could be broadened to a wider circle of interested states. The UK has a special place in this regard (the Commonwealth, Five Eyes intelligence cooperation, etc.).<sup>109</sup>

## Denmark

Denmark's primary links with the Arctic are the Faroe Islands and Greenland, of which the latter receives the most attention in its Arctic policy.<sup>110</sup> Greenland has far-reaching autonomy and is responsible for its own economic matters. The island is expected to reap the greatest benefits from increased Arctic activity, due to its strategic location and vast estimated energy resources. The resource potential in the Faroe Islands is less pronounced, although some hesitant attempts at extraction have been made recently.<sup>111</sup> Greenland's geostrategic importance is evident, as it is located between Europe and the US. The island facilitates a key US military presence in the region in the form of the Thule Air Base that is used for space surveillance.<sup>112</sup> Furthermore, it has now been on the Chinese radar for a while.<sup>113</sup> Recently, the Danish government has expressed concern about China's interest in Greenland, which includes the establishment of a research station, a satellite ground station and the expansion of mining activities.<sup>114</sup> Similarly, the Faroe Islands have become a stage for geopolitical tensions, after US officials began to urge the archipelago not to sign a contract with the Chinese tech company Huawei.<sup>115</sup>

Denmark is responsible for foreign policy and defence concerning Greenland. The Danish Arctic Strategy 2011-2020 points to sovereignty enforcement, increasing regional demands and requirements for improved surveillance, command, control and intelligence, and operational capabilities. Copenhagen has responded to the recent changes in the Arctic by merging its Greenland Command and Faroe Command into a streamlined Joint Arctic Command with its headquarters in Nuuk (Greenland's capital).

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109 Information from interviews.

110 *Kingdom of Denmark Strategy for the Arctic 2011-2020*, Governments of Denmark, Faroes and Greenland, 2011, p. 33.

111 'Island Drilling bags rig contract with Faroe', *Offshore Energy Today*, 3 May 2019; Craig Guthrie, '[Faroe Islands enlists help in exploration drive](#)', *Petroleum Economist*, 5 July 2019.

112 Piotr Szymański, '*Overstretched? Denmark's security policy and armed forces in light of the new Defence Agreement*', Warsaw: Centre for Eastern Studies, 20 April 2018; Talal Hussein, 'Thule Air Base: inside the US's northernmost military base in Greenland', *Airforce Technology*, 5 June 2019.

113 Ties Dams & Louise van Schaik, *Presence before power – China's Arctic strategy in Iceland and Greenland*, Clingendael Policy Brief, 2020.

114 *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2019*, US Department of Defense, May 2019.

115 Adam Satariano, '[At the Edge of the World, a New Battleground for the U.S. and China](#)', *The New York Times*, 20 December 2019.

Denmark is militarily present in the area by the deployment of a frigate and by operating Maritime Patrol Aircraft from Kangerlussuaq (Greenland).<sup>116</sup> Emergency operations (SAR, disaster relief, etc.) are the responsibility of the Joint Arctic Command. In case it needs more assets it can call on the Arctic Response Force – a concept or programme by which the Danish Armed Forces can direct additional assets to assist the operations of the Joint Arctic Command.<sup>117</sup> The Joint Arctic Command has also started to increase interoperability with allies and partners, often by exercising with the US, Canada, Iceland and France.<sup>118</sup>

Denmark's Arctic policy aims at keeping the Arctic a low-tension area. Thus, addressing climate change issues and economic effects should preferably not be influenced by geopolitical competition. The Arctic Council should continue to function as the main cooperation body. If hard security issues need to be addressed, this should first and foremost be carried out by the Arctic states themselves. However, the latest Danish Intelligence Risk Assessment clearly concludes that "the military focus on the Arctic is growing" as a result of the great power game.<sup>119</sup> The assessment states that "military activities in regions bordering the Arctic could potentially have a spill over effect on developments in the Arctic".<sup>120</sup> Thus "it is likely that balancing considerations for the Kingdom's allies and the defence of the Kingdom's strategic interests against the ambition to maintain the Arctic as a low-tension region will prove increasingly challenging."<sup>121</sup>

## Finland

Finland's economic interests in the region mainly concern mining, tourism and forestry. Lacking direct access to the Arctic sea areas and without an immediate national energy interest in the region, Finland is seeking to present itself as a service provider for commercial activities in the Arctic.<sup>122</sup> Russia is the main partner for Finnish energy and maritime expertise.<sup>123</sup> Being an important icebreaker nation, Finland currently has nine

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116 Dorscher, High North, p. 32.

117 Information from interviews.

118 Rachel Ellehuus, Paul Zukunft, Kim J. Jørgensen, Craig A. Baines, *Shifting Currents in the Arctic Perspectives from Three Arctic Littoral States*, Northern Connections, Center for Strategic and International Studies and the Lillian and Robert D. Stuart Jr. Center, May 2019, p. 7.

119 *Intelligence Risk Assessment 2019 – An assessment of developments abroad impacting Danish security*, Danish Defence Intelligence Service, 20 November 2019, p. 8.

120 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

121 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

122 Vincent-Gregor Schulze, *Arctic Strategy Round-Up*, Helmholtz Centre for Polar and Marine Research, 2017, p. 6.

123 *Finland's Strategy for the Arctic Region 2013*, The Government of Finland, 2013.

operating icebreakers and has supplied vessels to Canada, Germany, Russia, Sweden, the US and others.<sup>124</sup>

A key objective in Finland's Arctic strategy is to enhance its position as an Arctic country and to strengthen international Arctic cooperation.<sup>125</sup> Helsinki is preparing a new Arctic Strategy, but a continuation of the country's existing approach on keeping the Arctic as a low-tension area can be expected. The Finnish Armed Forces are well-prepared to operate in Arctic conditions, at sea, on land and in the air. In 2021, the country will host the multinational exercise 'Arctic Lock' with expected participation from all the Nordic countries and several NATO allies, including the US.<sup>126</sup>

Finland strongly supports multilateral structures – primarily the Arctic Council – to address regional issues. Helsinki wants the EU to be a principal actor in the Arctic and thus advocates more involvement on the part of the EU, particularly regarding environmental issues<sup>127</sup>, as well as the consolidation of an EU Arctic policy.<sup>128</sup> Positive relations with Russia are paramount, based on economic and geographic considerations.<sup>129</sup> At the same time, Finland has responded to the growing (Russian) activity in the Arctic by enhancing its military cooperation with other Western allies.<sup>130</sup> In particular, a trilateral agreement between Finland, Sweden and the US was signed in 2018 to expand defence cooperation on all fronts.<sup>131</sup> Finland is not in favour of a new forum to deal with political-military issues. Nonetheless, the Finnish Prime Minister stated at the 2019 Arctic Circle conference that he wanted to initiate an Arctic Council security meeting.<sup>132</sup>

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124 Arne Finne, '[Finland Wants to Break the Ice – For Everyone, Everywhere](#)', *High North News*, 10 April 2018.

125 Finland's Strategy for the Arctic Region 2013.

126 Dorscher, *High North*, p. 32.

127 Information from interviews.

128 *Action plan for the update of the Arctic Strategy*, The Government of Finland, March 2017. Confirmed by interviews.

129 Kenneth Yalowitz and Stacy Closson, '[Finland Seeks Continued U.S.-Russian Cooperation in the Arctic](#)', *National Interest*, 26 April 2017.

130 '[Fighter jets flying low over Arctic Finland for military drill in northern Sweden](#)', *The Barents Observer*, 22 March 2019; Helene Cooper, '[Military Drills in Arctic Aim to Counter Russia, but the First Mission Is to Battle the Cold](#)', *The New York Times*, 12 April 2019; '[US, Norwegian troops join military drill in northern Finland](#)', *The Barents Observer*, 19 May 2019; Harri Mikkola, 'The Geostrategic Arctic. Hard Security in the High North', *The Finnish Institute of International Affairs*, April 2019, p. 6.

131 Aaron Mehta, '[Finland, Sweden and US sign trilateral agreement, with eye on increased exercises](#)', *Defense News*, 9 May 2018.

132 Information from interviews.

## Iceland

Iceland's economy largely relies on Arctic resources for its fishing, tourism and energy production industries.<sup>133</sup> Regionally, Iceland advocates enhanced economic cooperation with Greenland and the Faroe Islands to strengthen their international and political-security position.<sup>134</sup> Iceland has been keen to enhance its economic relations with China as an Arctic shipping partner and potential export market, which is greeted with little enthusiasm by the US.<sup>135</sup>

Located on a geopolitical fault line, Iceland represents a key strategic asset in the rivalry between Russia and the US. After numerous incursions by Russian fighter aircraft, Iceland invited NATO allies to periodically patrol its airspace.<sup>136</sup> The US has reinstated its military presence on the island to monitor the so-called *GIUK gap*<sup>137</sup> as well as Russian aerial and submarine activity in the region.<sup>138</sup> On paper, Iceland strongly objects against any further militarisation of the Arctic and considers the Arctic Council to be the most important forum for international Arctic cooperation on soft security issues.<sup>139</sup> Meanwhile, despite having no Armed Forces, Iceland is modernising its Coast Guard, investing in new capabilities, strengthening bilateral security ties and augmenting its contributions to NATO.<sup>140</sup>

## Norway

Norway's economic interests in the Arctic mainly concern fishing, tourism and the extraction of energy resources. The Barents Sea that offers better operating conditions than other parts of the Arctic due to the warm North Atlantic drift is of high value to the Norwegian economy, as it is a growing-up area for several species of fish and

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133 *A Parliamentary Resolution on Iceland's Arctic Policy*, The Government of Iceland, 2011.

134 Ibid.

135 Guðbjörg Ríkey Th. Hauksdóttir, [Pressure in the Arctic: China-Iceland Relations in the Era of U.S.-China Rivalry](#), Stockholm: Institute for Security and Development Policy, December 2019.

136 Trude Pettersen, '[U.S. military could return to Iceland](#)', *The Barents Observer*, 11 September 2015; Siri Gulliksen Tømmerbakke, '[Norway Will Solve Missions on Iceland with the Brand New F-35 Fighter Aircraft](#)', *High North News*, 30 January 2020.

137 Greenland-Iceland-UK gap: the sea lanes connecting the Norwegian Sea to the North Atlantic Ocean.

138 Teri Schultz, 'NATO and Washington worry about Russian subs in the High North', *DW*, April 26, 2018; [Iceland's Role in Transatlantic Security Growing](#), NATO Parliamentary Assembly, 14 May 2019.

139 The Government of Iceland, *A Parliamentary Resolution on Iceland's Arctic Policy*.

140 Megan Eckstein, '[Iceland Embracing Its Strategic Location By Supporting NATO Air Defense](#)', *USNI News*, 24 October 2018; NATO Parliamentary Assembly, *Iceland's Role in Transatlantic Security Growing*; *A Parliamentary Resolution on Iceland's Arctic Policy*; *UK and Iceland sign agreement on defence and security cooperation*, Foreign & Commonwealth Office, 26 March 2019.

holds nearly half of Norway's estimated undiscovered oil and gas resources.<sup>141</sup> Fish is an important commodity in the High North; Norway earned 25 billion Norwegian Krone (NOK) in exports in 2016.<sup>142</sup> Despite persistent tensions on political and military grounds, Norway and Russia remain in close cooperation on fisheries management and environmental protection in the Barents Sea.<sup>143</sup> Meanwhile, the petroleum industry is expected to remain prevalent, with more oil wells currently being developed than ever before.<sup>144</sup> The extraction of Arctic reserves could become indispensable for Norway to maintain its position as a leading European gas and oil supplier.

Due to its direct border with Russia and its strategically important position in the European Arctic, Norway is actively involved in Arctic security.<sup>145</sup> Norway has balanced its position between its NATO membership and maintaining bilateral relations with Russia.<sup>146</sup> Moscow's enhanced military activity in the region is viewed with significant concern, leading Norway to maintain a direct communication channel with the Russian General Staff.<sup>147</sup> The archipelago of Svalbard constitutes a specific area of tensions.<sup>148</sup> Recently, Russia has objected to the non-preferential treatment it enjoys on Svalbard, referring to limitations that Norway has placed on Russian economic activities and helicopter traffic.<sup>149</sup> While the two share a long history of local disputes, Russo-Norwegian relations have been characterised by a willingness to resolve them.<sup>150</sup> The different interpretation of the applicability of the rights of the contracting parties to the Spitsbergen Treaty can potentially lead to issues between Norway and these countries about their access rights in the Svalbard EEZ, also for scientific research.<sup>151</sup>

Responding to an increasingly volatile Arctic environment, Norway has sought to strengthen its security policy. It is bolstering its national defence structures by rebuilding army bases, developing maritime surveillance structures and expanding Arctic military

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141 *Norway's Arctic Strategy – between geopolitics and social development*, The Norwegian Government, 2017.

142 Information from interviews. 25 billion NOK = 2.45 billion euro.

143 *Norway's Arctic Strategy – between geopolitics and social development*, 2017; Ulf Sverdrup e.a., A Governance and Risk Inventory for a Changing Arctic; confirmed by interviewees.

144 Katherine Dunn, 'Norway Is a Green Leader. It's Also Drilling More Oil Wells Than Ever', *Fortune*, 18 October 2019; Jillian Ambrose, 'Campaigners try again to stop Norway drilling for oil in Arctic', *The Guardian*, 5 November 2019; 'Appeals court upholds Norway licenses for Arctic drilling', *AP News*, 23 January 2020.

145 Tyler Cross, 'The NATO Alliance's Role in Arctic Security', *The Maritime Executive*, 11 February 2020.

146 Hilde-Gunn Bye, 'USA in the High North - A Lasting Engagement', *High North News*, 24 January 2020. Confirmed by interviewees.

147 *Norway's Arctic Strategy – between geopolitics and social development*, 2017. Confirmed by interviewees.

148 See Chapter 2 and Annex 2 for further details.

149 '[Russia Wants Talks On Norway's 'Restrictions' To Its Activities On Arctic Islands](#)', *RFE/RL*, 4 February 2020; Amund Trellevik, '[Russia With Stern Svalbard Warning to Norway](#)', *High North News*, 5 February 2020.

150 Information from interviews.

151 Information from interviews.

equipment. Five P-8A Poseidon Maritime Patrol Aircraft have been ordered to improve the country's surveillance capabilities. Three new Arctic patrol vessels will be delivered from 2022 onwards and NH-90 helicopters will be adjusted for combat operations.<sup>152</sup> Additionally, it places greater emphasis on multilateral cooperation and collective security, participating in most Arctic forums, and hosting NATO-led military exercises like 'Trident Juncture' in 2019 and the annual Norway-led multinational military exercise 'Cold Response', in which many NATO members participate. Finally, it reinforces bilateral cooperation with close allies such as France and the UK.<sup>153</sup> Oslo would also welcome an increase in Dutch military presence.<sup>154</sup> Ensuring the attention and presence of both NATO and the US in the European Arctic has emerged as a cornerstone in Norway's security policy.<sup>155</sup> A new White Paper on the Norwegian High North is expected in September 2020.

