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### Arctic Military Posturing and Its Influence on the Development of the Northern Sea Route \*

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**Abstract.** The author traces the evolution of military presence in the Arctic by Russia and NATO in the article. He analyses the impact of military posturing on Arctic geopolitics. The author advocates that while military capabilities are essential for deterrence, unnecessary military rhetoric by NATO and Russia is detrimental to peace and security in the Arctic. Arctic geopolitics is fraught with tensions due to regular highly publicized military exercises and posturing in the area. The new Arctic Cold War is likely to affect Russia more adversely due to Western sanctions post-2014 and the requirement to develop the NSR as an internationally competitive transport corridor. Russia has a legitimate right to protect its security in the Arctic. However, the author argues it is unnecessary to highlight such events regularly, and it may be more useful to focus on the economy and rationalize military spending. Russia needs to focus on its relationship with the Nordic countries and reemphasize its peaceful and cooperative engagement in the Arctic. Its leadership of the Arctic Council is crucial to reducing tensions in the Arctic.

**Keywords:** Arctic, The Northern sea route (NSR), Russia, geopolitics, military posturing cooperation

#### Introduction

The NSR is a historically developed national transport corridor of the Russian Federation through the Arctic. It means a water area adjoining the Northern coast of the Russian Federation, including the internal sea waters, territorial sea, contiguous zone and exclusive economic zone of the Russian Federation; limited in the East by the line delimiting the sea areas with the United States of America and by the parallel of the Dezhnev Cape in the Bering Strait, and in the West by the meridian of Cape Zhelanie to the Novaya Zemlya archipelago, by the east coastal line of the Novaya Zemlya archipelago, and the Western limits of the Matochkin Shar, Kara gates and Yugorski Shar gates <sup>1</sup> (see Fig. 1). The NSR, being an integral part of the Russian transport system, historically served as a transit corridor between the north-western and far-eastern reaches of Russia. It is the shortest sea route connecting European and East Asian markets and a potential alternative to the Suez Canal.

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<sup>1</sup> Russian Federation. Postanovleniye Pravitel'stva RF ot 18 sentyabrya 2020 g. N 1487 "Ob utverzhdenii Pravil plavaniya v akvatorii Severnogo morskogo puti [Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation "Concerning approval of the Rules of Navigation in the Water Area of the Northern Sea Route" of 18 September 2020, N 1487]. URL: <http://static.government.ru/media/acts/files/1202009220024.pdf> (accessed 20 April 2022).

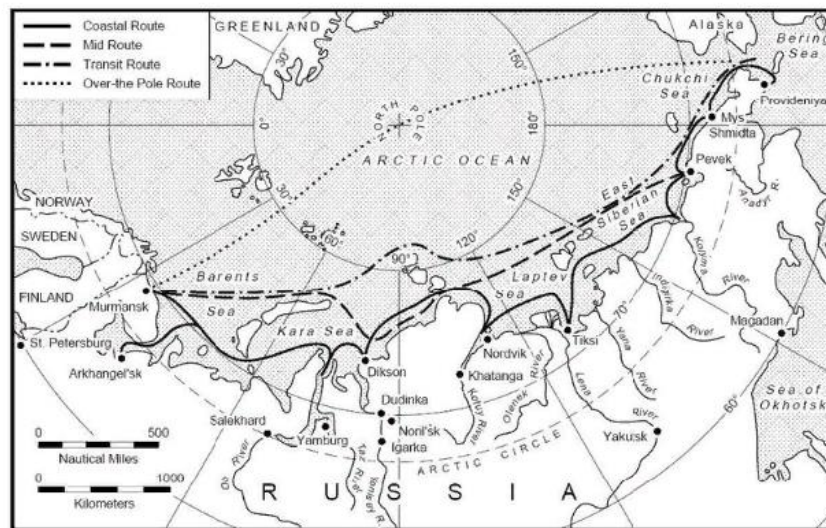


Fig. 1. Northern Sea Route (NSR)<sup>2</sup>.

Russia stated its intention to integrate the Northern Sea Route into international shipping routes in 1991. Over the years, the Russian government has introduced various regulations to facilitate this. However, due to various reasons related primarily to the challenging ice conditions, weak infrastructure and inadequacy of search and rescue assets, the growth of international transit shipping along the NSR was slow. Arctic geopolitics is fraught with tensions due to regular highly publicized military exercises and posturing in the area by both NATO and Russia. In 2019, there was no joint declaration at its biennial ministerial meeting for the first time ever. Even though, the declaration was nixed by the United States primarily due to its reluctance to include climate change; there was also an unusually confrontational speech by the American secretary of state Mike Pompeo in which he criticized China's Arctic policy, Russia has alleged militarization of the Arctic, and Canada's stance on the North-West passage<sup>3</sup>. This has affected the interest shown by shipping companies in the NSR, primarily those of Western origin. The article hypothesizes that the new Arctic Cold War may likely affect Russia more adversely due to Western sanctions post-2014 and the requirement to develop the NSR into a major international shipping route. The purpose of the research is to examine the way ahead for Russia within the backdrop of the deteriorating geopolitical situation and current military posturing in the Arctic, given its stated goal of converting the NSR from a national transport route to an internationally competitive transport corridor.

The first section of the article presents the methodology and literature review. The following section traces the evolution of military presence in the Arctic. Section 3 examines the status of Arctic geopolitics with reference to military deployments. Section 4 discusses the impact of high politics on the development of the NSR. Section 5 puts forth certain recommendations to mitigate the current situation.

<sup>2</sup> Bemuse. Map of the Northern Sea Route, 2008. URL: [https://benmuse.typepad.com/arctic\\_economics/2008/10/russias-shallow-arctic-seas-and-straits.html](https://benmuse.typepad.com/arctic_economics/2008/10/russias-shallow-arctic-seas-and-straits.html) (accessed 20 April 2022).

