

The Arctic Twenty: 12 observer countries of the Arctic Council

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The Arctic policy of the UK



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Abstract. The article describes the evolution of the British Arctic strategy, the role of the British

political institutions in this process, as well as the interests and policy priorities for the region. It is noted that currently the focus of the UK is addressed to the study of the environment state in the Arctic, as well as on climate change. In the future, with the development of the Arctic technology and increasing scrutiny of the area the interest of the Kingdom to natural resources of the Arctic zone will increase, as well as its military and defense interests in the region.

Keywords: *Great Britain, the Arctic, the Arctic Council, the Arctic Ambassador, Arctic policy, the British Petroleum Company, the Scientific Council for the Exploration of the environment*

Britain is seized by a “cold rush”. Analysts believe the Arctic is “the last frontier for new claims to possess natural resources and strategic position: from the comparative isolation and relative inaccessibility it becomes the part of the global geopolitical, commercial and legal network” for the situation in which the struggle is going on¹.

The UK has the following priorities in the Arctic: 1) the study of climate changes in the region and their impact on flora, fauna and human activity; 2) the prospects for the use of new shipping routes; 3) discovery of new sources of mineral and fishery resources; 4) the possibility to influence the decisions of the Arctic Council, using permanent observer status, as the geopolitical significance of the Arctic increases.

Evolution of the Arctic policy of the UK: from the framework policy to the Arctic strategy

Until now Britain has not developed a strategy for the Arctic, it has no long-term government program. The Arctic issues were discussed in the House of Lords in 2007 and 2010.

¹ Responding to a changing Arctic / Select Committee on the Arctic — Report of Session 2014-15. HL paper 118. URL: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201415/ldselect/ldarctic/118/11806.html#footnote-1158-123> accessed: 30 May 2016).

[2]. The report of the Environmental Audit Committee of the House of Commons "Protecting the Arctic" was published in 2013. The issues of protection of the Arctic from the effects of oil and gas field developments for the environment ².

Small department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Great Britain deals with the region, which emphasized: if Britain wants to be taken in the Arctic seriously, its research should be supported by the diplomatic and commercial endeavors: itself proximity to the Arctic (topographical or topological) does not provide the influence in terms of increased competition. It is necessary to strengthen bilateral relations with the Arctic countries and observer countries in the Arctic Council (Japan, Singapore), constantly work in its working groups.³

The fact that Britain starts more active policy in the Arctic can be confirmed by the fact that in February 2015 the House of Lords published the first in the history of the House report about the Arctic⁴. In the House of Lords, the question was raised broader than in the report of the House of Commons: instead of "protection" the Arctic, the upper house was more interested in the question of how the changes in the Arctic are forced Britain to rethink the attitude towards the region. The report pays a significant attention to higher degree of involvement of the UK in the issues of the Arctic, to conducting more proactive policy, and the current policy is characterized as "too hesitant and cautious"⁵.

The essence of the problem is that British bureaucrats still are not sure exactly how to negotiate about the access to the Arctic for the British scientists, business people, environmentalists. The appearance in the 1980—1990s. of circumpolar countries block made Britain to promote their interests in the region more delicately [3]. This was evidenced by the adoption in 2013 of the Arctic 'Policy Framework', rather than a strategy, and the British Ministry of Foreign Affairs considered it as the provoking proposal.

Observers note that the British policy in the Arctic should not be taken as a continuation of the neocolonial policy [4]. Claims on the privileged status of Britain's interests over the interests of "less Arctic countries" because of its proximity to the region can also cause resistance [5]. Britain will be welcomed in the Arctic just as a partner [6]. Indeed, the report says that activation of

² Protecting the Arctic / Environmental Audit Committee — Second Report. URL: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/environmental-audit-committee/inquiries/parliament-2010/protecting-the-arctic/> (accessed: 30 May 2016).

³ Adapting to Change. UK policy towards the Arctic / Polar Regions Department. FCO. 2013. URL: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/251216/Adapting_To_Change_UK_policy_towards_the_Arctic.pdf (accessed: 30 May 2016).