Norway opposes introducing political-military matters in the Arctic Council as this would impede further cooperation on other issues. It is felt that a new forum for political-military matters is not really needed, considering that Arctic security is already discussed in other forums, such as NATO and the Nordic Council. The ACGF deals with practical matters, which could also include military security affairs.<sup>156</sup> Due to the Russian absence the ASFR is considered less suitable, unless the mandate and composition would be changed. Furthermore, most Arctic states have bilateral Incidents at Sea Agreements with Russia to deal with confrontations at sea.<sup>157</sup>

## Russia

About 20% of Russia's GDP is currently generated above the Arctic Circle.<sup>158</sup> Since large portions of the undiscovered Arctic oil and gas reserves are expected to be located in Russia's EEZ, the country's economic interests are obvious.<sup>159</sup> Gas production continues to be the real engine of Russia's Arctic, with almost 5 trillion cubic meters to be found in Gazprom's Bovanenkovo gas field.<sup>160</sup> Russia is keen to become a more prominent

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152 Dorscher, High North, p. 33.

153 Frank Bakke-Jensen, 'Norway's defense minister: Change and stability in the High North', *Defense News*, 2 December 2019. The bilateral military cooperation with the US has also increased.

154 Information from interviews.

155 Bye, USA in the High North - A Lasting Engagement.

156 Information from interviews.

157 Information from interviews.

158 Pavel Devyatkin, [Russia's Arctic Strategy: Aimed at Conflict or Cooperation? \(Part I\)](#), Washington, DC.: The Arctic Institute, 6 February 2018.

159 Pavel Devyatkin, *Russia's Arctic Strategy: Energy Extraction (Part III)*, Washington, DC.: The Arctic Institute, 20 February 2018.

160 Atle Staalesen, ['Biggest Arctic gas field now in full production'](#), *The Barents Observer*, 8 December 2018.

player in the global liquified natural gas (LNG) market. Novatek's LNG project produced 16.5 million tons of gas in 2019 and two more LNG projects are underway.<sup>161</sup> The development of oil extraction has been slow, with one offshore and two onshore projects currently operational.<sup>162</sup> The large quantities of energy resources have stimulated the Russian state and state companies to collaborate with foreign firms. While there are some instances of cooperation with Western energy companies, they are hindered by the 2014 sanctions that restrict the sharing of technology to develop shale, offshore and Arctic deposits.<sup>163</sup> As Russia lacks the technology and capital to extract Arctic resources itself, it has turned towards the East for help.<sup>164</sup> Both China and Japan invest heavily in Russia's Arctic energy projects.<sup>165</sup>

Russia hopes to establish the NSR as an international shipping route, mainly because of the economic potential of energy and mineral resources.<sup>166</sup> Beyond marine infrastructure, Moscow intends to build northbound pipelines, railways and underwater communication cables to set up a well-rounded commercial Arctic trade route.<sup>167</sup> However, the Kremlin's attitude towards the NSR is conflicted between establishing it as a major international shipping route and ensuring control over its territory. Russia's insistence on its ownership and defence of the NSR, deemed by others to contravene international law, may foreshadow conflict situations involving foreign vessels.<sup>168</sup>

Russia's vast northern coastline makes it the quintessential Arctic state, with vital geopolitical and military interests in the region. Its Arctic policy considers the region to be both "a zone of peace and cooperation" and "a sphere of military security". Moscow has recently revitalised its Cold War-era bastion strategy, which aims to ensure the security of its second-strike nuclear assets on the Kola Peninsula, and access by

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161 Bloomberg, '[Novatek Greenlights \\$21 Billion Russian Arctic LNG 2 Plant](#)', *The Moscow Times*, 5 September 2019; '[Yamal LNG eclipses annual nameplate production](#)', *LNG World News*, 29 November 2019.

162 Devyatkin, Russia's Arctic Strategy: Aimed at Conflict or Cooperation?

163 Davyatkin, Russia's Arctic Strategy: Energy Extraction.

164 Dams & Van Schaik, Presence before power – China's Arctic strategy in Iceland and Greenland.

165 Ate Staalesen 'Gas company switches on huge Arctic plant', *The Barents Observer*, 5 December 2017; Vladimir Soldatkin and Jessica Jaganathan, 'Russia ups LNG race with green light on \$21 billion Arctic LNG-2 project', *Reuters*, 5 September 2019.

166 Thomas Nilsen, '[Moscow confirms go-ahead for giant nuclear icebreaker](#)', *The Barents Observer*, 3 March 2019.

167 Decree 'On the Basics of State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic for the Period Until 2035', President of the Russian Federation, March 2020; Ate Staalesen, '[Biggest Arctic gas field now in full production](#)', *The Barents Observer*, 8 December 2018; Boland, The Russian Northern Sea Route and a Canadian Arctic Seaway.

168 Pavel Devyatkin. [Russia's Arctic Strategy: Maritime Shipping \(Part IV\)](#), Washington, DC.: The Arctic Institute, 27 February 2018; [Report to Congress Department of Defense Arctic Strategy](#), US Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy June 2019; Testimony of Sherri Goodman, The United States Senate.

the Northern Fleet to the North Atlantic.<sup>169</sup> With this in mind, Russia is refurbishing as well as expanding its military infrastructure in the Arctic. In 2019, the Northern Fleet Joint Strategic Command (JSC) has been upgraded into a fifth Military District, to be equipped with new nuclear submarines<sup>170</sup> and anti-submarine aircraft.<sup>171</sup> The Northern Fleet is not an 'Arctic fleet' per se, as its priority is to protect strategic assets located between the Southern Barents and White Seas. As a result, it has limited operational ability in the Arctic, due to a lack of ice-class surface vessels and reliance on civilian icebreakers provided by Rosatom.<sup>172</sup> Russia's land-based capabilities have increased, including two army Arctic brigades declared operational in 2015 and 2016; special forces might have increased by 30%; airspace controls around the North Pole have been resumed in early 2019.<sup>173</sup> Russia has also invested heavily in its (radio-)electronic security capabilities for surveillance purposes.<sup>174</sup> It should be noted that there is also an economic reason for Russia building its Arctic military bases. Deploying military personnel is cheaper and logistically easier than training a new generation of civil engineers specialised in the Far North.<sup>175</sup>

Besides national defence, Russia's Arctic posture is based on a desire to restore its great power status.<sup>176</sup> While Russia's military build-up has generally been defensive in nature, it has recently started operating and exercising further west, for example at the time of the naval exercise Ocean Shield in 2019.<sup>177</sup> Russia's primary threat perception in the Arctic relates to NATO's military presence and enhanced capabilities by Arctic NATO members.<sup>178</sup> Amidst growing geopolitical tensions and rivalry it is expected that Moscow will further invest in radar coverage and radio-electronic jamming in the framework of "multi-layered sea denial and interdiction capabilities".<sup>179</sup>

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169 Mathieu Boulègue, *Russia's Military Posture in the Arctic: Managing Hard Power in a 'Low Tension' Environment*, London: Chatham House, June 2019.

170 Mark Episkopos, 'Russia's Northern Fleet Is Getting New Deadly Submarines To Support Its Arctic Mission', *The National Interest*, 10 November 2019.

171 'Russia's Northern Fleet to Get New Anti-Submarine Aircraft', *The Moscow Times*, 17 January 2020.

172 Boulègue, *Russia's Military Posture in the Arctic: Managing Hard Power in a 'Low Tension' Environment*.

173 Dorscher, *High North*, p. 29.

174 Boulègue, *Russia's Military Posture in the Arctic: Managing Hard Power in a 'Low Tension' Environment*.

175 Marlène Laruelle, *Russia's Arctic Policy – A Power Strategy and Its Limits*, Paris: Institut français des relations internationales, March 2020, p. 28.

176 Pavel Devyatkin, [Russia's Arctic Strategy: Military and Security \(Part II\)](#), Washington, DC.: The Arctic Institute, February 13, 2018.

177 Ulf Sverdrup e.a., *A Governance and Risk Inventory for a Changing Arctic*.

178 Boulègue, *Russia's Military Posture in the Arctic: Managing Hard Power in a 'Low Tension' Environment*; Maria Kiselyova and Gwladys Fouche, 'Russia alarmed by U.S. Air Force visit to Norwegian island', *Reuters*, 13 February 2020.

179 Boulègue, *Russia's Military Posture in the Arctic: Managing Hard Power in a 'Low Tension' Environment*; Testimony of Sherri Goodman, The United States Senate.



Under the expected new Russian Constitution, the governance of Arctic territories<sup>180</sup> would be transferred to the federal level, since the regional governments are considered insufficiently adept to manage these strategically important areas.<sup>181</sup> As it is not in Russia's interest to turn the Arctic into a zone of conflict, cooperation with other Arctic countries, both bilaterally and multilaterally, has been high on the agenda.<sup>182</sup> Despite the deterioration of relations elsewhere, cooperation between Russia and the other Arctic states has to date been resilient. The Russian objectives include cooperation on soft security issues, addressing environmental matters and others, while avoiding a worsening security situation in the Arctic region – but at the same time it is strengthening its own military and paramilitary presence. China is welcomed as an economic partner but should not have a security presence or an institutional role.<sup>183</sup> While being a proactive force regarding international law and energy cooperation with international partners, Russia portrays a more reluctant stance on transnational issues of Indigenous Peoples' rights and environmental protection. Russia's new Arctic strategy lists ensuring a Russian presence on the Archipelago of Svalbard based on an equitable and mutually beneficial partnership with Norway as a key objective in the field of international cooperation.<sup>184</sup>

## Sweden

Sweden's principal economic interests relate to the mining industry, specifically ore and minerals, fishing, forestry and tourism.<sup>185</sup> Stockholm presents itself as a supporting country, providing scientific research and services such as icebreaking, sea transport and consultancy.<sup>186</sup> The survival of the liberal international order is considered a national security interest.<sup>187</sup>

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180 As per the 2014 Decree 'on land territories of the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation', the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation (AZFR) is considered to be all land territories of Murmansk Oblast and Nenets, Chukotka and Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Districts, plus certain municipalities in the Karelia, Komi and Sakha Republics and Archangelsk Oblast (most notably the city of Archangelsk and Novaya Zemlya), and the city of Norilsk. The AZFR also includes all adjacent waters to these territories that are located within Russia's EEZ and on the continental shelf.

181 Atle Staalesen, 'Authors of Russia's new constitution eye direct federal control for Arctic regions', *Arctic Today*, 19 February 2020.

182 Decree 'On the Basics of State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic for the Period Until 2035'.

183 Laruelle, *Russia's Arctic Policy*, p. 29.

184 Decree 'On the Basics of State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic for the Period Until 2035'.

185 *Sweden's strategy for the Arctic region*, The Government Offices of Sweden, 2011.

186 *Sweden's strategy for the Arctic region*, 2011; Schulze, *Arctic Strategy Round-Up*, p. 8.

187 Nima Khorrami, *Sweden's Arctic Strategy: An Overview*, Washington, DC.: The Arctic Institute, 2019. Confirmed by interviewees.

Sweden is working on a new Arctic Strategy, but a release date has not yet been announced. Military the biannual exercise 'Arctic Challenge'.<sup>188</sup> Sweden has reinforced its military cooperation with the US, which is considered paramount to the country's long-term security.<sup>189</sup> Considering their similar geographic and institutional position and shared interest in the stability of the region, Sweden advances closer security cooperation with Finland.<sup>190</sup> While Russia is viewed as a problematic neighbour, it constitutes less of a concern for Arctic security. Sweden's approach to Russia is thus more sober in nature, underscoring the importance of keeping an open dialogue with Moscow.<sup>191</sup>

Based on the principle of military neutrality in the Arctic, Sweden's foreign policy is based on multilateralism and regional cooperation.<sup>192</sup> Sweden is in favour of strengthening the Arctic Council as the main Arctic multilateral forum and wishes to promote the EU's role in the region.<sup>193</sup> On matters of defence, Sweden favours close cooperation between Baltic and Nordic States through organisations like N5+3 and NORDEFCO.<sup>194</sup> Sweden is sceptical about creating a new forum for Arctic political-military matters. The ASFR offers a viable way forward. Moreover, if the NATO-Russia Council were to be revitalised, it could be used to discuss Arctic security issues with Russia (without involving China directly).<sup>195</sup>

## United States

The economic interests of the US in the Arctic are significant. The Trump administration aims to expand oil exploration in Alaska to the protected Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR), which is estimated to hold 10.4 billion barrels of oil.<sup>196</sup> In addition to a boost to the Alaskan economy, rebuilding the oil and gas industry would facilitate national

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188 Dorscher, High North, p. 33.

189 Aaron Mehta, '[Finland, Sweden and US sign trilateral agreement, with eye on increased exercises](#)', *Defense News*, 9 May 2018; Aaron Mehta, '[Sweden's defense minister on relations with America, Russian threats and the European Union](#)', *Defense News*, 27 December 2019; Khorrami, Sweden's Arctic Strategy.

190 [Increased Nordic defence cooperation](#), Swedish Defence Research Agency, 13 November 2018; [Continued deepening of defence cooperation between Sweden and Finland](#), Swedish Ministry of Defence, 2 July 2019.

191 Khorrami, Sweden's Arctic Strategy.

192 Sweden's strategy for the Arctic region, 2011; Khorrami, Sweden's Arctic Strategy.

193 Sweden's strategy for the Arctic region, 2011.

194 Increased Nordic defence cooperation, 2018; Khorrami, Sweden's Arctic Strategy. Confirmed by interviewees. N5+3 = informal cooperation format of the five Nordic states (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden) plus the three Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania). NORDEFCO = Nordic Defence Cooperation (see Annex 4).

195 Information from interviews.

196 *Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, 1002 Area, Petroleum Assessment, 1998, Including Economic Analysis*, U.S. Geological Survey, 29 November 2016.

economic growth, as this sector has contributed around 85% of the state's budget income in the last four decades.<sup>197</sup> The necessity to increase tax income by Alaska and more economic use of the Trans-Alaskan pipeline also play a role.<sup>198</sup> Furthermore, the projected migratory changes in the Arctic's marine ecosystem will also affect the US fishing industry and indigenous lifestyles. The eastern portion of the Bering Sea provides the US with 40% of its fish and shellfish supply.<sup>199</sup>

The geopolitical dimension demonstrates two US policy approaches towards the Arctic. First, the US emphasises cooperation between Arctic nations and partners as well as the importance of upholding the "rules-based order" to address shared challenges in the region.<sup>200</sup> The US Coast Guard (USCG) collaborates intensively with the coast guards of other Arctic nations in areas such as SAR, both bilaterally and in the ACGF. Another example concerns the formal dispute between the US and Canada concerning the NWP, which in practice is well managed and kept out of the political sphere.<sup>201</sup>

Second, the US has put its Arctic spotlight on China and Russia.<sup>202</sup> The 2019 Arctic Strategy even refers to competition with China and Russia as the principal challenge to long-term US security and prosperity.<sup>203</sup> It acknowledges that the immediate prospect of conflict in the Arctic is low. However, similar to Pompeo's May 2019 speech in Finland, the Department of Defense's (DoD) Strategy recognises "problematic strategic trends" that "could adversely affect US national security interests".<sup>204</sup> The US is aware of increased Russian military activity in the Arctic as well as Russia's "illegitimate" use of the NSR.<sup>205</sup> Regarding China, the Strategy states that the US only recognises the territorial claims of Arctic states, and therefore rejects the Chinese claim of being a

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197 Scarlett Evans, '[The future of Alaska's oil](#)', *Offshore Technology*, 26 November 2019.

198 Information from interviews.

199 P.J. Stabeno, R.L. Thoman and K. Wood, 'Recent Warming in the Bering Sea and its Impact on the Ecosystem', in: *Arctic Report Card 2019*, edited by J. Richter-Menge, M.L. Druckenmiller and M. Jeffries, 2019, p. 81.