<sup>3</sup> Chater A. Takeaways from the 11<sup>th</sup> Arctic Council Ministerial Meeting in Rovaniemi, May 15, 2019. URL: <https://polarconnection.org/arctic-council-ministerial-rovaniemi> (accessed 20 April 2022).

The first section of the paper presents the methodology and literature review. The next section traces the evolution of the military presence in the Arctic. The third section examines the status of Arctic geopolitics in terms of military deployment. The impact of high politics on the development of the NSR is then discussed. The fifth section offers some recommendations for alleviating this situation.

### *Methodology*

The article aims to highlight the pitfalls of militarization of the Arctic with reference to the development of the NSR and suggest measures to deescalate the situation. The methodological basis of the research is synthesis and analysis, description and explanation, dialectical approach, systemic and comparative analysis, as well as the historical method. System analysis is applicable because of the relationship between the policy choices made in respect of deterrence by Arctic governments in relation to the Arctic geopolitical environment. Comparative analysis was used to compare the approaches to militarization of the Arctic by NATO and Russia. The historical method is relevant for analyzing the rationale behind military deployments in the Arctic from their inception. The dialectical approach is relevant in discussing the problem from different points of view and then suggesting some recommendations.

### *Literature review*

The article has benefited from the historical works in tracing military deployments in the Arctic (Belov M.I., Shirokorad A. Timoshenko A.). It has examined the Arctic strategies of Russia, NATO countries, such as the USA and Norway, and the US Army's Arctic strategy released for the first time in 2021. It has analyzed the work of many international experts on Arctic geopolitics (Sergunin A., Gjørv G.H., Heininen L., Zagorskiy, A.V., Godzimirski J.), Russian security and strategy in the Arctic (Zaikov K.S., Kondratov N.A., Lipina S.A., Bocharova L.K., Grinyaev S.N., Zhuravel V.P.) and international cooperation in the Arctic (Gudev P.A.). Russian experts have almost unanimously justified the need for military modernization and reorganization in the Russian Arctic in response to NATO deployments. Further, it has evaluated the work of international experts on Arctic military posturing and deployments (Runner E., Sokolsky R., Stronski P., Rourke R., Folland R.). Western experts have noted the upgrading of Russian military facilities in the Arctic and the need for active NATO deterrence measures [1, Petersen M.B., Pincus R., pp. 490–491]. However, some experts acknowledge that these are a reactivation of Soviet bases and defensive measures (US Army Strategy, 2021). Some experts on both sides have advocated the necessity for de-escalation measures and avoidance of unannounced deployments [1, Petersen M.B., Pincus R., pp. 510–512; 2, Berbick W., Saunes L., pp. 45–63, 3, Zagorskiy A.V., Todorov AA, pp. 81–86], and the American initiative from an expert group convened by the US Naval War College has advocated a reduced role for NATO considering inherent suspicions by the Russian side. While all the works mentioned

have established linkages between Arctic geopolitics and military deployments, none of them has examined the impact on the evolution of the NSR.

### *History of military presence in the Arctic*

Some Russian scholars tend to trace Russia's "Arctic" history back to the times of the Pomors in the 10th century and others — to Mangazeya in the 16th century. The origin of the development of the Northern Sea Route was the outstanding Russian scientist M. V. Lomonosov, who devoted extensive fundamental theoretical and practical research to this issue and personally participated in the organization of the pioneering expeditions [4, Lukin Y.F., pp. 191–192].

In 1648, S. Dezhnev demonstrated that navigation along the NSR was feasible. He was followed by V. Bering (1725–1743). In his writings, M. V. Lomonosov expressed the idea that the development of the polar seas in future will serve other, more important purposes, for example, in the field of economics. Based on the works of Lomonosov, the great Russian Empress Catherine II organized two secret expeditions (1765 and 1766) to the Northern Sea Route. However, the expeditions did not achieve all their goals despite careful preparations. [5, Ogorodov S.A., Romanenko F.A., Solomatin V.I., pp. 12–14].

In addition, this step was only the beginning of a long and not consistently successful path to the development of the Arctic. The explorers F. Vranghel (Russia) in 1821–1824, N. Nordensheld (Sweden) in 1878–1879, D. De Long (USA) in 1879–1881, F. Nansen (Norway) in 1893–1896 made several expeditions confirming the possibility of using the NSR. Attention from the Russian authorities was received only at the end of the 19th century. Until then, most of the research was organized and conducted by military sailors. In the 16th–17th century, the discovery of new lands was already considered the basis for their inclusion in the territory of the country. In the 19th century, it was necessary to indicate interest in the land by placing the state symbol.

However, from the end of the 19th century until the First World War, the security of the Russian Arctic was threatened by Great Britain and Germany, which was the reason for the development of the infrastructure of the North. In 1901, under the leadership of the naval figure S.O. Makarov, a polar expedition was launched on the first Russian icebreaker "Ermak". As a result of this voyage, basic information about the Barents and Kara Seas was collected, and a detailed Arctic map was compiled. In addition, a document was prepared to justify the feasibility of developing the North, which reflected the economic and political benefits for the country [6, Belov M.I., pp. 72–73].

In 1910, a hydrographic expedition was organised using two vessels designed similar to icebreakers, the command staff of which consisted of their military personnel. Thus, the Navy entered the Northern Sea Route for the first time [7, Timoshenko A.I., pp. 2–3]. As a result, new territories were discovered. It was essential to consolidate all the realised achievements legally, and, therefore, in 1916, The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation announced that "the territories and islands located in the Arctic Ocean and discovered by Vilkitsky are included in the

Russian Empire” [8, Zaikov K.S., Kondratov N.A., Lipina S.A., Bocharova L.K., p. 79]. The Russian Empire was the pioneer in indicating at the treaty level sector limits to define its polar territories.

