

North Atlantic Treaty Organization

The militarization of the Arctic



Forum:	NATO
Issue:	The militarization of the Arctic
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Introduction:

The Arctic region, and its militarily strategic positioning, has been largely underdeveloped since the end of the Cold War. However, as **climate change** has begun to transform the region, heating at twice the rate of other non-polar regions around the globe, geopolitical challenges such as, access to **key waterways, territorial disputes, and resource competition** potentially threaten the status quo in the Arctic. Though nations holding territories above the Arctic circle (**Canada, Iceland, Finland, Norway, Sweden, the Russian Federation, the United States, and the Kingdom of Denmark, via its territory Greenland**) have, as of yet been able to peacefully approach concerns, the dynamic landscape is increasingly susceptible to volatility as new issues gain interest and individual states express their interests in the area. In today's understanding, **Arctic Council** states are able to resolve disputes entirely peacefully, as the region has not been of heightened geopolitical intrigue. However, as specifically **Russia continues to increase their military forces** in Siberia, further territorial security concerns will become apparent. Arctic states must aim to continue avoiding aggression, protecting their interests, merely making preparations for **defense strategies**, and approach any future altercations via diplomatic means supported by military strength to guarantee peace, prosperity, and security in the Arctic. Nonetheless, The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) must play a more active role in Arctic affairs in order to ensure the continued sovereignty of NATO nations, maintain regional security, and promote peaceful dialogue between the nations in question. This research report aims to present the current status of arctic nations, particularly their **attempts to militarize** their territories in the region, in order to form a viable solution in further discussions.

Key Terms and Definitions:



The Arctic,

The Arctic is commonly defined as the northernmost part of the earth, including the Arctic Ocean and parts of Canada, Russia, the United States, Greenland, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Iceland. Scientifically, there are many definitions as well, including the region north of the Arctic Circle.

Territorial Claim/Dispute,

When there is a land claim, a country claims sovereignty over a determined part of land. For example, in Antarctica there are seven countries claiming eight different territories. A land claim can be “backed up” with, according to legal scholars, eight different aspects of the claiming and the claimed territory:

- Treaty law (are there agreements that have already been established?)
- Geography (is a country part of the other in terms of geographical features?)
- Economy (is there a shared economy?)
- Culture (what people live in the claimed region?)
- Effective control (who is actually in control?)
- History (what historical backgrounds are present?)
- Uti possidetis juris (literally means “to whom possesses by law”, this refers to the doctrine that new boundaries are established along the lines of previously established borders)
- Ideology (why is this territory being claimed?)

Territorial claims are notorious for causing conflicts amongst countries, and it is because of that that there is a part of the United Nations Charter dedicated to it. Furthermore, territorial claims can cause or reflect existing or non-existing frictions between countries. The aim of the AT was to prevent any new territorial claims on Antarctica, which means that after 1961 no claims could be made. However, countries may still, under customary international law, recognize claims made by other countries. When countries do not agree with territorial claims, there is a territorial dispute over a certain territory.

General Overview:



The Arctic region has become increasingly ice-free due to the climate crisis. This newly **emerging open ocean** means rich **fishing**, untapped undersea **mineral and energy resources**, and arguably most significant valuable **sea trading routes**. The entire geopolitical area has therefore become a valuable commodity for all parties involved. Of these nations, those most poised to assert dominance in the region are the 'so-called', "**Arctic Five**", all are states with direct access to the newly opened ocean, in addition to well-established territorial claims, and multiple regional military bases. "**Russia and Norway** are the two states most active and deliberate in raising their capacity for operating in the Arctic," says Ernie Regehr, senior fellow in Arctic security at the Simons Foundation – a Canadian think-tank. Canada, Regehr says, made some "dramatic announcements regarding enhanced military capacity in the north", but these have since run up against financial realities, while the US has been too preoccupied elsewhere around the globe to devote excessive energies to increasing their Arctic presence. With increasing NATO pressure to do so however, they may reconsider and prioritize the region.

Investigating **Russia's presence** in further depth cements the notion that they are arguably the most militarily active in the region. Their growing '**North Sea Fleet**' is being restocked and is receiving a new 'Mistral-class amphibious assault ship' constructed in France; **six new \$1.1bn (€816m) icebreakers**, which, at 170 metres in length, will be the world's biggest; and later new aircraft carriers. **The Norwegians**, meanwhile, have procured a **new fleet of five Fridtjof Nansen-class frigates**, which, together with its **six Ula-class submarines**, have significantly boosted their naval clout. The Norwegians share a land-border, as well as claims to the islands of **Svalbard**, with Russia. This has already been addressed by NATO since the Cold War era, however is now being put back under scrutiny within the organization, due to the recent developments.