200 [Arctic Strategy](#), US Department of Defense, June 2019, p. 4.

201 Information from interviews. Also see Annex 2.

202 Besides in the speech by Pompeo and the DoD Arctic Strategy, it is also apparent in USCG Strategic Outlook and the recent Senate hearing *Expanding opportunities, Challenges and Threats in the Arctic: A Focus on the U.S. Coast Guard Arctic Strategic Outlook*, 12 December 2019.

203 The DoD Arctic Strategy uses the definition of the Arctic codified at 15 U.S.C. § 4111. The Arctic means all US and foreign territory north of the Arctic Circle and all US territory north and west of the boundary formed by the Porcupine, Yukon, and Kuskokwim Rivers; all contiguous seas, including the Arctic Ocean and the Beaufort, Bering, and Chukchi Seas; and the Aleutian islands chain." [Arctic Strategy](#), US Department of Defense, p. 2.

204 [Arctic Strategy](#), US Department of Defense, p. 3.

205 [Arctic Strategy](#), US Department of Defense, p. 4.

“Near Arctic State”.<sup>206</sup> The military presence of China compared to Russia is limited. However, the US administration fears that China might transform its economic presence (e.g. the development of critical infrastructure and civilian research) into a “permanent Chinese security presence” and “military presence”.<sup>207</sup> The US 2019 DoD annual report on China’s military capabilities for the first time included a section on China’s military interests in the Arctic and the possibility of Chinese submarines operating in the Arctic basin.<sup>208</sup>

The Trump administration has increasingly focused on military and geostrategic aspects, specifically towards the European part of the Arctic.<sup>209</sup> Besides the sea routes that transit through the Bering Strait between the US and Russia, the GIUK(-N) gap is a strategic passage for naval operations between the Arctic and the North Atlantic.<sup>210</sup> The US Second Fleet is reactivated for Arctic purposes and the US participates in military exercises and capacity building.<sup>211</sup> Moreover, the National Defense Authorization Act (passed by Senate in July 2019) directs the Pentagon to make plans for the construction of a “strategic port” in the Arctic, in order to be able to better project military power in the region.<sup>212</sup> Nonetheless, the US administration is being criticised for not putting money where its mouth is. Besides the Polar Cutter Program, there are no other significant US infrastructure initiatives, there is no dedicated budget or prioritisation of infrastructure improvements and the Armed Forces lack adequate detect and track surface vessels and aircraft as well as reliable security communications in the Arctic to keep their strategic advantage.<sup>213</sup>

Looking from the US’ (geographical) position, governance bodies dealing with security matters should perhaps be distinctive for the North American Arctic and for the European Arctic. The first requires trilateral cooperation between Canada, Russia and the US, while the second also has to involve the European Arctic states. The US will take a negative stance on the issue of including China in the Arctic security governance.

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206 [Arctic Strategy](#), US Department of Defense, p. 5.

207 *Looking North: Sharpening America’s Arctic Focus*, Speech by Michael R. Pompeo, Secretary of State, in Rovaneimi Finland, US Department of State, 6 May 2019.

208 *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2019*, Office of the Secretary of Defense, May 2019.

209 Bye, [USA in the High North – A Lasting Engagement](#).

210 [Arctic Strategy](#), US Department of Defense, p. 3.

211 Mark D. Faram, ‘Second Fleet continues to grow’, *NavyTimes*, 30 May 2019.

212 [https://www.congress.gov/116/bills/s/1790/BILLS-116s1790rs.pdf\\_p.452-467..](https://www.congress.gov/116/bills/s/1790/BILLS-116s1790rs.pdf_p.452-467..)

213 *Testimony of Heather A. Conley before the Senate Subcommittee on Security of the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation “Expanding Opportunities, Challenges, and Threats in the Arctic: A Focus on the US Coast Guard Arctic Strategic Outlook”*, The United States Senate, 12 December 2019; Lee Berthiaume, ‘Norad commander says Canada, U.S. have lost Arctic military advantage over Russia’, *The Canadian Press*, 13 February 2020; confirmed in interviews.

## Other states

### China

The growing Chinese involvement in the Arctic is part of President Xi Jinping's vision of China becoming a global superpower.<sup>214</sup> The 2018 Arctic Policy links the Arctic to China's Belt and Road initiative, naming the trans-Arctic shipping routes the "Polar Silk Road".<sup>215</sup> Beijing's primary interest in the region lies in the opening of the NSR. The shipping distance between China and Rotterdam will be reduced by 23%.<sup>216</sup> The Chinese Shipping Company COSCO has steadily increased the number of cargo vessels sailing through the NSR over the last few years.<sup>217</sup> The NSR will serve China's commercial interests and its rise as a "great maritime power".<sup>218</sup>

Beijing's long-term goals in the Arctic seem to be predominantly driven by geopolitics: it aims to build a presence in the region, for the moment economically, to underpin its aim to have a seat at the table when geopolitical tensions rise in the Arctic. However, there are also direct historical military motivations for the Chinese interest. The flight path of US and Russian intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) aimed at China would cross the Arctic. Thus, the Chinese Republic has viewed the Arctic as a vital part of its nuclear security and wants to exert control over the region.<sup>219</sup> Currently, China operates six nuclear-powered attack submarines, four nuclear-powered ballistic submarines, and fifty diesel attack submarines, with more under construction.<sup>220</sup> However, these are meant for Chinese waters and there are no convincing military-strategic reasons why China would operate them – equipped with strategic range ballistic missiles – in the Arctic as a deterrent.<sup>221</sup>

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214 Dams & Van Schaik, Presence before power – China's Arctic strategy in Iceland and Greenland; Congressional Research Service, Changes in the Arctic.

215 *China's Arctic Policy*, State Council of the People's Republic of China.

216 Eddy Bekkers, Joseph F. Francois and Hugo Rojas-Romagosa, *Melting Ice Caps and the Economic Impact of Opening the Northern Sea Route*, Den Haag: Netherlands Bureau for Economic Policy Analysis, May 2015.

217 From two in 2015 to 14 in 2019. See: Malte Humpert, 'Chinese Shipping Company COSCO To Send Record Number of Ships Through Arctic', *High North News*, 13 June 2019.

218 Michael McDevitt, 'Beijing's Dream: Becoming a Maritime Superpower', *The National Interest*, 1 July 2016.

219 Dams & Van Schaik, Presence before power – China's Arctic strategy in Iceland and Greenland; Ann-Marie Brady, 'Facing Up to China's Military Interests in the Arctic', *The Jamestown Foundation*, 10 December 2019.

220 *The Military Balance 2020*, p. 261.

221 Ernie Regehr, *Conjuring Chinese Nuclear Weapons Submarines in the Arctic*, New York City: The Simons Foundation, May 2019.

Since China has no Arctic territory, it is in its best interests to gain the acceptance of Arctic states (including Russia).<sup>222</sup> This explains its policy emphasis on international cooperation in the region. Its reference to the importance of dispute settlement under international law, the Arctic Council and the Spitsbergen Treaty demonstrates the low chances of China seeking regional conflict. Moreover, China is deepening its European Arctic presence through foreign direct investment. The focus lies on Greenland, because of its strategic location concerning the GIUK gap, and even more on Iceland, primarily because of China's interests in Iceland's expertise in geothermal energy, which could replace 25% of China's coal needs. Beijing has gradually increased its presence in Iceland with its embassy in Reykjavik able to host more than 500 staff.<sup>223</sup> In the future it is projected that Chinese actors will mostly focus on Russia in terms of oil and gas investments, on Greenland with respect to mining and for bio-economy on Iceland and Finland.<sup>224</sup>

Since 2014, China's Arctic strategy has become more security-oriented. To defend its growing interests in the region, Beijing has expanded its Arctic military capabilities through knowledge accumulation and the capacity-building of navigation and monitoring.<sup>225</sup> However, concerning assets, the Chinese still lag behind Russia and the US. After the *Xuelong* polar-capable icebreaker in 1999, China has produced a second version in cooperation with a Finnish shipbuilding company in 2019. In addition, in 2018 Beijing has presented plans to construct a 30,000 ton nuclear-powered icebreaker, making China the second country, after Russia, to operate a nuclear-powered version.<sup>226</sup> However, it was recently reported that China's third icebreaker might turn out to be a 26,000 ton<sup>227</sup> conventionally powered version.<sup>228</sup>

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222 Timo Koivurova, Liisa Kauppila, Sanna Kopra, Marc Lanteigne, Mingming Shi, Malgorzata (Gosia) Smieszek, and Adam Stepien, in co-operation with Juha Käpylä, Harri Mikkola, Egill Þór Niélssson and Matti Nojonen, *China in the Arctic and the Opportunities and Challenges for Chinese-Finnish Arctic Co-operation*, Publications of the Government's analysis, assessment and research activities, January 2019.

223 Dams & Van Schaik, Presence before power – China's Arctic strategy in Iceland and Greenland; Koivurova e.a., *China in the Arctic and the Opportunities and Challenges for Chinese-Finnish Arctic Co-operation*.

224 Koivurova et al., *China in the Arctic and the Opportunities and Challenges for Chinese-Finnish Arctic Co-operation*.

225 Heljar Havnes and Johan Martin, "[The Increasing Security Focus in China's Arctic Policy](#)", *The Arctic Institute*, 16 July 2019.

226 Koivurova e.a., *China in the Arctic and the Opportunities and Challenges for Chinese-Finnish Arctic Co-operation*; Avey, 'The Icebreaker Gap Doesn't Mean America is Losing in the Arctic.'

227 In comparison: the new polar icebreakers of the US Coast Guard are 22,000 tons.

228 Malte Humpert, 'China Reveal Details of a Newly Designed Heavy Icebreaker', *Arctic Today*, 17 December 2019.

China has been eager to establish and consolidate its role in Arctic governance since it obtained observer status at the Arctic Council in 2013. China has a limited influence in the Council, but has tried to get a seat at the table in its working groups by investing heavily in Arctic research.<sup>229</sup> Beijing's science diplomacy mainly constitutes Arctic expeditions, investment in knowledge accumulation and providing technical capacity and equipment.<sup>230</sup> Additionally, China has pushed to become a rule shaper in the Arctic, participating in the formation of IMO's Polar Code<sup>231</sup>, the 2018 International Agreement to Prevent Unregulated High Seas Fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean and UNCLOS.<sup>232</sup> Beyond science and legal diplomacy, China insists on the notion that non-Arctic – or indeed 'near-Arctic' – states should play a role in Arctic governance given how significantly the region affects other parts of the world.<sup>233</sup> Its economic interests in Arctic shipping are also used by Beijing to stress the legitimacy of its position at the table in current and future negotiations on Arctic matters.<sup>234</sup>

## France

In its National Roadmap for the Arctic, France refers to itself as a “polar nation”, given various expeditions and explorations, and their permanent research bases at the poles.<sup>235</sup> France's interests in the Arctic primarily concern its economy, security and the environment.<sup>236</sup> Firstly, French companies are omnipresent in the Canadian, Norwegian and Russian Arctic. In the latter case: Total has invested in the Yamal LNG facility, based on aspirations to export gas to Northeast Asia.<sup>237</sup> Hence, the country seeks to maximise the profitability of business activities. Moreover, it is essential for France that Europe's energy supply routes are secured.<sup>238</sup> Secondly, security and stability in the Arctic are regarded as essential for safeguarding present and future interests.<sup>239</sup> Hence, the

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229 Harriet Moynihan, *China Expands Its Global Governance Ambitions in the Arctic*, Chatham House, 15 October 2018.

230 Havnes and Martin, *The Increasing Security Focus in China's Arctic Policy*.

231 IMO: International Maritime Organization. For the Polar Code, see Annex 2.

232 Moynihan, *China Expands Its Global Governance Ambitions in the Arctic*.

233 Koivurova et al., *China in the Arctic and the Opportunities and Challenges for Chinese-Finnish Arctic Co-operation*.

234 Brady, *Facing Up to China's Military Interests in the Arctic*.

235 *The Great Challenge of the Arctic – National Roadmap for the Arctic*, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères et du Développement International, 2016, p. 9.

236 *Ibid.*, p. 34.

237 Total, 'Yamal: the gas that came in from the cold', <https://www.total.com/en/energy-expertise/projects/oil-gas/lng/yamal-lng-cold-environment-gas>.

238 *France and the New Strategic Challenges in the Arctic*, Ministère des Armées, 2019, p. 7.

239 *The Great Challenge of the Arctic: National Roadmap for the Arctic*, p. 33.

country wants to behave in an exemplary manner, including complying with the IMO Polar Code and promoting the safety enhancement of shipping routes.<sup>240</sup>

Military and defence issues are not central in the French Arctic policy, but the country's Armed Forces must remain able to use the Arctic for transit of its naval and air forces and, potentially, for naval air force (carrier) operations.<sup>241</sup> In addition, France's membership of the EU and NATO implies that it may have to deploy resources to the Arctic, if necessary, in order to maintain stability.<sup>242</sup>

## Germany

Access to resources is a key factor driving Germany's 2019 Arctic Policy<sup>243</sup>, as the country is highly dependent on natural gas and oil imports from Norway and Russia. On the one hand, the raised accessibility of raw material deposits in the Arctic could be beneficial for Germany's energy supply in the long term.<sup>244</sup> On the other hand, greater dependence on Arctic energy resources could pose a security risk, since a stable supply is premised on a conflict-free region and warm bilateral relations with Russia.<sup>245</sup> Furthermore, Germany rejects the use of nuclear-powered ships and is an initiator of the introduction of an IMO ban on the transport of heavy oil in the Arctic.<sup>246</sup>

Geopolitical tensions in the Arctic reflect negatively on the stability of the region and, in turn, on Germany's energy security. Germany participates in military security forums such as the ASFR and the Northern Group, but still considers the Arctic as an area of low tensions. To preserve the Arctic as a region without conflict, Germany emphasises the importance of international cooperation, advocates a more intensive involvement by the EU and NATO but opposes any further militarisation of the Arctic.<sup>247</sup>

Germany's Arctic Policy underscores the importance of international cooperation based on shared norms and rules. Security problems of a local nature can be dealt with in already existing forums (such as the ASFR) or bilaterally. Geopolitical tensions – also

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240 Ibid., p. 40.

241 Ibid.

242 Ibid., p. 12.

243 *Germany's Arctic Policy Guidelines: Assuming Responsibility, Creating Trust, Shaping the Future*, The Federal Government of Germany, August 2019.

244 Ibid.

245 *Germany's Arctic Policy Guidelines*; Kerstin A. Schley, *Germany's interests in the Arctic, as exemplified by its Arctic Council engagement*, MA thesis, 2019. To guarantee a direct supply of Russian natural gas, Germany has supported the construction of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline.