At the beginning of the First World War, the Russian Empire had only two channels of communication with the allies—the routes through the Barents and White Seas, which began in the port of Arkhangelsk. To connect the Northern Sea Route with the internal territories of the state, the Arkhangelsk–Vologda railway was expanded in 1915. In addition, a new seaport was built in Murmansk. A railway line connected it to Petrograd.

In 1916, major emergency construction of the Northern Navy was organized and implemented. The task of the fleet was to ensure the normal implementation of trade between Russian Arctic territories along the Northern Sea Route. The work carried out made it possible to identify all the existing shortcomings of the coastal infrastructure. However, despite all the actions taken by 1918, the ports of Arkhangelsk and Murmansk continued to deal with mainly military cargo.

In 1918, the Brest-Litovsk Peace was concluded between Soviet Russia and the Central Powers. In this regard, under the pretext of preventing the transfer of accumulated military reserves to Germany, an Anglo-American intervention was made in the North of Russia. Moreover, the naval forces available at that time could not cope with the threat to military security [9, Timoshenko A.I., pp. 6–7].

In 1920, the events that later were called the “first Arctic race” began. On the one hand, the Soviet government tried to strengthen its shaky power over the northern territories; on the other hand, foreign opponents tried to take advantage of the relaxation and challenge Russian sovereignty in the Arctic lands. As a result, a system of division of the northern territories into sectors controlled by the actors was formed.

In 1926, USSR, indicated by a decree that the entire northern territory in the sector between the meridians 32°4'35" W and 168°49'30" W, except for Svalbard, is an inseparable part of the USSR. Until the Second World War, the Soviet government systematically strengthened its position in the northern territories with measured actions [7, Timoshenko A.I., pp. 2–3]. USSR followed Canada to confirm the meridian limits of its Arctic sector at the level of national laws. Canada was the first Arctic country to do so in 1923.

In 1931, under the directive of Stalin, the document “On the protection of the northern coast” was prepared, according to which a naval base was to be established on the Kola Peninsula. This document activated the work of the Defense Commission. Therefore, in 1933, the Northern Flotilla was formed, which in 1937 was transformed into the Northern Fleet. In addition, the Main Directorate of the Northern Sea Route in the Arctic territories formed many military stations and wintering grounds [10, Shirokorad A., pp. 111–112].

However, the period of rapid development of the North got affected due to the beginning of the Second World War. It is worth noting that Germany was interested in the capture of the ice-



free Murmansk port that would allow the German army to receive military cargo freely, as well as to extract the nickel necessary for the needs of the army [10, Shirokorad A., pp. 125–130].

During the war period, with the help of the Allies, more than 2500 transports were organized along the Northern Sea Route; the German navy was able to prevent only 18 ones from reaching their destination [10, Shirokorad A., pp. 142–157].

The Second World War highlighted the need for the development of the north and the importance of the development of northern cities, such as Murmansk and Arkhangelsk, even more clearly. Thus, the experience of victory in the Northern Sea is essential both from the historical perspective and understanding current Russian policies oriented towards the Arctic.

During the war, all existing contradictions between the USSR and the allies were forgotten. However, with the advent of peace, they made a new round, largely caused by the results of the Second World War. In the post-war period, the Arctic Ocean and its airspace began to be considered nuclear test sites.

In accordance with Directive No. 432/D of 14.12.1945, issued by the Joint Committee of the Military Command, "the only weapons that the United States can effectively use for a decisive strike on the main centres of the USSR are atomic bombs delivered by long-range aircraft"<sup>4</sup>. That is, the existing nuclear experience and the advantages of equipment the US were superior to the Soviet forces. However, the USSR was considered the unquestioning leader with respect to the army. In accordance with the strategy of "massive retaliation", formed by the US military leadership, in order to win, it was necessary to launch nuclear strikes on the most vulnerable and, at the same time, important territories of the USSR, which included the Russian Arctic. In addition, at the same time, the Arctic territories were the most accessible for a nuclear strike [10, Shirokorad A., pp. 185–191].

Thus, the US military forces began large-scale preparations for the formation of nuclear military bases in the Arctic to strike the USSR and other socialist countries. As a result, as the Cold War progressed, the Arctic began to be considered a training ground for further military operations, and appropriate training was conducted. These circumstances served as an incentive for the Soviet authorities to study the Arctic lands more thoroughly and to form a strategy for conducting military operations in the northern territories [10, Shirokorad A., pp. 185–191].

The Soviet government took measures to improve security in the North. Therefore, in 1948, an extremely secret expedition "North" was organized, during which bases for Soviet aviation and ground forces were planned, including in the ice of the Arctic Ocean. In addition, in order to create a network of airfields, a large number of airfield construction battalions were sent to the northern lands [10, Shirokorad A., pp. 185–191]. In 1958, four years after the USS Nautilus, Soviet engineers prepared the first nuclear submarine K-3 "Leninskiy Komsomol", which was an im-

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<sup>4</sup> NATO. Report to the Council on The Future Tasks of the Alliance (Harmel report), December 13-14, 1967. URL: [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_26700.htm?selectedLocale=en](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_26700.htm?selectedLocale=en) (accessed 20 April 2022).

portant step to ensure the elimination of the American monopoly on this military field. By 1960, the Soviet-American confrontation had moved into the waters of the Arctic Ocean. This was due to significant technical improvements in the intercontinental ballistic missiles and the advent of nuclear submarines [10, Shirokorad A., pp. 185–191].