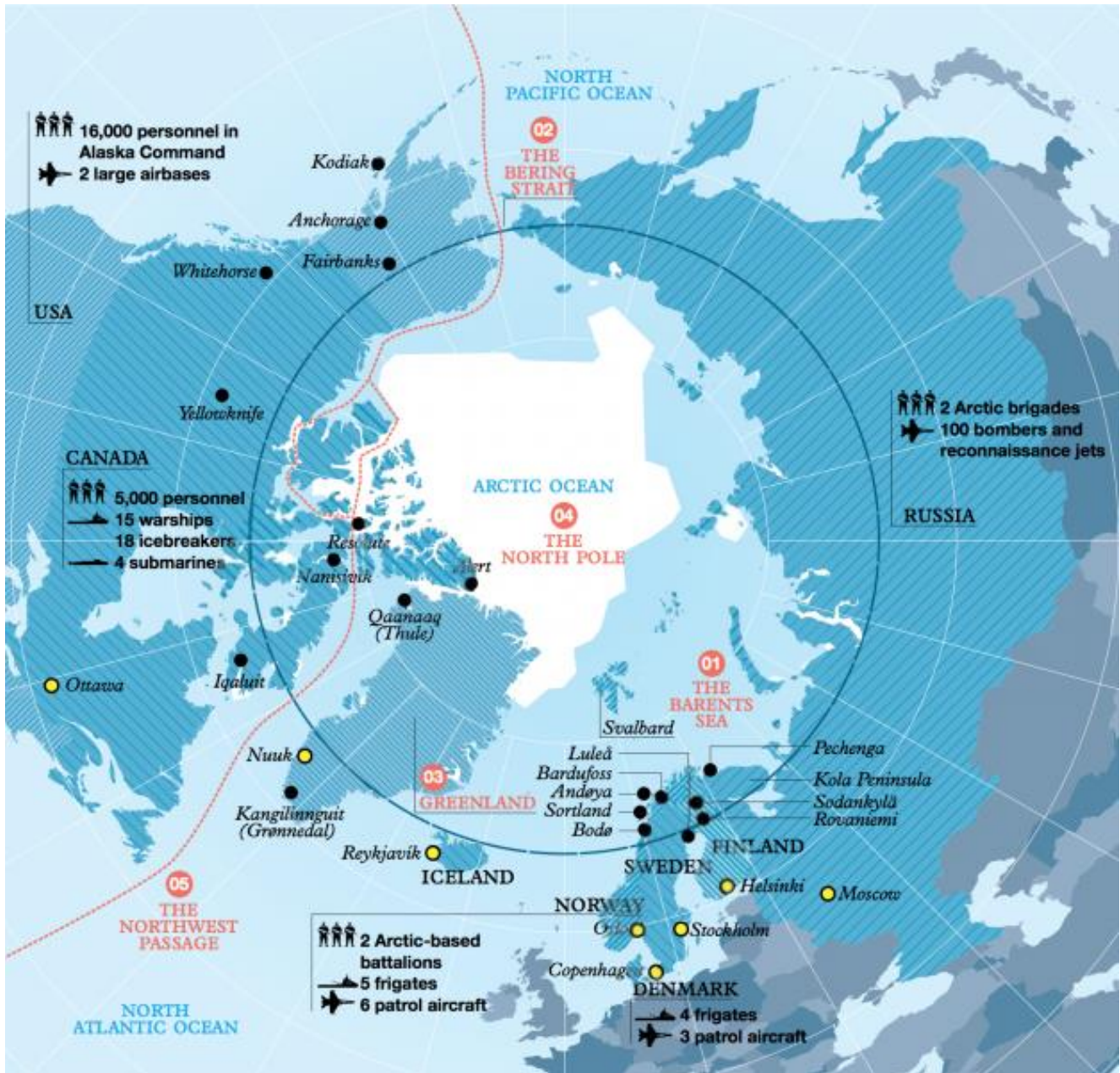
New interests in the Arctic region threaten to make it a much more crowded place. The Arctic Council – which already includes Finland, Iceland and Sweden in addition to the Five (Canada, Norway, Russia, Denmark, The USA) – voted to admit several key observer states, including **China, India and Japan**. China in particular has taken the keenest interest: in 2012 its sole icebreaker, Xuelong, completed the first transarctic voyage by a Chinese vessel, in addition a **new \$200m (€150m) icebreaker** has been delivered in 2014, with additional ships planned, as **Beijing seeks to open up the High North** as a conduit for **Chinese trade** prospects. It is presently assumed that these new players can be peacefully accommodated. The concern is more aimed towards the reality that



more and **more ships will be operating in waters**, which will remain dangerous even as they become navigable. This will naturally **increase risks for damages to property**, and more significantly to **civilian human lives**. Therefore it may be necessary to increase military presence in the region to **ensure trade security, and successful rescue operations** in the event of an accident.