246 Information from interviews.

247 *Germany's Arctic Policy Guidelines*, p. 25 & 42.



caused by the US – are not specifically of an Arctic nature. They have to be discussed elsewhere, e.g. in the NATO-Russia Council or the OSCE. Germany supports more NATO and EU involvement, although there are no clear views on what an enhanced role of NATO should be.<sup>248</sup>

## United Kingdom

In a November 2018 parliamentary report the UK has been labelled as a “near-Arctic neighbour”, based on a climate change impact on the UK’s weather system and e.g. the status of the UK as an observer to the Arctic Council since 1998.<sup>249</sup> In its Arctic Policy Framework<sup>250</sup> economic aspects occupy the central place, whereby companies are encouraged to engage through the Arctic Economic Council (AEC).<sup>251</sup> The UK has an interest in maintaining the Arctic as a stable and secure region, as it is largely dependent on Norwegian (Arctic) natural gas for its energy supply.<sup>252</sup> Central to regional governance is the Arctic Council. In this regard, the UK vouches that its mandate should stay so as to avoid possible tensions in the cooperative nature of the forum.<sup>253</sup> The UK’s engagement in Arctic forums takes on a so-called broker role, whereby it supports the Arctic states, as well as establishing situational awareness through research and the sharing of information.<sup>254</sup>

Interestingly, the UK does not have an official Arctic ‘Policy’, merely a ‘Framework’. In the past, the UK relied on the EU (1) to become a member of the Arctic Council, (2) to put its Framework under the EU’s Arctic Policy, and (3) to enjoy the benefits of the EU being the largest funder of Arctic research. Because of Brexit, this approach is being challenged and opens the door to security hardliners.<sup>255</sup> Whereas the Foreign and Commonwealth Office coordinates the Polar Regions Department and is hence responsible for the ‘soft’

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248 Information from interviews.

249 *The Changing Arctic, Twelfth Report of Session 2017-19*, UK House of Commons, Environmental Audit Committee, November 2018, p. 3.

250 The UK Arctic Policy Framework mentions the different definitions of the Arctic (the area within the Arctic Circle (66° 34' North); the area within the July 10°C isotherm; and the area within the Arctic tree line), but takes no specific stance on what definition is used in the document itself. See: *Beyond the Ice: UK policy towards the Arctic*, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2018.

251 “The Arctic Economic Council (AEC) is an independent organization that facilitates Arctic business-to-business activities and responsible economic development through the sharing of best practices, technological solutions, standards, and other information”. Source: <https://arcticeconomiccouncil.com/about-us/>

252 Schulze, Arctic Strategy Round-Up, p. 12; confirmed in interviews.

253 Information from interviews.

254 *Beyond the Ice: UK policy towards the Arctic*, 2018. Confirmed in interviews.

255 Information from interviews.

focus on ecological, economic and research interests as described above, the Ministry of Defence (MoD) is in favour of also including a 'hard security' approach.<sup>256</sup>

Noting the increased security dimension of the Arctic, the country's forthcoming new Defence Arctic<sup>257</sup> Strategy places the region as central to its national security.<sup>258</sup> The UK MoD is aware of the short-term threat coming from Russia and the even more vital long-term Sino-Russian threat. Consequently, the British MoD is keen to enhance its Arctic and High North military capabilities, by increasing its naval and air operational commitments, including in the GIUK gap, and having the Royal Marines conduct annual cold weather exercises.<sup>259</sup> The military cooperation between the UK and Norway in the Arctic was recently extended to year-round training.<sup>260</sup> Multilaterally, NATO is signalled as a key security player and UK participation in the ASFR is regarded as essential.<sup>261</sup> However, it is important to note that the UK's military activities in the North Atlantic and High North are also merely focused on creating situational awareness and cooperating with Arctic partners. The UK does not expect an Arctic conflict to take place in the short term.

## Multilateral organisations

### European Union (EU)

The most recent EU Arctic Policy (2016) has three pillars: climate change and safeguarding the Arctic environment; sustainable development in and around the Arctic; and international cooperation on Arctic issues.<sup>262</sup> Apart from the emphasis on international cooperation, the strategy lacks a geopolitical and security component. This does not imply, however, that the EU ignores the issue of Arctic security. In various

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256 Information from interviews.

257 'Arctic' is in the original name of the strategy, but the content focuses on activities in 'the High North', with an emphasis on the GIUK gap. Therefore, it was later renamed the 'UK Contribution to the High North'. Source: Sean F. Fahey and Tomas Jermalavicius, *Increasingly 'Slippery' Arctic: The United Kingdom in the Arctic and the Future of Arctic Security*, International Centre for Defence and Security, 5 November 2019; information from interviews.

258 Although the new Defence Arctic Strategy was already announced in 2018, it has been put on ice due to Brexit upheavals in the UK government. It is expected to be released in the autumn of 2020. Information from interviews.

259 *Defence Secretary announces new Defence Arctic Strategy*, Ministry of Defence, 30 September 2018. Confirmed in interviews.

260 Information obtained from interviews.

261 *Beyond the Ice: UK policy towards the Arctic*, 2018, p. 21.

262 *Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council – An integrated European Union policy on the Arctic*, European Commission, Brussels, 27.4.2016, JOIN (2016) final.

Council Conclusions, the EU has recognised the connection between climate change and security and defence.<sup>263</sup> Moreover, in a speech that introduced the 2016 Arctic Policy, the High Representative stated that the concern for the Arctic is not only an environmental one, but that the EU's prosperity and security are at stake as well.<sup>264</sup> The Arctic is of strategic importance to the EU.<sup>265</sup> Not only because of (economic) opportunities following the opening of shipping lanes, but also because the EU seeks to avoid Russia and China gaining a foothold in e.g. Greenland, Iceland and Spitsbergen, the EU's backyard.<sup>266</sup> The importance of the Arctic is moreover illustrated by the various attempts of the EU, since 2008, to formally obtain a permanent observer status with the Arctic Council. So far, they have been unsuccessful, initially witnessing resistance from Canada and later from Russia.<sup>267</sup>

Even though the EU has its own Arctic Policy and enjoys a strong voice in the Barents-Euro Arctic Council (BEAC), political-military security issues and geopolitics in the Arctic are not receiving much attention in the EU bodies. The EU mainly focusses on international cooperation in response to the impacts of climate change and enhancing sustainable development, particularly in the European part of the Arctic.<sup>268</sup> There is a gap between the political statements and expressions of the EU becoming a more geopolitical actor and the practical reality. The 2020 Work Programme of the Commission makes no reference to the Arctic at all. Apparently, the review of the 2016 Joint Communication has been postponed until later. The year 2020 will mainly be used for consultations with member states, seminars and other activities to explore the potential for amending the text of the Joint Communication. There is also increasing awareness that Arctic issues – geopolitical, economic and ecologic – cannot be treated in isolation from the global level. That makes it more difficult to seek agreement on the EU's role and activities regarding the Arctic.<sup>269</sup>

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263 See e.g.: *Council Conclusions on Climate Diplomacy*, 6153/19, February 2019; *Council Conclusions on Security and Defence in the context of the EU Global Strategy*, 10048/19, June 2019; *Council Conclusions on Climate Diplomacy*, 5033/20, January 2020.

264 *EU Arctic Policy in Regional Context*, DG External Policies (European Parliament), July 2016, p. 15-16.

265 See e.g. Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council – An integrated European Union policy on the Arctic.

266 W.R.M.J. Meessen, 'De 'Arctic', het nieuwe domein voor hybride conflicten', *ARMEX Magazine*, februari 2020, p. 7.

267 Joanna Cáp, 'The Arctic: What are the EU's interests in this rapidly changing region?', *The New Federalist*, April 2019.

268 *International Cooperation on Arctic Matters*, European External Action Service, 2017.

269 Information from interviews.

## NATO

In various press statements, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has recognised the increasing importance of the Arctic.<sup>270</sup> This is also underlined by the Alliance's 360-degree approach, the declaration of the Allied Command Transformation that the Arctic is one of its three future strategic scenarios and NATO's Readiness Action Plan.<sup>271</sup> The five Arctic NATO nations set the agenda for the Alliance in the Arctic and their concerns primarily relate to Russian remilitarisation, increased Chinese presence and growing economic activities. NATO as an organisation assumes no active role in the region, but facilitates information exchanges between its member states. The principal priority for NATO is to maintain and improve its situational awareness.<sup>272</sup> Moreover, it is important to make a distinction between the Arctic and NATO's primary area of operation: the North Atlantic. It is in the latter region where the Alliance is active. This includes for example Icelandic Air Policing and exercises like Trident Juncture.<sup>273</sup> A NATO military presence in the Arctic is perceived by most member states to be unnecessarily provocative towards Russia. The principal objective to be pursued is thus finding a balance between the military presence of individual NATO member states and partner countries, on the one hand, and political cooperation with all Arctic states, including Russia, on the other.<sup>274</sup> In the NATO-Russia relationship, predictability is key. This includes informing Moscow beforehand about any NATO (or NATO member states') activities in the Arctic and North Atlantic, as has been the case with Trident Juncture.

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270 See e.g.: *Questions and Answers by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the "NATO Engages: Innovating the Alliance" Conference*, December 2019; *Speech by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg on "NATO: Maintaining Security in a Changing World" at the Columbia University*, September 2019; *Conversation with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the Brussels Forum*, June 2019.

271 *Remarks by NATO Deputy Secretary General Mircea Geoana at the Hudson Institute public event "NATO and the New Decade: Assessing the Transatlantic Alliance"*, February 2020; Meessen, De 'Arctic', het nieuwe domein voor hybride conflicten, p. 6.; *Kamerbrief actualisering veiligheidsdeel Polaire Strategie*, 35000-V-82, 5 juli 2019, p. 5.

272 Information from interviews.

273 Ulf Sverdrup e.a., *A Governance and Risk Inventory for a Changing Arctic*.

274 *Kamerbrief actualisering veiligheidsdeel Polaire Strategie*, p. 5.

# 4 Arctic governance

## Existing governance bodies

The post-Cold War environment of the 1990s opened the door for increasing cooperation in the Arctic. In this process several governance bodies were created. The Arctic Council, established in 1996, acts as the principal forum of collaboration between the eight Arctic states and the six Permanent Participants (e.g. the six Arctic Indigenous Peoples organisations), focussing on all elements of cooperation, coordination and interaction. An exception is military security which is explicitly excluded from its mandate. The Arctic Council is still functioning well and a number of working groups are engaged “in substantive research and analysis to developing a shared knowledge base for data-driven circumpolar policymaking.”<sup>275</sup> In 2011, the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable (ASFR) was established upon the initiative of Norway and the US. It is a military-to-military forum, bringing together high-ranking military officers representing the Arctic states, France, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK. They generally discuss the increasing use of Arctic waters and examine how the deployment of national military and coast guard capabilities can support civilian authorities.<sup>276</sup> This platform provides a unique opportunity for stakeholders to cooperate, particularly on matters related to regional maritime security and emergency response capacity building.<sup>277</sup> The Arctic Coast Guard Forum (ACGF), established in 2016, has become a key venue for cooperation on ‘soft’ security.<sup>278</sup> It is functioning well, focussing on practical cooperation and the exchange of information on coast guard matters.<sup>279</sup> Currently, there is no Arctic forum to discuss hard security issues that includes Russia, as the ASFR operates without Russian participation following the annexation of Crimea.<sup>280</sup>

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275 Ulf Sverdrup e.a., *A Governance and Risk Inventory for a Changing Arctic*, p. 6. The well-functioning of the Arctic Council was confirmed by interviewees.

276 AIV, p. 37.

277 Rachael Gosnell, Andreas Hildenbrand and Elizabete Aunina, *Emerging Challenges in Arctic Security and Recommendations for the Future: Perspectives from the European Security Seminar-North*, Garmisch-Partenkirchen: The Marshall Center, September 2018.

278 Ulf Sverdrup e.a., *A Governance and Risk Inventory for a Changing Arctic*.

279 Information from interviews. Interviewees gave different explanations for the Russian empty chair. Some said that Russia has been excluded by the other ASFR members, while others stated that Russia has a permanent invitation but apparently chooses to remain absent from the meetings. It should also be noted that the ASFR meetings are split into a non-classified session, open to all members, and a classified session which can only be attended by (ASFR) NATO members plus Finland and Sweden.

280 Ulf Sverdrup e.a., *A Governance and Risk Inventory for a Changing Arctic*, p. 6; Rebecca Pincus, ‘NATO north? Building a role for NATO in the Arctic’, *War on the Rocks*, 6 November 2019.

Other existing forums have a regional focus, such as the Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC) and the Barents Regional Council. Membership of these Councils is limited. The same applies to the Nordic Council and the Nordic Defence Cooperation. Figure 5 provides an overview of Arctic governance, listing the membership composition of the relevant forums. In addition, Annex 4 provides a more detailed overview of the various organisations or bodies that concern themselves with the Arctic, including the year of their establishment, their jurisdiction and their duties.

**Figure 5** Diagram of the membership of Arctic governance bodies



Since 2014 Russia has not participated in ASFR meetings.

## Why an Arctic security forum?

According to some analysts 'Arctic exceptionalism' – the cooperation of the Arctic states in a world of growing geopolitical strife – might be endangered.<sup>281</sup> An earlier Clingendael publication referred to the geopolitics of the High North as “the Arctic elephant” that needs to be addressed.<sup>282</sup> One could argue that hard security matters need to be put on the political agenda when the region is discussed. For example, discussions could start on how to regulate military activities in the Arctic region – not replacing UNCLOS but setting specific rules for the international Arctic waters.<sup>283</sup> Others argue that there is little prospect of success in handling hard or political-military security issues while

281 Klimenko, The Geopolitics of a Changing Arctic.

282 Van Schaik and Dams, The Arctic Elephant.

283 Heather A. Conley, *A New Security Architecture for the Arctic: An American Perspective*, Washington, DC.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, January 2012; Seth Andre Meyers, 'With Strategic Spillover Rising, Now Is the Time for an Arctic Security Forum', *World Politics Review*, 5 July 2016; Duncan Depledge, Mathieu Boulègue, Andrew Foxall & Dmitriy Tulupo, 'Why we need to talk about military activity in the Arctic: Towards an Arctic Military Code of Conduct', in: *Arctic Yearbook 2019 – Redefining Arctic Security*, edited by Lassi Heininen, Heather Exner-Pirot and Justin Barnes, November 2019.

relations between the three superpowers remain tense.<sup>284</sup> Some experts claim that there are no hard security problems in the region and that the existing set of governance bodies should remain untouched.<sup>285</sup> The latter view neglects the potential impact of the trends and the risks associated with the growing geopolitisation of the Arctic. As elsewhere in the world, sooner or later tensions will increase further, incidents and accidents might occur, and conflicts and crises might arise. Thus, there seems to be sufficient reason to assess what forum, already existing or new, would be best suited to deal with political-military security issues in the Arctic.

Two important parameters should be considered when assessing the best option for discussing Arctic security. Firstly, all Arctic states should be included in such a forum. If resolving security tensions in the region is the objective, cutting off communication on political-military security issues with Russia is not the way to go. On the contrary, Russia's absence may even lead to increasing risks and uncertainties.<sup>286</sup> Clearly, this raises a significant political issue, to conduct 'business as usual' on Arctic political-military matters with Moscow, while both the issue of Crimea and the conflict in Eastern Ukraine remain unresolved. Secondly, it is important to keep in mind that ecological, economic and political-military security in the Arctic are closely interconnected. Hence, it might be useful to discuss military matters in a wider set-up than military-to-military talks, in order to connect them with the actors dealing with economic and ecological security. Taking these two parameters into account, only two of the existing forums would be candidates.

## Using the existing forums?

### The Arctic Council

Military security is per mandate excluded from the Arctic Council's agenda. Nevertheless, this forum can still prove to be useful for political-military security matters. Firstly, the Arctic Council is already used for discussing soft security issues, related to

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284 Ragnhild Groenning, *Why military security should be kept out of the Arctic Council*, The Arctic Institute, 2 June 2016. Groenning argues that it would be counterproductive to introduce hard security issues in the Arctic Council as this would disrupt cooperation on other issues.