Skilful sailors who commanded the early sailing ships were confronted with gigantic problems in their attempts to penetrate the frozen Arctic. Pack ice was the most obvious obstacle, and that was a serious challenge; much more difficult were the problems of high-latitude navigation and sailing. As soon as submarines became more robust and reliable, it was clear that submarines would be useful in exploration under the ice pack. After years of struggle with the ice pack by diesel-electric boats in both the Arctic and Antarctic, Admiral Arleigh Burke, the US Chief of Naval Operations, played a significant role during the final years of the breakthrough of the last unexplored frontier. For decades, man dreamed of reaching the North Pole by ship. With the personal support of President Dwight D. Eisenhower, the great Nautilus, the United States' first nuclear-powered submarine, gave the country one of its greatest achievements [11, Williams M.D., p. xi].

A whole new set of circumstances arose in 1955, specifically the culmination of the defence of the mainland against aircraft threats overflying the Arctic, with the construction of the early warning radar fence stretching along the north coast of Alaska and Canada, to Greenland. The strategic planning of this project had supported work on submarines, and icebreakers were drawn into use to help complete more important tasks [11, Williams M.D., pp. 34–41]. The fall of 1957 was a period of considerable agitation for the United States; in early October, the Russians launched the “Sputnik”, their first space success. Capt. Peter Aurand, President Eisenhower's naval aide, later described what he had learnt about an under-ice expedition up north a few weeks earlier. The purpose was to find a good way for a submarine to cruise under the ice. The new nuclear-powered Nautilus, with its greater underwater capabilities, had gone several hundred miles inside the pack [11, Williams M.D., pp. 34–41].

Captain Aurand explained the reasons for the final decision: “*We knew the trip could be made underwater, but that would take at least 30 days. That would take too long. It would be dramatic enough just to go from the Pacific to the Atlantic; crossing the North Pole get world-wide attention, both inside and outside the United States. The United States' image, especially in the space program, was under impact and, of course, if Nautilus failed, it would be bad. It was decided at the White House's request that it would be done in the deepest secrecy* [11, Williams M.D., p. xi].”

American nuclear submarines began to patrol regularly the waters of the USSR. By 1970, more than half of the American nuclear arsenal was located on the submarine and aircraft carrier forces of the fleet. The principles on which NATO deployed its forces were based on the 1967 Harmel report that was based on the pillars of deterrence and détente<sup>5</sup>. Since the US military

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<sup>5</sup> NATO. Report to the Council on The Future Tasks of the Alliance (Harmel report), December 13-14, 1967. URL: [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_26700.htm?selectedLocale=en](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_26700.htm?selectedLocale=en) (accessed 20 April 2022).

forces took regular forward deployments using nuclear submarines, the Soviet navy was forced to take retaliatory measures [10, Shirokorad A., pp. 192–198].

During this period, the Soviet Union steadily developed the NSR. However, it was only utilised for internal purposes for security reasons, as mentioned above. The US claims about the international use of the NSR date back to the Cold War. In 1964, Washington and Moscow exchanged notes of protest over the attempt of American ships to pass along the coast of the USSR without the requisite approvals. America challenged the rights of coastal states to implement rules for the deployment of ships in northern latitudes. Similarly, since the 1960s, it did not recognize Canada's right to control Arctic routes. In 1969, Americans sent an oil tanker, and in 1985, its Coast Guard icebreaker Polar Sea, without informing Canada. Canada responded with the Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act of 1970, and in 1972, the Shipping Safety Control Zones Order and the Arctic Shipping Pollution Prevention Regulations that prohibited the discharge of fuel and oil substances. In 1977, Canadians introduced the NORDREG vessel traffic reporting system that became mandatory for travelling along the North-West Passage in 2010. Canada also was instrumental in proposing Article 234 of the UNCLOS on special navigation rules for ice-covered areas. The Soviet Union keenly followed the Canadian lead and duly implemented similar regulations regarding the passage of foreign vessels along the NSR.

The introduction of nuclear-powered icebreakers significantly increased the period of navigation along the NSR. The amount of cargo carried along the NSR steadily increased over time until reached its maximum in 1987, before the dissolution of the Soviet Union. By this time, the policies of glasnost and perestroika, introduced by Mikhail Gorbachev, with little planning and control had already introduced economic decline and chaos. In 1989, an increase in tariffs for the use of icebreakers along the NSR led to a steep decline in cargo carried throughout the 1990s<sup>6</sup>.

The 1980s also was the final stage of the Cold war. By this time, the Soviet navy, consisting of the first and third flotillas, consisted of 38 nuclear submarines with ballistic missiles, as well as 79 multi-purpose submarines. The boats were armed with 940 ballistic missiles with 2804 nuclear warheads. Thus, the main part of the Soviet nuclear force was located in the northern territories. The nuclear technology at the disposal of the USSR was a powerful deterrent to NATO [10, Shirokorad A., pp. 192–198].

In 1987, a speech by Mikhail Gorbachev, head of the Soviet Communist party in Murmansk, stated that the Arctic should become an area of cooperation. He further stated, "*Across the Arctic, the shortest sea route runs from Europe to the Far East, to the Pacific. I think that, depending on*

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<sup>6</sup> USSR. Item 3.7.6 of "Price list N 11-01. Tariffs for the carriage of goods by sea (coastal navigation)" (approved by Decree of the State Committee on Prices of the USSR of 27.03.1989 N 274), extract: "Dues for icebreakers shall be levied once per ton (container) of the cargo being transported, arriving or departing from (to) ports of the Northern Sea Route, or being transported through the NSR as transit by coastal navigation and foreign voyages year-round, also year-round fee shall be levied for passing along the NSR of vessels not belonging to the Ministry of Maritime Fleet of the USSR". URL: <http://www.economics.kiev.ua/download/ZakonySSSR/data01/tex11346.htm> (accessed 20 April 2022).