⁴ Responding to a changing Arctic / Select Committee on the Arctic — Report of Session 2014–15. HL paper 118. URL: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201415/ldselect/ldarctic/118/11802.html> (accessed: 30 May 2016).

⁵ At the same place, p. 6.

Britain in the Arctic is justified not geographically or historically, not by the natural topography, but topologically: Britain's ties with the Arctic are scientific, commercial, international-legal. Activity to study the Arctic, financial services of the City of London — the true vehicles of the relations Britain — the Arctic, the geographical proximity is not enough: Britain should "contribute to relationships with the Arctic in order to benefit for the United Kingdom and for the common interests of the international community" [6, p. 103].

The main recommendation of the House of Lords is that Britain should follow other non-Arctic countries, appointing "Arctic ambassador" to pay more attention to the Arctic and the coordination of the British Arctic policy. It is noteworthy that the committee of the House of Lords has started to deal with energy security and diplomatic relations with Russia. Regarding the first question, the British government for a long time supported the development of hydrocarbons on non-discriminatory basis of in order to stabilize the global markets of energy and ensure the supply of hydrocarbons in the country. However, due to the sharp decline in prices for hydrocarbons Committee found necessary to call for the development of hydrocarbons on the basis of the principles of sustainable development and to think of the necessity of their development in the region.

The committee's recommendations can be summarized by the following: Britain should hold not reactive and but active policy in the Arctic: to appoint "Polar Ambassador," to support organizations of indigenous peoples, Indigenous Peoples' Secretariat, to send their representatives to academic institutions in Britain, to business trips to the British public authorities; to expand the program of scientific research of the Arctic; to ensure full representation of Britain in the Arctic Council bodies, including representatives of industry; to participate in discussions of the future fish resources in international waters of the Central Arctic Ocean in order to establish a moratorium on fishing until the way of fishing is coordinated. Particular attention is expected to be paid to the development of panarctic system of sea search and rescue operations with the Arctic countries, strongly support the provision of the observer status in the Arctic Council to the European Union.

British interests in the sphere of energy

United Kingdom is oil- and gas-extracting country, but it faced with significant shortage of hydrocarbons, which is covered by import. The country takes one of the first places in the world in terms of import gas and oil volume. Britain use its reserves of hydrocarbons carefully, as they are not very significant in the international comparison: hydrocarbon deposits are situated mainly off the coast of Scotland, and they are almost worked out. If earlier the kingdom had been supplying natural gas to Europe for twenty years through the pipeline, now it has turned into an importer of

the natural gas (gas production is declining since 2007). Britain itself imports natural gas from Norway.

At the same time, the British oil and gas companies are among the most powerful in the world, some of them are among the 500 largest companies in the world. According to data for 2014, Royal Dutch Shell took the third place in the world in terms of turnover, and BP — the sixth⁶. International prestige and financial indicators of BP suffered due to major disaster on the oil platform in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010. The accident has caused major expenses of the company in the amount of 19 billion dollars⁷, and this figure is not final. However, it still leads the international activities on a large scale. This TNC is developing hydrocarbon production throughout the world, with 4 thousand branches of oil extractation and 5.6 thousand of natural gas extraction. BP has reserved a position in the Arctic through the acquisition of 19.75% of "Rosneft" shares (they acquired the package by selling the company TNK-BP which belonged to BP before).

BP and English-dutch company Shell before announcement of sanctions closely cooperated with Russian companies and made plans to use the Arctic deposits. Shell launched a test drilling in the Alaska offshore in the Chukchi Sea. However, they decided to slow down corresponding works after the accident on a drilling platform Kulluk, which ran aground at a distance of 250 miles from Anchorage which threatened to spill. The platform was carrying 140,000 gallons of oil and 12 thousand tons of lubricants. In 2015 Shell confirmed to leave from Alaska. They spent 7 billion of USD, but only one deposit was found in the Chukchi Sea at a distance of 80 km from the northwest coast of Alaska, which was recognized by unpromising for use. Test drilling in Baffin Bay also was not successful, although drilling was carried out in great depth — more than 6,000 feet.