285 Kathrin Stephen, *An Arctic Security Forum? Please, no!*, The Arctic Institute, May 26, 2016; Adam P. MacDonald, 'Precarious existence or staying the course? The foundations and future of Arctic stability', in: *Arctic Yearbook 2019 – Redefining Arctic Security*, edited by Lassi Heininen, Heather Exner-Pirot and Justin Barnes, November 2019. Specifically, MacDonald argues that the Arctic's regional stability can remain even among increasing great power competition, due to the "region's geographic division of authority, strategic alignments, and state coherence (...) that has ensured stability and the emergence of a decentralized but robust regional order."

286 Klimenko, *The Geopolitics of a Changing Arctic*, p. 13.

economic activities, ecological matters, tourism and other matters: SAR, responding to environmental disasters, etc. A new working group could be established, focussing on the military use of Arctic waters, which in due course could result in a set of measures to prevent misunderstanding and resolve incidents, to make military activities more transparent and to strengthen military cooperation.

A more radical solution would be to create an Arctic security and cooperation organisation. This idea was coined by the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo May 2019 in Rovaniemi, Finland.<sup>287</sup> Such a fundamental change to the nature of the Arctic Council would require a new mandate, based on a unanimous decision by all its members.<sup>288</sup> Setting up a new working group to deal with military security might be politically more attractive, particularly as it could build on already existing soft security issues. On the downside, bringing military matters to the Arctic Council could spoil the ongoing cooperation on other issues – thus having a counterproductive result.<sup>289</sup> It seems that most members of the Arctic Council object to the inclusion of political-military matters.<sup>290</sup> Therefore, such a fundamental change is not feasible. Hence, the Arctic Council's mandate should remain as it is, thereby providing the best guarantee for continued cooperation between all Arctic states on matters other than political-military security.

### **The Arctic Security Forces Roundtable**

Another option is to expand the mandate and composition of the ASFR. The main problem with this option is the absence of Russia at the ASFR meetings. Therefore, for the ASFR to be a useful forum for matters of hard security, the first prerequisite would be to call on Russia to return to its seat at the ASFR table. Politically, this seems possible as Russia has a standing invitation to participate in the ASFR meetings.<sup>291</sup> A problem, however, is the Russian position on the composition of the meetings and the level of participation. Moscow prefers ASFR meetings between the Chiefs of Defence Staff.<sup>292</sup> Since Russia no longer participates in ASFR meetings, these are now held in two formats: one for exchanging open source information on military matters, including how to increase practical cooperation, e.g. when military assets are needed to address emergencies, and a so-called Northern Flank format in which Finland, Sweden and the

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287 Looking North: Sharpening America's Arctic Focus, Speech by Michael R. Pompeo, Secretary of State, in Rovaniemi Finland, 6 May 2019.

288 Van Schaik and Dams, *The Arctic Elephant*, p. 9.

289 See the lead-in section of this chapter. All interviewees had the same view.

290 Information from interviews.

291 Information from interviews.

292 Tony van der Togt, *Conflict Prevention and Regional Cooperation in the Arctic*, Clingendael OpEd, October 2019 (hereafter 'Van der Togt').



NATO ASFR countries discuss Arctic military security matters including on the basis of classified information.<sup>293</sup> As such, the first ASFR format seems to be the right forum to restart the discussions with Russia on political-military matters. At the moment, the prospects of resuming ASFR meetings with Russian military participation might not look favourable, based on Russia's attitude. Nevertheless, the option should not be excluded. If relations with Moscow were to improve in the wider sense, the Russian approach might also start to change, which could create a window of opportunity for discussing political-military matters within the ASFR.

An even more ambitious approach could entail the expansion of the ASFR with the inclusion of China and the EU and potentially the chair of the Arctic Council, thus resulting in the establishment of an inclusive Arctic security and cooperation organisation.<sup>294</sup> However, this would require an even higher degree of improved relations in the China-Russia-US triangle. Moreover, both Russia and the US have expressed their objections towards the inclusion of China in such matters. For Russia, China is welcomed as an economic actor, but should not have a security presence or become an institutional actor in the Arctic.<sup>295</sup> It appears that this approach is not feasible if Russia and the US do not change their stance on the expansion of the ASFR.

## The option of multilateral organisations

Apart from the European Arctic states, other European countries also have, to varying degrees, a stake in Arctic security, depending on their national security interests: France, Germany and the UK, but also the Netherlands, Poland and the Baltic States. In essence, geopolitisation turns Arctic security into a matter for all European countries – and even for the whole globe. Below, the three major multilateral organisations that are relevant to European security are assessed concerning their roles in Arctic security.

### The EU

The EU is already active in the working groups of the Arctic Council, while it still has no formal observer status – an issue that is often overrated in political terms as the EU is present at all ministerial and ambassadorial meetings of the Arctic Council. As the EU has broad responsibilities, encompassing all sectors of national government, the EU-Russia dialogue could be suitable to engage with Moscow on issues of the interconnectedness between ecological, economic and political-military security. Clearly, formal EU meetings are limited to its members, which excludes important

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293 Information from interviews.

294 Van Schaik and Dams, *The Arctic Elephant*, p. 10.

295 Laruelle, *Russia's Arctic Policy*, p. 29.

Arctic states. It will be essential for the EU to associate the non-EU Arctic countries (Canada, Iceland, Norway, the US) as well as post-Brexit UK to the maximum extent with its own policy development. However, the exclusion of five of the eight Arctic states from the EU-Russia dialogue itself would probably make this option a non-starter. As the current US President regularly portrays the EU in negative terms, this proposal seems to be even more unrealistic in political terms. An alternative for increasing the EU's role would be to give the organisation a more prominent role in the Arctic Council. Even though states like Sweden and Finland favour a more prominent role for the EU in the Arctic, politically this seems to be unattainable; even granting the EU observer status within the Arctic Council has been out of reach.<sup>296</sup>

## NATO

Given its origin and nature, NATO would be a suitable forum to discuss and coordinate security cooperation in the Arctic. Even though the Arctic has gained prominence on NATO's agenda, the organisation has not yet developed an Arctic strategy. This is unlikely to happen. NATO's primary interest is not the Arctic but unrestricted use of the North Atlantic sea lanes linking continental US to Europe. Furthermore, several Arctic states seem to object to NATO's involvement in Arctic security as it might have a counter-productive effect on engaging with Russia on these matters.<sup>297</sup> So far, Denmark has been reluctant to do so.<sup>298</sup> Where Canada used to take a more reluctant stance as well, it has recently shown a greater willingness to bring NATO into Arctic affairs as a response to a militarising Arctic region.<sup>299</sup> A complicating factor is also that not all Arctic states are represented in NATO, such as Sweden and Finland. The engagement of China is less likely in a NATO context. Concerns regarding increasing tensions with Russia could be addressed through shifting Arctic security from being discussed solely within NATO toward discussions in the NATO-Russia Council.<sup>300</sup> Perhaps, Finland and Sweden – both countries already cooperate closely with NATO – can be invited to NATO-Russia Council meetings on Arctic security. Nevertheless, any forum with the title 'NATO' is most likely to generate a negative response from Moscow. Another downside of the NATO context is the political-military focus without much connectivity to the ecological and economic actors.

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296 Van Schaik and Dams, *The Arctic Elephant*, p. 9.

297 Information from interviews.

298 Van der Togt, p. 3.

299 Rob Huebert, 'Canada and NATO in the Arctic: Responding to Russia?', in: *Canada's Arctic Agenda: Into the Vortex*, edited by John Higginbotham and Jennifer Spence, Waterloo, ON.: Centre for International Governance Innovation, 2019.

300 Van der Togt, p. 3.

## Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)

Another potential platform to initiate a debate on military-security issues in the Arctic is the OSCE. Its broad membership that includes all Arctic states on an equal basis makes this organisation a useful forum. In addition, the OSCE's comprehensive security mandate makes it an appropriate platform where both soft and hard security issues can be discussed in a sub-regional context. Raising Arctic issues in the OSCE could be done in the Permanent Council, in the Forum for Security Co-operation or in informal frameworks as well as within the context of the Economic and Environmental Dimension – even better, in a combined mode to encompass the three major elements of Arctic security. For now, the Arctic states show little or no willingness to discuss Arctic security matters in the OSCE, which makes this option politically unfeasible.<sup>301</sup> Moreover, to discuss hard security issues through the OSCE would require that both the US and Russia should be convinced of the benefits of addressing the topic in a multilateral setting, instead of the adoption of a unilateral or bilateral approach or using a regional forum such as the Arctic Council.<sup>302</sup> Finally, given the deep divisions within the OSCE over political-security issues elsewhere in the OSCE area, some of its other participating States which have no essential interests in the Arctic could use the OSCE format to spoil discussions on that region.<sup>303</sup>

However, the experience of the OSCE regarding risk reduction, incident prevention, confidence-building measures and promoting military transparency in other regions could be made use of in the Arctic, for example by using some of the tools contained in the Vienna Document.<sup>304</sup> The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly also pays increased attention to the Arctic, e.g. through the appointment of a Special Representative for Arctic Issues. It could serve as a channel for parliamentary diplomacy, including on environmental security issues.<sup>305</sup>

## An alternative Arctic security forum?

Theoretically, both of the existing Arctic forums and the three multilateral organisations could be suitable to address the political-military aspects of Arctic security, but in practice they are difficult to realise for political reasons. Subsequently, the question arises whether an alternative Arctic security forum should be created. An answer

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301 Ibid.

302 Ibid.

303 Views of several interviewees.

304 Loïc Simonet and Veera Tuomala, 'How can the OSCE help to reduce the risk of hazardous military incidents?', *NATO Review*, 2 November 2016.

305 See: <https://www.oscepa.org/activities/special-representatives/arctic-issues>.

can only be given by considering the vital elements which establish the common denominator. Based on the analysis in this chapter, these are:

- the involvement of all Arctic states;
- the willingness to invite other interested states to the table;
- in due course, broadening the scope and participation if a security forum would start to discuss preventive measures and arrangements for de-escalation in times of increasing tensions.

It seems that transforming the ASFR could result in a forum fulfilling these criteria – perhaps with a new name, underlining a broader mandate and a more inclusive composition. First, a high-level political-military attempt could be made to convince Moscow that it is better to take its seat in the ASFR than continuing its policy of absence. If Russia would persist in its attitude of non-participation, then another approach could be to consign the ASFR into history and to establish a new forum to replace it. The agenda could then immediately be broadened to encompass talks on military stability and conflict prevention measures in the Arctic region. Such a new format could be called the *Arctic Security Cooperation Forum* (ASCF). It should consist of the eight Arctic states plus the most interested other European countries (France, Germany, the Netherlands and the UK). The EU and NATO could be invited on a case-by-case basis. One could think of a second ring of associated countries, e.g. China and other interested European states such as Poland and the Baltic States. Officials of foreign and defence ministries, on a case-by-case basis reinforced by representatives from ministries dealing with economic and ecological issues, should be represented. The same cross-government composition should apply to the ministerial level. It should be noted, however, that the establishment of a new and broader Arctic security forum is currently met by scepticism on the part of various Arctic states. Canada and Denmark prefer that the Arctic states should first discuss matters of a political-military nature themselves, before this is expanded to include others. Finland is also not an advocate of a new forum, but prefers to hold a security meeting within the Arctic Council. In turn, Norway claims that a new forum is superfluous, given that matters of security are already discussed in other forums, such as the Nordic Council and NATO.

## 5 The Netherlands and Arctic security

Although the Netherlands is not an Arctic state, the country has an interest in the region, and it wants to play a meaningful role. In recent decades, the Dutch efforts have focused on strengthening international cooperation, on mitigating the impact of climate change and protecting the Arctic environment, and on contributing to scientific research.<sup>306</sup> The Netherlands Polar Strategy 2016-2020 recognised that the geopolitical dimension of the Arctic region was evolving, due to the changes in the world order and accelerated by the melting of the ice. However, the government subscribed to the key conclusion of the report of the Advisory Council on International Affairs<sup>307</sup> that, for the time being, the countries concerned still adhered to the international agreements and continued to cooperate, particularly in the Arctic Council. Furthermore, the Advisory Council concluded that, despite an increased military build-up in the region, notably by Russia, so far “no worrying degree of militarisation” could be detected – a conclusion to which the Dutch government also subscribed at the time.<sup>308</sup> Can comparable conclusions be drawn in 2020 or has the balance shifted further from cooperation to confrontation?

In order to answer this question, the three elements of Arctic security – ecological, economic and political-military – must be analysed in a coherent framework as they are closely interrelated. The changes in the Arctic offer risks, but at the same time opportunities. The Netherlands has six national security interests as defined in the National Security Strategy. Relevant for the case of Arctic security are the following:

- *Territorial security*: the unimpeded functioning of the Netherlands and its EU and NATO allies as independent states in a broad sense, or territorial security in a narrow sense.
- *Economic security*: the unimpeded functioning of the Dutch economy in an effective and efficient manner.
- *Ecological security*: the unimpeded continued existence of the natural living environment in and around the Netherlands.

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306 *Nederlandse Polaire Strategie 2016-2020 – Samen voor duurzaam*, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, januari 2017 (Dutch Polar Strategy 2016-2020 – Together for sustainability), p. 34.

307 AIV.

308 *Nederlandse Polaire Strategie 2016-2020 – Samen voor duurzaam*, p. 22.

- *International rule of law*: the functioning of the international system of rules, standards and agreements established for the purposes of international peace and security.<sup>309</sup>

Against the backdrop of these national security interests, the ecological, economic and political-military risks and opportunities for the Netherlands will be assessed.<sup>310</sup>

## Ecological security

For the Netherlands, the effects of climate change in the Arctic have to be addressed as part of global warming. In general, the country will be confronted with more variable weather, with peaks of heavy rain or hail and thunder storms, on the one hand, and with very warm and dry weather periods, on the other. The rising sea level is a longer-term problem. The Royal Netherlands Meteorological Institute predicts a sea level rise at the Dutch coast of a maximum of 40 cm by 2050 and a maximum of 80 cm by 2085, based on the currently available data of the IPCC. For 2100 the maximum sea level rise could be 1 meter.<sup>311</sup> The latest figures, based on 2019 IPCC data, point to a more rapid melting of Arctic and Antarctic ice compared to previous data.<sup>312</sup>

The changing weather and the rising sea level can lead to more flooding, but also water shortages impacting agriculture, nature, tourism and health. In 2017 new norms have been defined for strengthening dykes and dunes in the Netherlands and in 2019 a new programme was launched to strengthen the knowledge build-up on the rising sea level.<sup>313</sup> Once implemented, the dykes and dunes both along the coast and in the interior of the country will be capable of safeguarding the population against flooding caused by high water levels in rivers and at sea until 2050.<sup>314</sup>

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309 Definitions listed in: *National Security Strategy 2019*. The two remaining security interests are physical security and social and political stability (in both cases in the Netherlands). Both are less relevant for the case of Arctic security.

310 In the National Security Strategy of the Netherlands 'political-military security' as such is not mentioned. The two remaining interests (territorial security and the international rule of law) together could be seen as 'political-military security'.

311 *KNMI '14 klimaatscenario's voor Nederland*, Herziene uitgave 2015. Updated scenarios will be developed in 2023, based on the 2021 IPCC data.