*how the normalisation of international relations goes, we could open the Northern Sea Route to foreign ships under our icebreaker escort”*<sup>7</sup>. Gorbachev was perhaps also acknowledging the futility of the arms race. The advent of a new stage in the history of the development of the Soviet Arctic was in 1991. The collapse of the USSR caused stagnation in the northern territories due to the restructuring of the political and economic system [12, Panikar M.M., Shaparov A.E., pp. 33–44]. The crisis, which manifested itself in almost all areas of life in the new Russia, made it only possible to maintain the military forces at a minimum level and with suspect capabilities due to lack of maintenance and modernization.

President Vladimir Putin put on agenda the question of the catastrophic situation of the Russian northern territories only in 2000. During his speech in Murmansk, the president indicated that the Russian North is of fundamental importance to Russia. According to Vladimir Putin, “almost all aspects of national security are concentrated in the Arctic: military-political, economic, technological, environmental and resource”. It may be noted that it was this speech that outlined the country’s future policy in the Arctic and the NSR. Subsequently, a number of laws and policy documents on the Russian Arctic including the NSR were issued starting in 2008, and these have been regularly revised.

The document “On the fundamentals of the state policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic for the period up to 2035” highlights the following main areas of activity in the Arctic:

- ensuring the protection of the population and territories of the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation from natural and anthropogenic emergencies;
- ensuring public safety in the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation;
- development of the NSR;
- ensuring the military security of the Russian Federation; protection of the state border of the Russian Federation<sup>8</sup>.

According to the Strategy for the development of the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation and ensuring national security for the period up to 2035, the priority areas for the development of the Arctic Zone include:

- integrated socio-economic development of the region, including the NSR;
- development of science and technology;
- creation of modern information and telecommunications infrastructure;
- ensuring environmental safety;
- international cooperation in the Arctic;
- ensuring military security,

<sup>7</sup> Byers M. Towards a Canada-Russia axis in the Arctic, 2012, URL: <https://globalbrief.ca/author/michael-byers/> (accessed 20 April 2022).

<sup>8</sup> Russian Federation. Ukaz Prezidenta RF ot 5 marta 2020 g. N 164 «Ob Osnovakh gosudarstvennoy politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii v Arktike na period do 2035 goda» [Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of March 5, 2020 N 164 "On the Fundamentals of State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic for the Period up to 2035"]. URL: <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/000120200305001> (accessed 20 April 2022).

- protection of the state border of the Russian Federation in the Arctic<sup>9</sup>.

The Soviet Union in 1990, and then Russia's Federal Law in July 1998<sup>10</sup> defined the Northern Sea Route as "a historic national transportation passageway of the Russian Federation". Foreign vessels could utilise the NSR if they complied with the Navigation Rules for the NSR. For example, in September 2013, Russia detained the Greenpeace ship Arctic Sunrise that trespassed the NSR waters during a protest action at the Prirazlomnaya platform in the Pechora Sea.

For Russia, the development of the Northern Sea Route (NSR) is vital for the social-economic progress of the Arctic North; the Russian government has formulated a detailed plan for its transformation into an internationally competitive transport corridor [8, Zaikov K.S., Kondratov N.A., Lipina S.A., Bocharova L.K., pp. 86–87]. Russia's plan is to create it as an alternative to the Suez Canal, and the six-day blockage in the canal in 2021 got various comments in the Russian media advocating the advantages of the NSR as a suitable and reliable alternative. However, Laruelle's study of the new Arctic strategy stated that Russia's goals involve human and financial outlays, which it cannot rely upon under current budgetary and social constraints [13, Laruelle M., pp. 18–19]. However, many factors such as the unpredictable ice and weather conditions, poor port infrastructure, high investments in ice-strengthened vessels, comparatively greater insurance costs, inadequate search and rescue assets, gaps in communication and navigation coverage, and the "just in time" principle inherent in commercial transit shipping are likely to affect the development of the NSR.

### ***Current Arctic geopolitics***

For quite a long time, the Arctic has been a sphere of international interest. Geopolitics in the Arctic has been regulated by cooperation amongst the Arctic Council members. The international order in the Arctic is based on the international legal framework of UNCLOS and other international agreements such as the Polar Code and the interests of the primary and secondary actors. The main actors are the Arctic coastal states of Russia, the United States, Canada, Denmark, Norway, Finland, Iceland, and Sweden, which are also members of the Arctic Council. In the 1920s, Canada and Russia asserted influence over the Arctic according to the sectoral principle, which was not objected to by other countries, though not officially confirmed due to the lack of any international Convention on the Law of the Sea, which was signed only in 1982. The main Arctic ac-

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<sup>9</sup> Federal'nyy zakon ot 31.07.1998 g. № 155-FZ «O vnutrennikh morskikh vodakh, territorial'nom more i prilizhashchey zone Rossiyskoy Federatsii» [Federal Law No. 155-FZ of 31.07.1998 "On the internal sea waters, the territorial sea and the adjacent zone of the Russian Federation"]. URL: <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/12742> (accessed 20 April 2022).

<sup>10</sup> Ukaz Prezidenta RF ot 26 oktyabrya 2020 g. N 645 «O Strategii razvitiya Arkticheskoy zony Rossiyskoy Federatsii i obespecheniya natsional'noy bezopasnosti na period do 2035 goda» [Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of October 26, 2020 N 645 "On the Strategy of Development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation in the Arctic for the Period up to 2035"]. URL: <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/Text/0001202010260033> (accessed 20 April 2022).

tors are fully aware of the natural resource potential of the territory; thus, the United States are actively trying to designate their sovereignty over as large a territory as possible.