The plans of two major oil and gas companies of the Kingdom: BP and Shell still include the study of hydrocarbon production capacity in the Far North. British insurance companies are interested in the possibilities of the insurance of the Arctic activities, but the largest insurance company of UL — Lloyds is showing restraint and does not promise to insure Arctic risks, because they find them unpredictable.

UK Research activities in the Arctic

UK claims to be considered as subarctic powerhouse, which can not be excluded from the Arctic "club". The arguments in favor of justification of the role of England are that its travelers from the XVI century made a significant contribution to the study of these harsh lands. In addition, the northern boundary of the economic zone of the Scottish Islands comes to the Arctic Circle.

⁶ In accordance with the rating of the magazine «Fortune» for 2015.

⁷ According to «Fortune» for 2015.

Britain has a long tradition in the study of the Arctic. Natural Environmental Research Council — NERC is the main organizer of the research in this area. Its functions include financing and coordination of research activities of the British scientific organizations. The Council has the Bureau for the study of the Arctic nature — NERC Arctic Office. These studies are based on the necessary infrastructure, in particular, on the research station in the village of New-Ollesund at Spitsbergen. The scientists have the opportunity to use several planes and four research vessels: Ernest Shackleton, James Clarc Ross, RRS Dis-covery, RRS James Cook, whose technical characteristics let them go in the Arctic seas, observing and studying the environment and Arctic climate. Britain is involved in the work of the Arctic Information Centre, which was organized by the EU in 2011, in Finnish Lapland. British interests in this center are represented by the Polar Institute of Cambridge University. Several British universities and institutes are engaged in the study of the polar regions. In particular, Scott Polar Research Institute in Cambridge is studying both polar regions: The Arctic and Antarctic. A number of the British universities take part in various projects of the Arctic, namely the Russell Group, University of Southampton, Aberdeen and Cambridge, National Oceanography Centre Southampton — NOCS, located in Southampton. In Swedish city of Kiruna, which is located above the Arctic Circle, there is British laboratory to analyze the interaction of the Earth and the Sun, which is part of the European Scientific Association (EISCAT). Along with the British laboratory in this association research institutions of China, Finland, Norway, Sweden and Japan cooperate. Using radar surveillance, they observe over the processes that occur in the lower, middle and upper layers of Earth's atmosphere.

Like the other EU members, the United Kingdom, in addition to carrying out its own research projects, is actively involved in projects and programmes implemented jointly with European partners. This allows the use of parity financing, to avoid duplication and to use synergy. This activity is financed partly or in full through the EU Seventh Framework Program and /or other EU programs. Very popular subject of research in the united Europe is a program of study of the environment and the climate in the Arctic, including the impact of the changes there on the economy and society (ACCESS), in which almost all the EU members are involved. On the part of the UK the British Research Council for the study of the natural environment, the Scottish Association for Marine Science and University of Cambridge are included in this program. The program receives funding from two European programs, namely the Seventh EU Framework Program and the program "Ocean Future".

Plymouth Marine Laboratory — participant of the project NETMAR, which aims to create a European maritime information system (EUMIS). This information system is supposed to combine

the observations obtained from satellites, from the sea and coastal areas and to provide information to interested parties.

On behalf of the Ministry of Defence of Britain the University of Exeter joined the project “Page 21”, which aims to review and analyze how the melting of the eternal ice affect the planet's climate and how these processes are associated with the increase of greenhouse gas emissions.

Department of Applied Mathematics and Theoretical Physics at Cambridge University is included in the project SIDARUS, in which they watch the movement of ice in the Arctic and Antarctic. The relevant information can be provided to interested persons and organizations, primarily to ships that sail in the Arctic waters. The project is funded by the EU.