312 Richard Bintanja and Dewi le Bars, *De koudste plek op aarde smelt*, KNMI Antarctica Specials 04, februari 2020.

313 <https://www.deltacommissaris.nl/deltaprogramma/vraag-en-antwoord/wat-is-het-kennisprogramma-zeespiegelstijging>.

314 *Maatregelen tegen overstromingen*, Rijksoverheid, <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/water/maatregelen-tegen-overstromingen>.

## Economic security

Clearly, a further increase in using the NSR by China and Russia offers opportunities for Europe's largest port, i.e. the Port of Rotterdam. However, a strategic expert from the Port of Rotterdam expects no commercially viable use of the NSR within the next 15 years.<sup>315</sup> Germany is the most important EU country in terms of trading with China, but the Netherlands occupies second place in terms of imports.<sup>316</sup> Moreover, most of Germany's imports enter Europe via the Port of Rotterdam, although in the future China might increase the use of the railroad connection with Duisburg as the choke point, once this becomes financially more profitable.<sup>317</sup> In 2017, imported Chinese goods accounted for 8.8% of the total Dutch imports; exports to China amounted to 2.4% of the total Dutch exports. These figures might not seem too impressive, but they have considerably increased.<sup>318</sup> Although Chinese trade with Europe will predominantly continue to use the Suez Canal route for the next two decades – according to current predictions – imports of oil and gas products from installations in the Russian EEZ by shipping might, at least partially, start to enter Europe earlier. This offers a good potential for the Port of Rotterdam. If the NSR becomes better navigable at commercially attractive costs, it might also trigger Dutch shipping companies and others to use the NSR. Clearly, in the long term the economic interest of the Netherlands in the growing use of the NSR seems uncontested.

Tourism and fisheries are the two other potential economic sectors of interest to the Netherlands with regard to increased access to Arctic waters. Cruises into the Arctic area have already started and are likely to increase in numbers. Regarding fishing, at the moment larger Dutch fishery firms are operating up to approximately the Arctic circle. Sailing further north will largely depend on the economic business case, particularly if additional costs – such as strengthening the ship's hull, extra fuel, etc. – will be balanced by revenues. Furthermore, fishing in international waters (i.e. outside EEZs) in the Arctic is forbidden by a recently signed Agreement to Prevent Unregulated High Seas Fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean. For the near future, this sea area is not navigable; once this becomes possible, the treaty will block commercial fishing in these waters.<sup>319</sup>

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315 Wouter Jan Strietman, Jorden Splinter and Liz ter Kuile, *Nieuwe ruimte voor varen, vissen en grondstoffenwinning*, KNMI Specials 05, januari 2020.

316 *Handels- en investeringscijfers China-Nederland februari 2019*, Rijksdienst van ondernemend Nederland, 2019.

317 Jochem van Staalduine, 'Wat kan de Rotterdamse haven tegen de dreiging uit China?', *Trouw*, 11 December 2019.

318 From 2001 to 2017 imports of goods increased fourfold while exports increased tenfold. See: *Nederland-China: een nieuwe balans*, Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, mei 2019, p. 24.

319 The International Agreement to Prevent Unregulated High Seas Fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean, see Chapter 2.

## Political-military security

As analysed in previous chapters, the Arctic states continue to cooperate in the Arctic Council and other bodies, while at the same time the changing international order – characterised by the return of great power competition – is impacting their relationship in Arctic matters. For the Netherlands, as a non-Arctic country, there is no direct territorial security risk. However, four of the Arctic coastal states are NATO members<sup>320</sup>: in case of rising tensions or infringements of their national territory, these countries could invoke Article 4 (consultations) or, in a worst-case scenario, Article 5 (collective defence) of the NATO Treaty. The likelihood of territorial disputes – claims to extended continental shelves – turning into political-military conflicts seems to be low (see Chapter 2 and Annex 1). Nevertheless, in case of a further deterioration of US-Russia relations, tensions in the Arctic may increase, e.g. when the US starts to test unrestricted access to the NSR. Even when disputes about claims in the Arctic will be settled by peaceful means, the geopolitical strife in the region will continue as it is driven by global competition. If competition between the great powers results in political-military confrontation, it will affect Dutch security interests, also in connection with economic and ecological interests.

## Arctic security – the Dutch perspective

Dutch ecological, economic and political-military interests will be best served by the peaceful and gradual development of the economic use of the Arctic region, based on the application of ecological norms, both for using new sea routes as well as for exploiting natural resources. This requires a political-militarily stable situation in the region, which is no longer automatically given. In other words, Dutch interests will be served by launching efforts to prevent an escalation of geopolitical tensions, to strengthen security cooperation and to actively contribute to multilateralism and effective governance bodies. What could The Hague contribute in support of these aims?

Firstly, the Netherlands should continue to reinforce cooperation on non-military issues by actively contributing to the work in existing bodies, particularly the Arctic Council and its working groups. Dutch participation in scientific Arctic research could be stepped up. For example, Wageningen University and Research is coordinating the Arctic Marine Litter Project.<sup>321</sup> The role of the Dutch Arctic Circle<sup>322</sup>, a forum bringing

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320 Canada, Denmark (Greenland), Norway, the US.

321 Wageningen University & Research, *The Arctic Marine Litter Project: knowing the sources to work on solutions*.

322 Wageningen University & Research, *Dutch Arctic Circle*.



together government, scientific research and business, could be enhanced. Together with partners the Netherlands could also underline in the EU and NATO that paying even more attention to cooperation on soft security matters will further strengthen the optimal functioning of existing Arctic cooperation structures.

Secondly, the Netherlands should even more clearly recognise the growing importance of the geopolitical aspect of Arctic security and its consequences. The political sensitivity of Arctic political-military security argues for 'keeping it as it is' with regard to the Arctic Council's mandate, excluding these issues from the agenda. The Hague should support this approach which is widely shared by the Arctic states. Nevertheless, political-military issues should be discussed in order to prevent a worst-case scenario from occurring. The Netherlands – naturally, in close consultation and cooperation with the (Western) Arctic states, the EU member states and NATO Allies – should also prepare itself for the impact of the geopolitisation of the Arctic. NATO is the prime organisation to discuss what this means in terms of the deterrence and defence posture in the area. At the same time it would be in the interest of the Netherlands and its Allies to start a dialogue with Russia on restricting and regulating the military use of the Arctic region. This implies that the Netherlands, together with other countries such as France, Germany and the UK, should call for an Arctic forum dealing with security and cooperation – such as the Arctic Security Cooperation Forum as proposed in Chapter 4.

Thirdly, traditionally the Dutch Armed Forces contribute to NATO's deterrence and defence posture. The Dutch Marine Corps conducts its cold weather training in northern Norway. The Navy, Army and Airforce have taken part in Exercise Trident Juncture. The Dutch MoD could examine how such military support for safeguarding the Alliance's Northern flank – which may no longer be a flank area within the next few decades – could be enhanced. Naturally, this has to be done in close consultation with NATO partners like the UK and with Norway.

## 6 Conclusions and recommendations

In 2020 and the years to come, there is still little chance of military conflict in the Arctic region. The Arctic states, including Russia, continue to cooperate on non-military matters, despite a further deterioration of the US-Russia relationship. The Arctic Council serves as the primary venue for cooperation between the Arctic states on non-military matters and all its members intend to stick to 'business as usual'. Using the Arctic Council for addressing political-military matters – in any case not possible without changing its mandate – could affect this well-functioning Arctic governance body negatively by spill-over effects from geopolitical tensions.

Nevertheless, the Arctic situation has changed. Current trends point to a further geopolitisation of the area, multiplied by the melting of ice. Arctic security is not primarily dependent on what happens in the region but on the state of relations between the main global actors – Russia, China and the US. Current trends point to an Arctic region that will increasingly be influenced by the global competition between the world's great powers. Moscow is stepping up its military activities and, even if they can at least be partially explained in the context of safeguarding Russia's 4,000 km long Arctic shoreline, the US administration has already started to respond by accusing Russia and China of their geopolitical activities. China is increasing its financial-economic investment and its influence in the region is growing, thereby serving its long-term agenda of becoming a global superpower.

For the new Dutch Polar Strategy it is important to decide how the Netherlands prefers to position itself, NATO and the EU in a setting where the US, on the one hand, and Russia and China, on the other, are increasingly at odds with each other. The difficult relationship with Russia on other security issues of international concern makes it not an easy matter to step up ties with Moscow on Arctic security cooperation. China as the Arctic 'newcomer' complicates the matter further as Beijing is already cooperating closely with Russia in the Arctic. Furthermore, in order to promote Arctic security and stability the Netherlands will need to consider how to balance its position in NATO – and the practical military support to Allies such as Canada and Norway – with the policy focussed on non-military cooperation in scientific matters, the environment and search and rescue.

From the Dutch ecological, economic and political-military perspectives, the Eurasian Arctic subregion is the most important one. Not in the next five years, but in the coming decades the melting of the Arctic ice will open up the Northern Sea Route and,

ultimately, the Central Arctic Ocean with a huge ecological and economic impact for the Netherlands, both in terms of risks and opportunities. Ecologically, the country will be affected by the impact of melting ice although this has to be related to the global climate impact including the melting of ice in Antarctica. In the near term more extreme weather – both ‘very wet’ and ‘very dry’ periods – will occur. In the longer term the rising sea level is posing a challenge to the protection of the Dutch coast and sea barriers.

Economically, little change is expected in the next five years<sup>323</sup>: at the moment using the NSR by commercial shipping is considered to be too costly. Nevertheless, also here the trend is towards increased use and, once the NSR is ice-free, sailing along Russia’s northern coast or even through the Arctic Ocean will become commercially attractive. The Dutch economy – which continues to be dependent on overseas trade to a large extent – will benefit from a more accessible NSR, which applies specifically to the Port of Rotterdam as Europe’s largest harbour.

The geopolitisation of the Arctic will impact Dutch foreign and security policy. Depending on how the big power competition will unfold in the future, The Hague has to deal with emerging political-military questions requiring a strategic response. Dutch interests are best served by a multi-layered strategy of proactively contributing to international forums dealing with Arctic matters – the regional governance bodies as well as the EU and NATO – as well as increasing its own national investment and activities in the region. Contrary to the Dutch Polar Strategy 2016-2020, today geopolitics are influencing the Arctic region in such a way that the phrase “no worrying degree of militarisation” no longer applies. The danger of an action-reaction pattern is growing. If executed in an uncontrolled manner, in due course this could lead to serious tensions and even to military conflict. Furthermore, it could negatively impact the Arctic Council and other well-functioning Arctic cooperation bodies. Thus, it might start to endanger the international management of the Arctic ecosystem, the well-being of Indigenous Peoples and the peaceful and environmentally safe exploration of Arctic resources. Together with the Arctic states and other European countries with vested interests in the Arctic – primarily France, Germany and the UK – the Netherlands has to address the question of how to cope with the political-military trends in the Arctic.

Regarding the political-military aspects it has two implications for The Hague: (1) to start discussing with the most interested partner countries how best to address these aspects and in what forum – which has to include Russia; (2) to take the military consequences into account in its long-term defence policy. Recognising the shortcomings of existing bodies in terms of their mandate, membership and participation, the best option might be to transform the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable – or, alternatively, to have it replaced by – an *Arctic Security Cooperation Forum (ASCF)*. The main difference

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323 Not taking into account the economic impact of the Corona (Covid-19) virus.

between the ASFR and the ASCF would be to open discussions on future conflict prevention measures and other arrangements in order to de-escalate the situation in case of growing tensions and crises in the Arctic. Next to a wider mandate, this would also imply a broader participation of experts in the ASFR meetings. One could also consider a continuation of the military-to-military meetings to deal with strictly military matters combined with back-to-back political-military meetings focusing on Arctic security conflict prevention measures.

In summary, the key conclusions include:

- (i) Climate change in the Arctic is impacting the ecosystem, offers new economic opportunities and opens up the sea areas to military activities. As these three elements are closely interrelated they require *an integrated approach*, in which all the relevant actors contribute to the overall goal of a stable and secure Arctic region.
- (ii) Melting ice is gradually turning the Arctic region into *an area of global interest*, in particular in view of new sea routes and the extraction of natural resources. The Arctic will unavoidably be *influenced by geopolitics*, first and foremost by the global competition between China, Russia and the US.
- (iii) The impact of the great power competition on the Arctic leads to *a gradual increase in the militarisation of the region*, primarily by Russia. A distinction should be made between Russia's national security interest for safeguarding its 4,000 km long Arctic coastline, on the one hand, and its global power projection, including the access of its Northern Fleet to the North Atlantic Ocean, on the other hand.
- (iv) *China's influence in the Arctic is growing*, albeit primarily by economic investment for the moment. However, China's investment in the Arctic serves its national interest in becoming a global superpower. Thus, pumping money into infrastructure and the extraction of natural resources in the Arctic serves Beijing's geopolitical agenda.
- (v) The optimal functioning of existing Arctic governance bodies, such as *the Arctic Council* and *the Arctic Coast Guard Forum*, are best served by *continuing their business as usual*. Addressing political-military security matters – leaving to one side the fact that existing mandates exclude these issues – could lead to the politicisation of these forums and thereby endanger their ongoing cooperation activities in non-military matters.

These conclusions on the impact of the changing Arctic security situation lead to the following set of recommendations for the Netherlands:

1. The Netherlands should *continue to support the ongoing cooperation in the Arctic on non-military matters* by actively contributing to the Arctic Council and its working groups, through scientific efforts and cooperation with Arctic and non-Arctic states and by supporting EU involvement and investment to explore economic opportunities but equally to mitigate the associated risks.
2. The geopolitisation of the Arctic has implications for the new Dutch Polar Strategy. Contrary to five years ago, today it no longer seems justified to state that there is 'no worrying degree of militarisation' in the Arctic. Trends point in the direction of '*increasing worries of Arctic militarisation*'. There is no reason to ring the alarm bells, but the new Dutch Polar Strategy should reflect ongoing geopolitical trends and their potential implications in the long term.
3. The Netherlands should promote the transformation of the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable or even its replacement by an *Arctic Security Cooperation Forum (ASCF)* with a broader mandate and wider participation for addressing conflict prevention measures. The *participation of Russia is essential*. The ASCF should also encompass military-to-military meetings to continue the ASFR's practical activities on purely military matters.
4. In line with its own national interests in the Arctic and in order to influence the Arctic governance bodies in a positive way, the Netherlands should *consider increasing its own investment in the Arctic*, e.g. by expanding scientific research (as already mentioned in the Netherlands Polar Strategy) and by promoting the use of technological innovation – in particular to increase ecological security (or safety). The *Dutch Arctic Circle* – bringing together government, research and private companies – should *be used more actively* to coordinate the policies and activities of the three important actors involved in the Arctic in a comprehensive way.
5. For the same reason the *Defence Vision 2035*, the Dutch national Defence Strategy to be published later this year, has to include *the impact of the geopolitical trends on Arctic security*. In particular as the Defence Vision is focusing on the long term, it should also indicate what consequences the geopolitisation of the Arctic might have on Dutch security and defence policy, including on the future force requirements.