In the 21st century, the potential for a possible conflict in the Arctic has increased. In 2007, during a scientific expedition, Russian scientists installed a flag on the bottom of the Arctic Ocean, which was met with sharp dissatisfaction from other Arctic actors. However, despite some aggravation of the situation, in 2008, the Ilulissat Declaration was adopted in Greenland, according to which five countries-actors (Russia, the United States, Canada, Norway and Denmark on behalf of Greenland) confirmed their commitment to existing international standards. Russia and Norway agreed to a maritime boundary in 2010. Russia's relations with the Nordic countries have been characterised by cooperation. In the case of Norway, there has been a 1000-year peace between the countries<sup>11</sup>. It seemed that during the period 2008–2012, Russia's Arctic policy was moving towards greater international cooperation [14, Heininen L., Sergunin A., Yarovoy G., p. 92].

The Ukrainian and Crimean issues, which have been on agenda in 2014, served to complicate the existing situation and had its fallout on economic cooperation within the Arctic. Western oil and gas companies such as ExxonMobil, Norwegian Statoil and Italian Eni withdrew from investments in the Russian Arctic due to Western sanctions. Russia was excluded from various Arctic forums, such as the Arctic Chiefs of Defense Meetings and the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable [2, Berbick W., Saunes L., pp. 12–13]. Russian Arctic policy documents have outlined security concerns that were supported by modernizing old Soviet military bases in the Arctic [15, Sergunin A., Gjørsv G.H., pp. 252–254].

Thus, the current state of geopolitics in the Arctic has been characterized by researchers as bipolar with features of cooperation and deterrence. That is why, despite the fact that there are some contradictions between the leader of the Western coalition — the United States and other Arctic Council states except Russia, it does not lead to open disagreements. In fact, researchers have noted that while competition has increased, the Arctic can be characterized as an area where risk of conflict is negligible due to various international agreements such as the fishing agreement, Polar Code and search and rescue agreements [16, Zagorskii A. pp. 107–108]. The build-up of Russian military potential is a reason for other states-actors to take collective measures, predominantly as part of NATO to ensure collective military and political security [17, Runner E., Sokolsky R., Stronski P., pp. 2–15].

In this case, for a long time, the following axiom applies – "for a stable international existence, it is important not to allow excessive strengthening of one of the states". This axiom is the unifying factor for Western countries against Russia. Russia has no allies in the Arctic, which means that the country's geopolitics is based on its own interests. The Arctic Council has had the

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<sup>11</sup> Folland R. ArcticSecurity: Deterrence and Détente in the High North, Arctic Institute, March 30, 2021. URL: <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/arctic-security-deterrence-detente-high-north/> (accessed 20 April 2022).

greatest influence in the Arctic since it was formed by the Arctic countries, despite the fact that the organization appeared in 1996.

The European Union is also taking active steps to strengthen its position in regulating the geopolitical situation in the Arctic. This interest is explained by the fact that a number of member states of the European Union, which do not have access to the northern lands, are, however, interested in the resource potential of the Arctic and the scientific and technological development of the entire region. Other countries that are not directly related to the Arctic, such as China, Japan, South Korea and India, have shown a clear interest in it. It is worth noting that the engagement of an economic power, like China, will not be superfluous since the Arctic needs new vistas for development [18, Gudev P.A., pp. 58–66].

It should also be noted that the military-political situation in the Arctic continues to become more complicated due to the desire of various states to control resources and transport routes in the region. In order to strengthen the defense capability of the Arctic and ensure national security, Russia is actively developing the Northern fleet [17, Runner E., Sokolsky R., Stronski P., pp. 2–9]. Therefore, in 2020, the Northern Fleet held more than 20 major organisational and staff events, about 4000 test events, carried out 8 combat deployments of ships with visits to 12 foreign ports, and practised firing of all types of weapons<sup>12</sup>. Russia has its rights to conduct such exercises within its EEZ, and Western experts have also remarked that these are primarily defensive actions [17, Runner E., Sokolsky R., Stronski P., pp. 2–23]. This is even more relevant because since 2018, NATO has been conducting regular military exercises and deployments within the Arctic not far from Russian territory [19, Grinyaev S.N., Zhuravel V.P., pp. 51–54]. In September 2020, US, UK and Norway exercised in the Barents Sea for the first time without notification of the Russian authorities. Norwegian ships operated east of the Vænger Fjord despite reservations by the Norwegian military [1, Petersen M.B., Pincus R., p. 511].

However, extensive publicity of military deployments in the official media that is replayed in the Western press fuels the claim of the US and European leaders that Russia is militarising the Arctic<sup>13</sup>. This has given rise to certain experts predicting a military conflict in the Arctic. Some of them have stated that it is a repeat of the Cold war period. Reporting of recent events in the Arctic has been heavily influenced by frequent military exercises by both NATO and Russia. In April 2021, three Russian submarines simultaneously surfaced in the ice in different parts of the Arctic<sup>14</sup>. Whilst all this is part of regular military training again extensive publicity given in the official Russian media to these activities and the statement by President Putin that this had no analogy in Soviet and Russian history was given wide media hype in the official Russian government media.

<sup>12</sup>Folland R. ArcticSecurity: Deterrence and Détente in the High North, Arctic Institute, March 30, 2021. URL: <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/arctic-security-deterrence-detente-high-north/> (accessed 20 April 2022).

<sup>13</sup>Rourke R. Changes in the Arctic: Background and Issues for Congress, October 12, 2021. URL: <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/R41153.pdf> (accessed 20 April 2022).

<sup>14</sup>Three Russian Submarines surface and break Arctic ice during drills, March 26, 2021. URL: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-military-arctic-idUSKBN2BI2RZ> (accessed 19 April 2022).