The James Hutton Institute is a leading member of the project HUNT, whose task — the study of the economic, environmental, social and cultural consequences of hunting animals. This project also includes a study of commercial extraction of Arctic species.

The faculty of Cambridge University is busy in the ATP project (Arctic Tipping Points), the contents of which — to identify changes in the marine ecological systems of the Arctic, as well as the factors that cause them. In addition, the aim is to determine the economic consequences of these changes, and it kindles the interest of many European countries.

Nine British universities and research organizations cooperate within the project EPOCA (European Project on Ocean Acidification), in order to study the increasing acidity of the world's ocean, as well as to identify its biological, ecological and biochemical effects.

University of Sheffield is the member of the interdisciplinary project MONARCH-A aiming to monitor and to study regional climate change, which occur in high latitude and the Arctic (Monitoring and Assessing Regional Climate Change in High Latitude and the Arctic). At the same time, they explore the sea and the air currents, changes in global sea level and the carbon cycle, as well as their causes.

Thus, before to start any economic activities in the Arctic seas, the United Kingdom, as well as other countries which have acquired the status of the Arctic Council observer, prefers to study the region.

Military and defense Britain's interests in the Arctic

The Arctic has not been mentioned either in Strategic Defence and Security Review or National Security Strategy 2010.

However, in the UK National Strategy for Maritime Security⁸ it is said that new shipping routes constitute a danger for the security of Britain and along with the cooperation, it is necessary to recognize the importance of anti-submarine operations in the Arctic, and constantly monitor the situation together with NATO allies. [7]

The report of the Ministry of Defense "Global trends in the strategy — up to 2045" noted that the economic development of the region will cause disputes over access to the Arctic and control over its resources, although they do not lead to the armed conflicts⁹. With regard to Russia the Defense Ministry report says that Russian military presence in the region is enhanced by due to its extent of the Arctic boundaries and the area of the exclusive economic zone, but does not pose a threat. Nevertheless, the concerns about the threat to neighboring countries intensified in connection with the Ukrainian crisis. The report expresses uncertainty about the predictability of the policy of Russia and, accordingly, that the peaceful co-existence in the Arctic will continue in the long term. Britain, like other Arctic countries should protect Arctic cooperation from the "non-Arctic disputes." However, we note the wider defense and security considerations permeate the region. Strategic interest of Britain to the northern regions of Europe, including the Arctic, has increased.

So already in 2012 the defense ministers of Britain and Norway signed a Memorandum of Understanding "On the Enhancement of Bilateral Defence Co-operation"¹⁰, which provided the political basis for bilateral cooperation in the sphere of defense and security, including the interests of NATO. The memorandum was signed after the agreement "Bilateral and global partnership", signed by the Prime Ministers in 2011. [8].

This measure indicates that changes in strategic thinking have occurred, especially in the Arctic, which requires more attention to the planners of the British defense. After a significant reduction and reform of the armed forces David Cameron coalition government tried to provide security guarantees at the expense of bilateral and multilateral partnerships. Units of the British Armed Forces are training in a cold climate in Norway and take part in NATO exercises in the Arctic in Norway, as well as in security cooperation on bilateral and multilateral basis, including the

⁸ The UK National Strategy for Maritime Security / HM Government. May 2014. URL: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/310323/National_Strategy_for_Maritime_Security_2014.pdf.

⁹ Ministry of Defence, Strategic Trends Programme, Global Strategic Trends: Out to 2045, fifth edition (2014): URL: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/348164/20140821_DCDC_GST_5_Web_Secured.pdf

¹⁰ Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) "On the Enhancement of Bilateral Defence Co-operation".