# Annex 1      Contribution by Andreas Østhagen

## The different levels of the geopolitics of the Arctic

### The race North

Few places have been the source of as much speculation, hype, and broad statements as the Arctic region at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Propelled onto the agenda by climate change, flag planting and resource appraisals a decade ago, the Arctic continues to lure researchers and journalists to venture northwards to 'the next great game'. However, to perform a (traditional) geopolitical analysis is to examine the connections between geographic space and power politics, being sensitive to expansionist inclinations and interstate rivalry over finite territories and resources. Scholars have now debunked the notion of 'resource wars' in the North. Oil and gas resources – both onshore and offshore – are located within the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) or the territories of the Arctic states themselves, as approximately 90% of the oil and gas resources of the circumpolar North are under the control of the littoral states.

The situation in the Arctic is thus not fuelling a dash northward to grab unclaimed resources. Instead, there is a desire to ensure stable operating environments to extract costly resources far away from their prospective markets. Moreover, the Arctic riches have already been divided amongst the Arctic states, since their EEZs cover almost all of the Arctic Ocean<sup>324</sup>, while the foreign ministries of the Arctic states keep highlighting the cooperative traits of the region: "in the Arctic, we work together to solve problems".<sup>325</sup> Nevertheless, notions of Arctic conflict and great power politics over the North Pole keep emerging on the political and news agenda. Why is this the case?

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324 Rolf Tamnes and Kristine Offerdal, 'Conclusion', in: Rolf Tamnes and Kristine Offerdal (Eds.), *Geopolitics and Security in the Arctic: Regional Dynamics in a Global World*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2014, 166–77; Klaus Dodds and Mark Nuttall, *The Scramble for the Poles: The Geopolitics of the Arctic and Antarctic*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016; Andreas Østhagen, 'Geopolitics and Security in the Arctic', in: Mark Nuttall, Torben R. Christensen and Martin Siegert (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of the Polar Regions*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2018, 348–56.

325 Sergei Lavrov and Jonas Gahr Støre, 'Canada, Take Note: Here's How to Resolve Maritime Disputes', *The Globe and Mail*, September 21, 2010, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/canada-take-note-heres-how-to-resolve-maritime-disputes/article4326372/>.

## Levels of analysis

In the case of the Arctic, it is particularly useful to distinguish between two levels: the international (system) level, and the regional (Arctic) level. Such an approach helps to tease out the dynamics that are present in the Arctic, explaining *why* the idea of conflict persists, and how this is not necessarily counter to ideas of regional cooperation and stability.

During the Cold War, the Arctic held a prominent place in the political and military standoffs between the two superpowers.<sup>326</sup> It was important not because of interactions *in* the Arctic itself, but because of its strategic role in the systemic competition between the USA and the USSR. As the Cold War ended, the Arctic was transformed from a region of geopolitical rivalry to one where Russia would be included in various cooperative arrangements with its former adversaries. Several regional organisations (the Arctic Council, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and the Northern Forum) emerged in the 1990s to tackle issues such as environmental degradation, regional and local development, and cross-border cooperation. Subsequently, although *interaction* between Arctic states and Arctic peoples increased in this period, the region nevertheless disappeared from the geopolitical radar and lost its systemic importance, beyond its significance to the neighbouring northern countries.

## The Arctic is central to Russia

Recently, the strategic importance of the North has risen once again. Recalling the dynamics of the Cold War, the Arctic's strategic importance has evolved primarily because Russia is intent on re-establishing its military power, and the Arctic is one domain where it can do so basically unobstructed.<sup>327</sup> This comes not necessarily because of the Arctic itself, but is related to Russia's dominant position in the North, with its Northern Fleet based in the Kola Peninsula<sup>328</sup>, which houses strategic

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326 Norway was one of only two NATO countries (the other being Turkey) to share a land border with the Soviet Union. Alaska – albeit separated by the Bering Strait – is in close proximity to the Russian Far East region. Greenland and Iceland hold strategic positions in the North Atlantic, and the Kola Peninsula – specifically, the Northern Fleet at Severomorsk – has been central to Russian military planning, offering unrestricted access to the Atlantic.

327 Paal S. Hilde, 'Armed Forces and Security Challenges in the Arctic', in: Rolf Tammes and Kristine Offerdal (Eds.), *Geopolitics and Security in the Arctic: Regional Dynamics in a Global World*, London: Routledge, 2014, 153–55.

328 Katarzyna Zysk, 'Russia's Arctic Strategy: Ambitions and Restraints', in: Barry Scott Zellen (Ed.), *The Fast-Changing Arctic: Rethinking Arctic Security for a Warmer World*, Calgary, AB: Calgary University Press, 2013, 281–96.

submarines essential to the country's status as a nuclear power on the world stage.<sup>329</sup> It is primarily not the melting of the sea ice that has spurred Russia's military emphasis on the Arctic – it is the importance of the Arctic for Moscow's more general strategic plans and ambitions.

Unlike the case in the Cold War, however, the Arctic environment itself also spurs action. Russia's ambition concerning the Northern Sea Route demands a presence in terms of both military and civilian infrastructure and capacity. The other Arctic states are following suit: as more and more of their northern waters remain ice-free for longer periods during the summer, establishing a forward presence through coast guards, patrol aircraft and exercises becomes a challenge and priority for all Arctic littoral states.

## Enter China

In addition to the challenges deriving from a more active and ice-free Arctic, China has emerged as an Arctic actor. With Beijing continuing to assert its influence on the world stage, the Arctic will be only one of many regions where China's presence and interaction are components of an expansion of power in both soft and hard terms. China has been noted as a 'near-Arctic state', a situation which demands involvement from Beijing.<sup>330</sup> However, China is not accepted as an Arctic state and has largely been excluded from regional politics. Despite the inaccuracies of US Secretary of State Pompeo's warning in 2019 that Beijing's Arctic activity risks creating a "new South China Sea"<sup>331</sup>, such statements highlight how the US sees the Arctic as yet another arena where the emerging systemic competition between the two countries is increasing.

## Different Arctic (security) regions

On the systemic level, the US can and will engage in regions like the Arctic as it sees fit. However, in North America the Arctic does not play the same seminal role in *national* security considerations as it does in Russia or Northern Europe. Although the rhetoric might suggest otherwise, for the US the Arctic has served primarily as the location for missile defence capabilities, surveillance infrastructure, and a limited number of

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329 Alexander Sergunin and Valery Konyshev, 'Russia in Search of Its Arctic Strategy: Between Hard and Soft Power?', *Polar Journal* 4, no. 1 (2014): 75, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2154896X.2014.913930>.

330 Sanna Kopra, 'China's Arctic Interests', in: *Arctic Yearbook* 2013 (2013): 1–16, <http://www.arcticyearbook.com/2013-articles/51-china-s-arctic-interests>.

331 'US Warns Beijing's Arctic Activity Risks Creating 'New South China Sea,' *The Guardian*, May 6, 2019.



strategic forces. It is also of importance to the US Navy and Coast Guard, although the US has yet to invest significantly in Arctic capabilities and infrastructure.<sup>332</sup>

This brings us to the important difference between overarching strategic considerations, and those that concern the Arctic region specifically. First, security dynamics in the Arctic have remained anchored to the sub-regional level: the Barents area, the Bering Sea/Strait area, even the Baltic Sea region. Thus, it is futile to generalise about security interests and challenges across the whole northern circumpolar region. It makes more sense to discuss security in the *different parts* of the Arctic, not in the Arctic as a whole. Of these different parts, the European Arctic is undoubtedly the most active and the most challenging.

### Arctic cooperation: what effect?

Intra-regional cooperation on Arctic matters has flourished. In response to the outcry and to concerns about the 'lack of governance' in the Arctic caused by a generally growing Arctic awareness internationally, the five Arctic coastal states came together in Ilulissat (Greenland) in 2008, where they declared the Arctic to be a region of cooperation. They also affirmed their intention to work within established international arrangements and agreements, particularly UNCLOS.<sup>333</sup> Since the Ilulissat meeting, the Arctic states have all repeated the mantra of cooperation, articulating the same sentiment in relatively streamlined Arctic policy and strategy documents. The deterioration in relations between Russia and the other Arctic states that started in 2014 has not changed this.<sup>334</sup> Indeed, it has been argued that these low-level forms of interaction help to ensure low tension in the North, on the regional level.<sup>335</sup> The emergence of the Arctic Council as the primary forum for regional affairs in the Arctic plays into this setting.<sup>336</sup> An increasing number of actors have applied to the Council for observer status. These include China, India, Germany and the EU.

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332 Hilde, *Armed Forces and Security Challenges in the Arctic*, 149; Heather Conley et al., *A New Security Architecture for the Arctic: An American Perspective*, CSIS Report, Washington D.C.: Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS), January 2012.

333 The document can be found at: [http://www.oceanlaw.org/downloads/arctic/Ilulissat\\_Declaration.pdf](http://www.oceanlaw.org/downloads/arctic/Ilulissat_Declaration.pdf).

334 See Michael Byers, 'Crises and International Cooperation: An Arctic Case Study', *International Relations* 31/4 (2017).

335 Kathrin Keil and Sebastian Knecht, *Governing Arctic Change: Global Perspectives, Governing Arctic Change: Global Perspectives*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-50884-3>.

336 Svein Vigeland Rottem, 'The Arctic Council: Challenges and Recommendations', in: Svein Vigeland Rottem and Ida Folkestad Soltvedt (eds.), *Arctic Governance: Law and Politics. Volume 1*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2017, 231-51.

The Arctic states have thus shown a preference for a stable political environment in which they maintain dominance in the region. This is supported by the importance attributed to the Law of the Sea and issue-specific agreements signed under the auspices of the Arctic Council. These developments benefit the northern countries more than anyone else, while also ensuring that Arctic issues are generally dealt with by the Arctic states themselves.

### **Conflict still exists**

The dynamics of the Arctic region cannot be boiled down to the mutually exclusive options of conflict or no conflict. A race for Arctic resources or territory is highly unlikely in the foreseeable future, despite the territorial land grabs that have been occurring in other parts of the world. The Arctic states have limited, if any, rationale for engaging in outright *conflict* (bilateral or regional) over resources or territory – although local rivalries, such as between Norway and Russia persist. This does not mean, however, that disputes in the Arctic do not exist. Retreating sea ice, changing inter-state power relations, altering the distribution of marine natural resources, plus a demand for the same resources, has combined to create a ‘perfect storm’ for political disputes. The potential for disputes amongst Arctic states, or between actors inside and outside the region, is real enough. Beyond the traditional and strategic concerns in the ‘East–West axis’, there are domains and issue areas in the North where states and non-state actors engage in disputes. This is linked particularly to marine resources and maritime space, spurred by technological advances and developments (or the lack thereof) in international law, where economic actions taken by states are aimed at achieving larger (geo)political goals.

Examples of such disputes include those over: the status in international law of the North West and North East Passages; the processes for determining the limits of continental shelves beyond 200 nautical miles on the Arctic seabed; the status of the continental shelf and/or maritime zone around Svalbard; the inability of coastal states to agree on how to divide quotas on transboundary fish stocks; and efforts concerning marine protected areas and access to genetic resources/bioprospecting in northern waters. In such instances, actors may hold diverging opinions on international law, resource management and distributional principles.

### **Rising strategic importance**

Simultaneously, the region’s growing importance within the international system is becoming apparent. This is only somewhat linked to events *in* the Arctic (melting ice, economic ventures, etc.), but has everything to do with the strategic position of the Arctic *between* North America, Europe and Asia. True, we find some intra-regional competition, as well as investments and cooperation. However, here it is difficult to

generalise across the Arctic *region*, precisely because of the vastness and inaccessibility of the area itself.

The Arctic will not become any less important on the strategic level, simply because the US and Russia are already *in* the region, and China is increasingly demonstrating its (strategic) northern interests. The worse the relations between these actors *globally* are, the more tensions are likely to occur in the Arctic, materialising through increasingly bellicose statements, sanctions and military posturing and exercises. In this regard the Arctic stands as a nexus where these global actors also interact with Europe. European states (including the EU) should therefore watch this space closely as it continues to transform in lieu of a changing climate and international power balancing.

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## Annex 2 Contribution by Timo Koivurova

### The legal landscape in the Arctic – implications for the governance and security of the region<sup>337</sup>

The overall sovereignty situation over land areas (both continental areas and islands) in the Arctic is clear. There are no disagreements as to who has sovereignty over land areas in the Arctic region, except the insignificant Hans Island.<sup>338</sup> Yet, there are several areas of disagreement between the Arctic littoral states.<sup>339</sup>

#### Extended continental shelves

There is one remaining long-standing maritime border dispute left between the Arctic states, that is between Canada and the US over the Beaufort Sea boundary (all maritime zones<sup>340</sup>). There are also overlapping “claims”<sup>341</sup> by the Arctic littoral states over their continental shelves in the Arctic Ocean (AO). Information on the extended continental shelves is processed by the Commission on the Limits of Continental Shelf (CLCS) on the basis of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), given that the states need to provide technical-scientific data to the CLCS if they perceive that their continental shelf extends longer than their Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). All AO coastal states except the US are parties to the UNCLOS and have therefore made a submission of their extended continental shelves. The US has developed its own data on its extended continental shelf. The “claims” proposed by the AO states concerned overlap in the central AO (also including the North Pole), namely those of Canada, Russia and Denmark. The US cannot make a submission to the CLCS, but has a customary law right to an extended continental shelf. Thus, it is not yet known whether

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337 This short paper provides a brief general overview of legal issues that are, in closer inspection, extremely complicated and multifaceted.

338 The only insignificant dispute is between Denmark (Greenland) and Canada over Hans Island, a tiny island over which the countries have not yet found any solution, but this has not caused any real tensions since there is nothing of value on the island.

339 Only Denmark (Greenland), Canada, Norway, Russia and the US are perceived as the littoral states of the Arctic Ocean. If we include the adjacent seas to the AO, Iceland can also be seen as a littoral state.

340 Maritime zones: internal waters, territorial sea, contiguous zone, EEZ and Continental Shelf.

341 To be exact, one should only talk of CS entitlements, but the term claim is also used, e.g. in the Ilulissat Declaration. The word is admittedly problematic because the coastal state does not have to claim its continental shelf.

there is an overlap with others. Expectations are that these forthcoming maritime boundary negotiations will not lead to tensions between AO littoral states. First, these processes are still pending in the CLCS and it will take a long time before they can be completed. Moreover, the probability of the occurrence of valuable recoverable resources in the disputed seabed areas has been assessed as very small. Even if sizeable resources were to be discovered, their extraction would be highly unlikely from an economic point of view, also in the long term. So far, the co-operative spirit has prevailed among the AO coastal states in debates over the extended continental shelves. The CLCS process is slow and it does not have a mandate in prescribing boundaries between states. Hence, negotiating the continental shelves' boundaries will be up to the Arctic states themselves.<sup>342</sup>

## Svalbard

A second maritime area which may cause tensions is related to Svalbard.<sup>343</sup> This is not only an issue between Arctic states but also between all the contracting parties to the Svalbard Treaty. Svalbard's legal status has been regulated via the Svalbard Treaty, granting Norway sovereignty over the islands but also economic rights to other contracting states. The views of Norway and other contracting states differ as regards the legal status of the maritime areas surrounding the Svalbard islands. Norway perceives that, on the basis of a literal interpretation of the Svalbard Treaty, it only applies (and thus the economic rights of other parties) to the extent of the territorial waters. Other contracting states argue that the rights under the Svalbard Treaty should extend to maritime zones in accordance with the evolution of the Law of the Sea.<sup>344</sup> Norway has been dealing with these different views from the 1970s when it wanted to establish the EEZ around Svalbard. As a compromise solution, a fisheries protection zone around Svalbard was established. Today, the stakes are becoming higher in view of oil and gas discoveries and exploitation may become possible at some point in the future in the continental shelf around Svalbard.<sup>345</sup>

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342 Timo Koivurova, 'The Actions of the Arctic States Respecting the Continental Shelf: A Reflective Essay', *Ocean Development & International Law*, 42:3, 211-226(2011). This article is also included in: Geir Hønneland (Ed.), *The Politics of The Arctic*, Edward Elgar 2013.