These deployments have been utilised by NATO to expand the scope of its regular military exercises [17, Runner E., Sokolsky R., Stronski P., p. 2]. Satellite pictures of Russia's rejuvenation of its military bases in the Arctic have also been widely discussed in the Western media <sup>15</sup>/

These developments have also been used by the Pentagon to advocate more military spending, particularly to bolster its weak fleet of icebreakers <sup>16</sup>. In 2019, the US Department of Defense (DoD) updated its 2016 DoD Arctic strategy <sup>17</sup> and its Coast Guard Strategy for the Arctic <sup>18</sup>. In July 2020, the US Air Force released its strategy <sup>19</sup>. In 2021, the US Navy released an updated Arctic strategy <sup>20</sup> and the US Army released its service strategy related to the Arctic for the first time <sup>21</sup>. In the latter strategy, it acknowledged that the Russian military buildup in the Arctic was largely a defensive capability. Notwithstanding the political and military rhetoric of the USA, other than for its submarines, it is unlikely in the near term to be capable of carrying out freedom of navigation (FON) operations in the NSR due to the state of the icebreaker fleet. Only one foreign warship Rhone, an offshore support and assistance vessel from France, has carried out a passage across the NSR so far, and this was in September 2018. There is a significant differential in terms of the capabilities of the naval forces of NATO and Russia in the Arctic despite the projection of the Arctic as a military battleground (see Table 1). Therefore, the United States and NATO forces cannot realistically hope to control the battleground where it will be contested by Russian armed forces that are more experienced and comfortable with the weather and terrain.

Table 1

*Comparison of military capabilities of NATO and Russia within the Arctic Circle*<sup>22</sup>

US/ NATO	Russia
Temporary deployment of naval ships. No capabilities for permanent deployment in the Arctic. It may noted that ships have to return to bases to refuel and rearm periodically.	Permanent deployment of naval ships

<sup>15</sup> CNN. Satellite images show huge Russian military buildup in the Arctic, April, 05, 2021. URL: <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/04/05/europe/russia-arctic-nato-military-intl-cmd/index.html> (accessed 19 April 2022).

<sup>16</sup> Rourke R. Changes in the Arctic: Background and Issues for Congress. October 12, 2021. URL: <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/R41153.pdf> (accessed 19 April 2022).

<sup>17</sup> US Department of Defense. Department of Defense Arctic Strategy, June 06, 2019. URL: <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jun/06/2002141657/-1/-1/1/2019-DOD-ARCTIC-STRATEGY.PDF> (accessed 19 April 2022).

<sup>18</sup> US Coast Guard. US Coast Guard Arctic Strategic Outlook, April, 2019. URL: [https://www.uscg.mil/Portals/0/Images/arctic/Arctic\\_Strategic\\_Outlook\\_APR\\_2019.pdf](https://www.uscg.mil/Portals/0/Images/arctic/Arctic_Strategic_Outlook_APR_2019.pdf) (accessed 19 April 2022).

<sup>19</sup> US Air Force. The Department of the Air Force Arctic Strategy, July, 2020. URL: <https://www.af.mil/Portals/1/documents/2020SAF/July/ArcticStrategy.pdf> (accessed 19 April 2022).

<sup>20</sup> US Navy. Blue Arctic: A Strategic Blueprint for the Arctic, January, 2021. URL: <https://media.defense.gov/2021/Jan/05/2002560338/-1/-1/0/ARCTIC%20BLUEPRINT%202021%20FINAL.PDF/ARCTIC%20BLUEPRINT%202021%20FINAL.PDF> (accessed 19 April 2022).

<sup>21</sup> US Army. The Department of the Army: Regaining Arctic Dominance, January, 2021. URL: [https://www.army.mil/e2/downloads/rv7/about/2021\\_army\\_arctic\\_strategy.pdf](https://www.army.mil/e2/downloads/rv7/about/2021_army_arctic_strategy.pdf) (accessed 19 April 2022).

<sup>22</sup> Compilation by the author based upon NATO. Regional Perspectives Report on the Arctic, January, 2021. URL: <https://www.act.nato.int/application/files/8516/3236/7596/regional-perspectives-2021-04.pdf> (accessed 19 April 2022) and other sources as indicated.

Temporary deployment of naval submarines	Permanent deployment of naval submarines. The Northern Fleet has the bulk of the Russian SSBN and SSN force.
Limited experience of operating in Arctic conditions except for nuclear submarines	Extensive experience of operating in Arctic conditions
Limited capability of ships to operate in ice conditions. The US and Norwegian navies have no capabilities; Canada limited capability – 2008 program to build six Arctic patrol ships behind schedule; Denmark has four Tethys-class ice-reinforced patrol frigates; UK has one ice-reinforced patrol ship <sup>23</sup> .	
The US Navy does not have plans to build any ice capable warships taking into account limited threats and suitability	Excellent capability of ships to operate in ice conditions supported by icebreakers
The operational U.S. polar icebreaking fleet has one heavy polar icebreaker (Polar Star) and one medium polar icebreaker, Healy. Polar Sea, a second heavy polar icebreaker is with the US Coast Guard. Polar Sea has had a defect since June 2010 and is therefore not available. Polar Star and Polar Sea were commissioned in 1976 and 1978. There is a plan to build six icebreakers (three heavy and three medium), also called polar security cutter (PSC). Only two have been funded so far and the first may fructify only by 2025 <sup>24</sup> .	Fleet of nuclear icebreakers and building more at a rapid pace.
No significant change in Arctic specific military equipment induction plans post 2014	Rapid surge in military capabilities, including the deployment of S-400 missile systems and induction of modern platforms including new weapons such as the heavy Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) capable of kinetic energy impact without a nuclear payload, called the RS-28 Sarmat, a nuclear-powered cruise missile named Burevestnik (Skyfall), a laser system named Peresvet, a nuclear-armed underwater vehicle, and Avangard and Kinzhal hypersonic missiles into the Russian Armed Forces inventory <sup>25</sup> .
No change in coastal infrastructure plans post 2014	Extensive construction / revitalisation of coastal infrastructure to facilitate military deployments
US plan approved in 2021 to develop a port at Nome, 250 km south of the Bering strait. However, this port freezes from November to May.	Numerous ports along the NSR, including naval bases in Murmansk and Kamchatka. Murmansk is the only ice-free port.
Re-activation of the GIUK gap between Greenland and Iceland to monitor Russian submarine activity (see Figure 2). Enhanced radar coverage of respective areas by members of NATO	No open-source intelligence is available on a corresponding Russian system for monitoring NATO submarines. Russia is stated to have unbroken radar coverage of the NSR coast