Northern Group of countries (Britain, Poland, Germany, the Netherlands, northern countries and the Baltic countries). Only two of them — Sweden and Finland — are not members of NATO [9]

Speaking about the bilateral, the relationship with France in particular grabbed most attention. However, a week after the conclusion of the agreement with France about cooperation in the sphere of defense, Britain publicly promoted the defense cooperation with the Northern and Baltic countries, as well as with Germany, the Netherlands and Poland. At the first meeting of defense ministers of North group in November 2010, the Minister of Defence in Britain L. Fox said: "Britain is too long looking in every direction but his own backyard"¹¹. The creation of the Northern Group was the part of the broader plan to deepen bilateral and multilateral relations with its northern neighbors. In January 2011, Cameron talked about British interests in the north, especially an alliance of common interests (including economic growth, the environment and welfare) across the northern Europe¹². Bearing in mind the importance of cooperation of Britain with the northern and the Baltic countries, namely the cooperation with Norway progressed more. Similar memoranda of understanding were signed in 2010 for exploration of oil and gas, offshore wind farms, cooperation in the North Sea, biotechnology and scientific research in the polar region. The memorandum lays the groundwork for the second defense cooperation support — with Norway after France. Both supports stand on the basis of NATO and transatlantic cooperation with the United States. The Memorandum also indicates the degree of confidence to the northern European allies and more — to NATO, unlike many of its European partners, which do not fulfill their obligations in the field of defense (their defense expenses are less than 2% of GDP).

It should be noted that since 2010 the British Armed Forces Training in Northern latitudes decreased, Britain is limited in its actions in the polar latitudes: surface ships do not come into the waters of the Arctic and the opportunities to conduct maritime air patrols are insignificant since maritime patrol aircrafts "Nimrod - MR.2" were taken out of service in 2010, which does not allow the UK to carry out search and rescue operations in the Arctic, and to provide assistance to Denmark and Iceland. Norway performs maritime air patrols of the North Sea instead of Britain, which is limited to naval forces. It is assumed that in the documents of the government's national strategy in the field of defense and security in 2015, the question of the maritime air patrols both for defense and search and rescue operations will be revised as well as expansion of operational capacities, expertise and resources in conditions of cold climate.

¹¹ Defence Secretary launches new forum of northern European countries // Defence News, 10 November 2010. URL: <http://bit.ly/agvbxw>

¹² Cameron calls for northern European alliance', BBC News Online, 20 January 2011.

Attention of defense community in the Arctic is increasing due to changes in the physical, political, social and economic nature. 8 countries have territory in the Arctic, 5 of which are seeking to establish sovereign rights on the basis of an exclusive economic zone and continental shelf, which reaches North Pole. Approximately 4 million people inhabit the region and still 500 million live along its frontiers or close to them. As the ice are melting the region will inevitably be included as a part in the economic, political and legal system. Consequently, the British experts need to find out how these changes will affect the judgments about future risks and opportunities of the country in the region to evaluate the strategic consequences. Britain stand behind in the strategic assessment and in knowledge about the Arctic [10], as British experts believe, fearing that such a "gap" won't allow the country to determine its interests and develop a strategy for "first partner" and to contribute to the defense of the northern regions of Europe. There is also the question whether Britain has the resources to be an important player in the northern latitudes, maintaining commitments regarding other vital defense problems. Analysts wonder also if Britain takes into account when creating weapons their further use in the Arctic [11].

In the British Arctic policy, the Scottish factor may occur, as most of the British oil is produced in the Scottish sector. The position of Scotland was not deferred enough while developing the British policy in the Arctic [12]. However, it is expected that in connection with the probability of the second referendum on Scottish independence, the opinion of the region will be taken into account, since Scotland stands for withdrawal of nuclear weapons from its territory and disposal of North Sea resources.

With regard to relations with Russia, Britain joined the hard course of EU and the United States in connection with the Ukrainian crisis, joining the sanctions, hindering the development of Russian oil fields in the Arctic. Committee of the House of Lords urged to take all possible measures to protect the Arctic from the effects of the Ukrainian crisis. It is possible to interpret the Committee's recommendation also so that the government should revise the sanction regime in terms of Russia's interests in the Arctic. Ultimately, the House of Lords would like to see Britain the "first partner" of the Arctic countries and other players in the Arctic.

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