Figure 1, active personnel and military presence in the region





The 5 territorial disputes remaining at present, in the arctic region, are listed beneath:



1) **The Barents Sea:** Traditional Cold War rivals, **Norway and Russia** have settled their longstanding Barents Sea border dispute in the 2010 agreements. However, the subsequent discovery of **vast oil and gas deposits** on Norway's side of the border have resulted in Russia questioning whether they are getting their full share of their claims in the Sea. Some in Russia believe that Norway was aware of these substantial deposits prior to signing the treaty in 2010, but delayed announcing the significant discovery due to fears of losing sovereignty over the area. **This is arguably the most tense territorial dispute, requiring definitive NATO attention.**

2) **The Bering Strait:** China has declared plans to start **using the Arctic as a key trade** route to cut long-distance transit times from their industrial ports, to the European and eastern North American ports. In order for these ships to access the region, **the Bering Strait must be left open** – a narrow chokepoint between Russia and Alaska once used by Eurasians to enter North America, forming the Native American populations. A **blockade of this chokepoint** would be an obvious play should conflict arise between China and another power, notably the USA, following recent **Trump induced tariffs on China**. The strait has also been a historic **point of friction between the USA and Russia**, as they are so geographically near to one another. 2008 presidential candidate Sarah Palin was quoted saying she could 'See Russia from her house' in response to her understanding of US-Russia relations. Although this statement is greatly exaggerated, her sentiment is fair, the two nations nearly share a land border ever since the US purchase of Alaska in the late 1800's. This could result in potential tensions in the region with development in the Arctic region.

3) **Greenland:** The rampant retreat of icecaps covering the **autonomous territory of Denmark** is attracting foreign firms keen to exploit the island's natural resources. Specifically **rare earth metals**, which have become immensely valuable with the onset of the digital age, due their **use in all electronic devices**. At present, China holds the largest processed number of these metals, but **commercial pressures in Greenland** are making it a contentious place to operate. One must bear in mind that over-exploitation of its **fragile environment** could incite disputes between local Inuit peoples, environmentalists, and the **Danish government**. The latter has also recently received a **request from US president Donald Trump, to sell Greenland** to them. This was promptly dismissed, but nonetheless exposes the region's obvious intrigue. With the opening of vast new arable lands in the region, EU nations that will be affected by climate change, such as Spain, may use their connections to Denmark in order to migrate from their nation to the emerging Greenland.



4) **The North Pole:** Ever since a Russian submarine planted a national flag on the seabed at the Pole in 2007, **ownership of the High North has been a contentious issue.** The Pole itself matters much less than the vast hydrocarbon resources thought to lie beneath it. **Canada, Denmark, Russia and the US** all have **overlapping claims** based on their conflicting interpretations of the **maritime borders.** If the effects of climate change result in a worst case scenario, in which the entire region will remain navigable the year round, **this region may become one of the world's most valuable oil and gas reserves,** in a time where the Middle East and other, notable oil rich areas will have been long exploited.

5) **The Northwest Passage:** Melting sea ice has opened up the fabled Northwest Passage, which runs along **northern Canada** and **links the Atlantic and Pacific oceans.** But while Canada claims sovereignty over the route, citing its proximity to the Canadian coast, **other Arctic claimants – plus China** – say the Passage is in **international waters.** As more ships ply the route, NATO member Canada must choose whether to enforce its claims to the waterway, or ultimately bow to pressure from other Non-NATO member states, **resulting in a collective security risk** in the previously secure region.

Key parties involved, and their current military operations:

Capabilities of the Arctic nations

Military operations in place

01 Canada



Several military bases are currently being upgraded on Canada's Arctic coast. A €2.25bn programme for the construction of a new fleet of Arctic offshore patrol ships is underway.

02 Denmark



The Danish military launched an Arctic Command in 2012 as part of its Arctic defence strategy, with a special-ops force that patrols northeast Greenland by sled.

03 Finland



The Finnish army's Jaeger Brigade, based in Sodankylä, specialises in polar warfare. The air force's Lapland Air Command operates from its base at Rovaniemi. Also home to strategically important Santa's village.

04 Iceland



With no military forces of its own, Iceland relies on security provided by its Nato allies. Nato conducts air patrols in Icelandic airspace.

05 Norway



In 2012, the Norwegian army's 2nd Battalion started converting into a new highly mobile Arctic Battalion. The navy's latest frigates and submarines patrol the Arctic. Svalbard, Norway's most northerly territory, is a demilitarised zone.

06 Russia



The army's first Arctic special forces brigade was recently set up in Pechenga in Murmansk Oblast. The navy's Northern Fleet has Russia's only aircraft carrier. Long-range Tupolev Tu-22 bombers patrol the polar region and six nuclear-powered icebreakers are in the pipeline.

07 Sweden



The Swedish military has an Armed Forces Winter Unit, which specialises in Arctic operations, while the air force operates Gripen fighters from its Arctic air base at Luleå.