343 The Svalbard question is a very complex issue from a legal viewpoint; it is dealt with in this contribution at a general level only.

344 Norway's position is that the Svalbard Treaty limits the economic rights of other contracting states to land areas and territorial waters, according to the Law of the Sea at the time when the Treaty was signed (1920). The other contracting parties argue that, since the Law of the Sea has evolved to include EEZ and Continental Shelves, the Svalbard Treaty should extend to those maritime areas as well. This results in a dispute over the economic rights to exploit oil and gas resources in the Svalbard Continental Shelf.

345 Norway's position is that Svalbard does not generate its own continental shelf but the shelf surrounding Svalbard is part of the continuous shelf from the mainland.

Recently, Norwegian judiciary prosecuted a Latvian fishing vessel for harvesting snow crab, even if the vessel had obtained a prior permit for this activity under the EU law. Since snow crab is a sedentary species, it belongs to the continental shelf and can open the issue of whether the economic rights of other parties to the Svalbard Treaty also apply to the oil, gas and mineral resources in the seabed around Svalbard. Yet, the Norwegian Supreme Court did not resolve the issue as one relating to whether Svalbard treaty applies there, but rather whether the vessel had a permit on the basis of Norwegian Snow Crab regulation. As a result, the issue is still open to disagreement between the parties. The EU has been particularly active on this issue and many perceive that the EU (and possibly contracting states) will continue challenging the snow crab regulation but also contest any future granting of offshore oil, gas or mineral licences to the continental shelf around Svalbard if they are not accorded on a non-discriminatory basis.<sup>346</sup> Even if tensions arise, it is difficult to foresee any real security problem resulting from this situation. In addition, it is also difficult to see any resolution of the issue, other than that Norway would accept the legal views of other contracting states. It is, of course, possible that the issue is taken to an international legal proceeding, but even this seems unlikely.

### **North West Passage**

Another long-standing dispute over the legal status of certain marine areas is related to the Canadian Arctic Archipelago waters. The US has long argued that Canada's claim about its waters being historic internal waters is not in accordance with the Law of the Sea. Instead, the US argues that the North West Passage includes an international strait, with extended rights for other states to navigate there. Although the US and Canada resolved this controversy by the 1988 convention<sup>347</sup>, both countries still disagree on the status of these waters.<sup>348</sup> With sea ice melting due to climate change, it can be expected that tensions over the status of waters may increase, even if it is difficult to foresee that this would lead to a real conflict between Canada and the US. Washington has also criticised the way Russia has included several straits between outlying archipelagos and the Russian mainland into its own internal waters. By encompassing these straits within

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346 <https://www.arctictoday.com/svalbard-treaty-doesnt-apply-beyond-coastal-waters-signals-norwegian-high-court-ruling-in-snow-crab-case/>.

347 Agreement Between the Government of Canada and the Government of the United States of America on Arctic Cooperation, <https://www.treaty-accord.gc.ca/text-texte.aspx?id=101701>.

348 See the text at: [http://www.assidmer.net/doc/1988\\_Canada\\_-\\_USA\\_Treaty.pdf](http://www.assidmer.net/doc/1988_Canada_-_USA_Treaty.pdf).

straight baselines<sup>349</sup>, Russia would effectively require the consent of all states when they use the Northern Sea Route (also called the North East Passage).<sup>350</sup> When a French navy vessel traversed through the North East Passage, this triggered Russia to adopt a draft decree giving Moscow control over navigation in the region. Reportedly, the draft decree requires a 45-day advance notice from a navy vessel if it wants to traverse the North East Passage. A Russian pilot has to be on board. In the case of non-compliance with these obligations, Russia could take severe penalty measures. The US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo criticised this decree very strongly just before the last Arctic Council's ministerial meeting as being an illegal step.<sup>351</sup>

### Future expectations

As identified above, there are a limited number of disagreements between the Arctic states (and others, in respect of the Svalbard situation). Therefore, one could conclude that the existing fairly heterogeneous governance system, very much based on nation-state legal and policy systems both in land and marine areas (EEZ and continental shelves) – and international agreements – is working well. However, the situation as regards the North West and North East Passages is likely to become more difficult given that navigation is expected to increase as a result of the sea ice melting. The same applies to the Svalbard marine areas, because oil and gas exploitation there becomes more probable. It is difficult to foresee any real solutions to the legal issues, given that views differ considerably from each other – and taking the cases to the international court also seem unlikely, although of course not excluded. Apart from the North East Passage, no hard security issues are likely to arise. The US has now taken a strict stance on Russia, but again it seems rather unlikely that it would challenge the North East Passage navigational rights via its freedom of navigation operations.

On the issue of broader regulatory gaps, the Arctic states have solved most of them with regard to shipping, fisheries and certain environmental concerns. The Arctic Council has catalysed two independent legally binding agreements on search and rescue and

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349 All maritime zones of the coastal states are measured from the baselines, which are of two types:

(i) normal baselines, see Art. 5 UNCLOS ("Except where otherwise provided in this Convention, the normal baseline for measuring the breadth of the territorial sea is the low-water line along the coast as marked on large-scale charts officially recognized by the coastal State"); (ii) straight baselines are measured according to Art. 7 UNCLOS.

350 North Eastern passage is used for the whole route via the Russian northern waters, whereas Northern Sea Route a more limited maritime area.

351 See: <https://www.state.gov/looking-north-sharpening-americas-arctic-focus/>.

oil spills.<sup>352</sup> Furthermore, the Arctic Council member states were active in pushing for the global IMO agreement on the Polar Code that is meant to guarantee safer and environmentally more sound AO (and Southern Ocean) shipping.<sup>353</sup> In addition, outside of the Arctic Council, the five AO coastal states invited China, Japan, South Korea, Iceland and the EU for negotiations over fisheries in the Central AO, resulting in an agreement that at least temporarily prevents unregulated commercial fishing in the high seas of the AO for a period of 16 years (with an extension clause for periods of five years). This agreement has been signed in October 2018 and the countries are in the process of ratifying it.<sup>354</sup>

Some non-governmental organisations and academic commentators argue for a stronger Arctic institutional management body to especially govern the gradually melting Arctic sea ice marine ecosystems. Yet, at the moment, it does not seem that there is any political will for creating such a body, and the marine work in the Arctic Council remains the only imperfect solution to manage these opening marine areas. To some extent, progressing on this matter is related to whether consensus can be reached on adopting an implementing agreement to UNCLOS for governing marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction. This would also apply to the 2.8 million square kilometre high seas area of the AO, 40% of which is now open from ice during summer months.

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352 Agreement on Cooperation on Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue in the Arctic (signed 2011), see: <https://oaarchive.arctic-council.org/handle/11374/531>, and Agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response in the Arctic (signed 2013), see: <https://oaarchive.arctic-council.org/handle/11374/529>.

353 See: <http://www.imo.org/en/MediaCentre/HotTopics/polar/Documents/POLAR%20CODE%20TEXT%20AS%20ADOPTED.pdf>.

354 See: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/en/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52018PC0453>.



## Annex 3 Schematic overview of the Arctic's legal framework

The Arctic's legal framework: international agreements	
<p><i>United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)</i></p>	<p>The UNCLOS defines the rights and responsibilities of states in relation to the utilisation and protection of the world's oceans. It settled several important issues, such as the established right of the freedom of navigation, the setting of territorial sea boundaries at 12 miles offshore; the setting of EEZs up to 200 miles offshore; and the creation of conflict resolution mechanisms like the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS). This mechanism fulfils a significant role in the Arctic, considering that the Commission still has to make recommendations on coastal states' continental shelf claims. Except for the US, all Arctic states have ratified the Convention. The US accepts and acts in accordance with the provisions of the Convention relating to e.g. navigation and overflight, but objects to the seabed mining provisions.<sup>355</sup></p>
<p><i>IMO's The Polar Code (2014)</i></p>	<p>The Polar Code of the International Maritime Organization supplements previous conventions on the operation of ships (in ice-infested waters), to specifically focus on the polar regions. It is based on the assumption that the changing circumstances in the Arctic region will lead to both an increase in the volume and a diversification of the nature of polar shipping. This code is intended to address these challenges in such a way that the safety of life at sea and the sustainability of the environment are guaranteed. It applies to passenger and cargo ships of 500 gross tons or more that are on international routes. The code does not apply to fishing vessels, military vessels, pleasure yachts or smaller cargo ships. Hence, it covers the full range of shipping-related matters relevant to navigation in waters surrounding the two poles (incl. ship design, construction and equipment, Search and Rescue, etc.).<sup>356</sup></p>

355 Congressional Research Service, Changes in the Arctic.

356 *International Code for Ships Operating in Polar Waters (Polar Code)*, International Maritime Organization, January 2017.

The Arctic's legal framework: international agreements	
<i>Ilulissat Declaration</i>	This Declaration is related to the changing circumstances in the Arctic, and in particular to the opening of shipping routes. One of the main goals included in the Declaration is the blockage of any new comprehensive international legal regime that would govern the Arctic ocean. <sup>357</sup> As the purpose of the meeting in Ilulissat was to discuss legal regimes and jurisdictional issues in the Arctic Ocean, only the five coastal states were invited, and thus the non-coastal Arctic states of Finland, Iceland and Sweden are not a signatory parties to the Declaration. "Although the US I not a signatory to UNCLOS, the 2008 Ilulissat Declaration – issued by all the Arctic coastal states together – underscores a commitment to using international law to ensure peaceful governance in the region." <sup>358</sup>
<i>Spitsbergen Treaty (Treaty of Paris)</i>	The treaty, signed in Paris on 9 February 1920, recognises the sovereignty of Norway over the Arctic archipelago of Svalbard, then called Spitsbergen. The treaty regulates the demilitarisation of the archipelago. The original signatories to the treaty were: Denmark, France, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom (including Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, and India), and the United States. The contracting parties were given equal rights to engage in commercial activities on the islands. Several countries acceded to the treaty after it was ratified by the original signatories. As of 2018, there are 46 contracting parties to the treaty (including China and Russia).
<i>International Agreement to Prevent Unregulated High Seas Fisheries in the Central Arctic Ocean (2018)</i>	This agreement prohibits commercial fishing in the Central Arctic Ocean (i.e. outside the EEZs) for a period of 16 years. It was signed in October 2018 by the Arctic states, China, Japan, South Korea and the EU. The agreement has not entered into force as ratification procedures are still ongoing.

357 *The Ilulissat Declaration*, Arctic Ocean Conference, Ilulissat, Greenland, 27-29 May 2008.

358 Ulf Sverdrup e.a., A Governance and Risk Inventory for a Changing Arctic.

## Annex 4 Schematic overview of Arctic bodies

	Founding year	Membership	Other involved parties	Jurisdiction and duties	Governance	Level of participation
The Nordic Council	1952	Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.	Representation of Greenland, the Faroe Islands and Åland.	Addressing a variety of topics including cultural, social and economic cooperation, as well as issues of transportation, communication and environmental protection.	Interparliamentary cooperation. Political co-operation in specific issues takes place mainly in five specialist committees. The Presidium is responsible for parliamentary cooperation on foreign and security policy.	Representatives are members of parliament in their respective countries or areas and are elected by those parliaments
The Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC)	1993	Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the European Commission.	Observers: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Poland, the United Kingdom and the United States.	Supporting and promoting cooperation and development in the Barents Region. The principal aim is sustainable development.	Intergovernmental cooperation. Work is carried out by the committee of Senior Officials (CSO), which consists of civil servants representing the governments of member states.	Foreign ministers (meetings every two years), civil servants
The Barents Regional Council (BRC)	1993	13 member counties located in Finland, Russia, Norway and Sweden.		Support and promoting cooperation and development in the Barents Region. The principal aim is sustainable development.	Interregional cooperation. The Council convenes twice a year. The Regional Council's meetings are prepared by the Regional Committee, which consists of civil servants from the member county administrations.	Civil servants

	Founding year	Membership	Other involved parties	Jurisdiction and duties	Governance	Level of participation
The Arctic Council	1996	Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the United States.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Six permanent participants who represent Arctic Indigenous Peoples</li> <li>- Observer states: China, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Singapore, South Korea, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.</li> </ul>	Promoting cooperation, coordination and interaction among the Arctic States and peoples, in particular on issues of sustainable development and environmental protection. Explicit exclusion of military security.	Intergovernmental forum. Work is primarily carried out in six working groups.	Each member state is represented by a Senior Arctic Official (SAO), who is usually drawn from that country's foreign ministry
The Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFCO)	2009	Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.	Other states can participate in NORDEFCO's Arctic Challenge Exercise (ACE). Germany, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, the United States have done so in the past.	Covers military security issues. The main aim is to strengthen the participating nations' national defence, to explore common synergies and to facilitate efficient common solutions.	Political and military cooperation levels. Activities are facilitated and agreed within the structure, but the actual realisation of and participation in activities remain national decisions. Once a cooperation activity is implemented, it will be run by the existing national chain of command.	Senior departmental officers and Chiefs of Defence of participating states
The Nordic Group	2010	Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Sweden and the United Kingdom.		Security and defence policy: Promotion of more coherent, efficient and effective defence and security cooperation in northern Europe.	Informal cooperation format.	Ministers of Defence, Chiefs of Defence or other senior officials

	Founding year	Membership	Other involved parties	Jurisdiction and duties	Governance	Level of participation
The Arctic Security Forces Roundtable (ASFR)	2011	Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway, Russia (not attending since 2014), Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States.		Addressing regional security challenges and improving security cooperation and coordination.	Military security forum, co-chaired by Norway and the United States.	Senior military officers
The Arctic Economic Council (AEC)	2014	The AEC is open to corporations, partnerships and indigenous groups that have an economic interest in the Arctic. The primary members are the legacy members (three business representatives from each Arctic state and three representatives from each Permanent Participant organization).	Arctic partners (non-Arctic states); Permafrost partner (micro, small or medium-sized businesses with 15 employees or less with their business domiciled or headquarters located within an Arctic state).	A regional business-to-business forum. "The AEC facilitates substantive dialogue amongst private sector actors engaged in the Arctic, strategizes on attracting venture capital to the region, identifies resilient and sustainable infrastructure needs that would enable Arctic commerce, and provides for a flow of circumpolar expertise. In 2019, the Arctic Council and the AEC agreed to work closely on initiatives to further common interests." <sup>359</sup>	Work of the AEC is carried out in six working groups.	Business representatives

359 Ulf Sverdrup e.a., A Governance and Risk Inventory for a Changing Arctic.

	Founding year	Membership	Other involved parties	Jurisdiction and duties	Governance	Level of participation
The Arctic Coast Guard Forum (ACGF)	2015	Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the United States.		Working towards safe, secure, and environmentally responsible maritime activity in the Arctic.	The work of the ACGF is headed by the ACGF Chair and supported by the Secretariat and Working Groups. The forum holds two meetings every year.	Officials from the national Coast Guards