08 USA



The US military's Alaskan Command operates two major airbases, as well as the US military's premier fighter jet, the F-22 Raptor. Washington is spending €750m on expanding its Alaskan missile defence. Aircraft carrier battle groups exercise annually in Arctic waters, but the US Navy only has one polar research vessel.

In addition to those arctic regional powers, **China, India, Japan, and the EU states hold significant sway over many contested issues in the area.** However, these nations only hold interests on the region in **environmental and commercial settings,** which only influence militarization and tensions,



rather than instigate or operate in them. Therefore they **are of secondary concern** to the NATO states, in comparison with those nations currently undertaking personal military involvement in the region.

UN and NATO involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

The external influence on arctic issues is limited by the region's current underdevelopment; however, it can be expanded with proper agreements. The United Nations was a driving force behind the Antarctic Treaty, which means that the UN has the knowledge and the incentive to work on improving international cooperation concerning this issue, a similar treaty could be created for the Arctic region.

As of today the treaty with the most significance on territorial claims in the region is the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. It defined sovereign claims to territorial waters. Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) provide states exclusive rights to the economic resources in the waters and sea bed extending 200 nautical miles from the natural shorelines of each country. This can be extended to 350 nautical miles if there is evidence to support the existence of an extended continental shelf. This has spurred deep-sea exploration and mapping by Arctic countries to support extension of their claims. Russia has applied this as their reasoning to establishing ownership claims of the Lomonosov Ridge and the North Pole.

Concerning additional treaties, resolutions, and other UN documents, there is rather little pertaining to the direct issue of the militarization of the Arctic Region. There is however, more on the well-

being of the inhabitants of the region, and the sustainable development of the settlements, which is in the interest of the parties involved.

- The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea is, as mentioned in this research report, a very important legal document in this issue. It describes what sovereignty can be exercised by a member state over which parts of the sea. It also includes maritime law, which makes this document relevant when discussing issues of conflict over vessels and oil rigs for instance.



- Sustainable development of Arctic human settlements, 20th April 2007, (HSP/GC/21/5) This resolution stresses the bad living conditions of the indigenous peoples of the Arctic. Included here are threats of climate change and unrest due to possible conflict.

- General and complete disarmament, 15th December 1989, (A/RES/44/116 L) This resolution handles the resolution of disputes between member states. It seeks to include a better way for member states to come to agreements over territorial claims.

- The issue of the peaceful settlement of disputes however, is also discussed in the United Nations Charter itself, more specifically, in chapter VI of the charter.

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

The measures taken until now by the countries of the Arctic are very important, since they have prevented armed conflict in the Arctic. Problems and tensions, however, remain. The Arctic Region is home to many potential sources of conflict, and any solution must take this into account. The existing measures have been successful to a certain extent, but durable peace can only be ensured if the changes that occur on a regular basis can be incorporated in the undertaken solutions, by whichever organ they might be implemented.

Possible solutions:

A static solution, as in no solution at all, is no longer enough to maintain stability in the region. Any solution that is undertaken must be successful in the way that it must be able to respond to the rapid developments in the area. Another problem with a solution that can be taken in the Arctic is that it might not be capable of coping with direct challenges and problems in a sustainable way, because it will be drafted without knowledge of future developments. This is partly a problem that is addressed in the previous paragraph, but also means that policy makers now must not have the impression that we can immediately solve the problem for once and for all. A reason for this is that many of the threats that we now face could be much worse in the near future. This can lead a treaty we draft right now, outdated in the future.



In the future, there will be a major lack of natural resources, due to the demand for them being greater than the supply. In the future, therefore, when all the other resources are almost depleted, the Arctic will hold a massive supply. This means that there will be increasing tensions over the following decades to begin exploiting the region, and with which countries benefiting from this income. A treaty or other solution must be made that can address this issue.

Delegates may also consider that it is wise for the states that have already undertaken measures regarding the issue of the Arctic to come up with a joint Treaty that replaces all the existing treaties with the characteristics mentioned above. If they do so, it is to be recommended that they consider who is going to sign the treaties, if countries are going to sign the treaties, and who becomes responsible for them. The delegates must also consider if creating a completely new treaty will make things more effective, or less effective. These are all things to consider.

In addition, these questions are all at the core of the debate, and must be addressed in any solution that arises:

- Will this solution make the situation in the Arctic more or less problematic? Will it cause friction between countries? What factors produce friction in the international community?
- How will this solution be amended if another approach turns out to be better?
- Will this solution be one that can be changed easily to cope with direct challenges, or is it static so that it provides a sturdy legal framework to base other options on? Can it be both?
- Why would member states of the United Nations cooperate with this solution? What is in it for them? The same goes for any military action of collective NATO forces.
- What developments are likely to happen in the future? What will this affect?



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