<sup>23</sup> Rourke R. Changes in the Arctic: Background and Issues for Congress, March 24, 2021. URL:<https://sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/R41153.pdf> (дата обращения: 20.04.2022).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Rivero J. The Future of Russia's Hypersonic Weapons program, December 10, 2021. URL:<https://www.military.com/daily-news/opinions/2021/12/10/future-of-russias-hypersonic-weapons-program.html> (дата обращения: 20.04.2022).



Armies: No US Army base within the Arctic circle. Canada and Denmark do not have any forces. Norway has limited capabilities.	Extensive deployment of Russian armed forces who regularly train in these conditions.
Air Force: Forward deployment of US bombers at Thule air base in Greenland. The US also signed an agreement with Norway to permit temporary basing of B-1 nuclear weapon capable bombers and P-8 anti-submarine aircraft at Rygge, Solav and Evenes airfields in case of necessity. Of the other NATO countries, only Norway has aircraft within striking range of Russian Arctic bases.	Extensive deployment of Russian aircraft and modernisation of old Soviet air bases to facilitate regular training

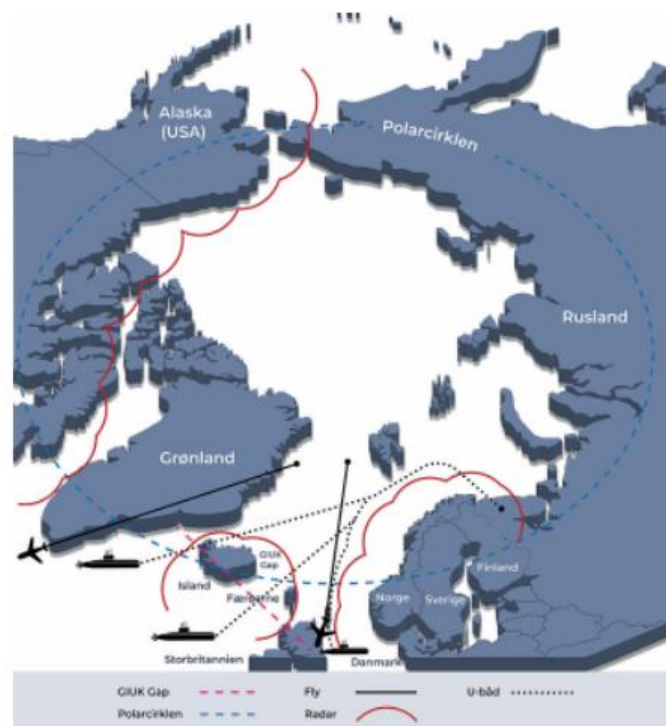


Fig. 2. Overview of NATO anti-submarine monitoring and radar coverage in the Arctic [2, p. 37].

Notwithstanding the overwhelming advantages in defence capabilities (Table 1) within the Arctic Circle, the primacy of the Russian defence establishment and the military-industrial complex in an increasingly resurgent and nationalist Russia may result in increased military spending by Russia not commensurate with actual threats, especially with respect to further build-up of Arctic capabilities [1, Petersen M.B., Pincus R., pp. 505–507]. As former US Secretary of the Navy argued in his assessment of US strategy in 2021 that it is important not to over-estimate another side [20, Lehman J.F., p. 674]. In contrast to other military hardware, Arctic specific military equipment has to be specially designed and engineered to cater for the vagaries of the weather and inevitably cost more. According to a study released in May 2019 by an influential American think tank “The Centre for Strategic and Budgetary Investments” the withdrawal of the US from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty in 2019 could coerce Russia into investing in expensive defences and

retaliatory measures<sup>26</sup>. The United States withdrew from the treaty on August 02, 2019<sup>27</sup>. President Putin remarked that Russian would respond appropriately, but not be drawn into an arms race<sup>28</sup>. However, it remains to be observed whether Russia would indeed follow this declaration. Unlike the USA, whose currency rules the world's financial markets despite trillion-dollar deficits, Russia will not be able to compete in military spending, and this will have a negative impact on the already fragile socioeconomic and demographic status of the Russian Arctic that has been noted by various experts [8, Zaikov K.S., Kondratov N.A., Lipina S.A., Bocharova L.K., pp. 71–72].

This may result in a repeat of the 1980s Cold War when increased military spending by the USSR to combat the US President's Star Wars rhetoric, which was more hype than reality, coupled with Soviet presence in Afghanistan, created enormous budgetary constraints that related to the economic crisis before the disintegration of the Soviet Union<sup>29</sup>. The aim was to defeat the Soviet Union without combat [20, Lehman J.F., pp. 674–675]. The Russian political leadership and military strategists may also revisit the history of Napoleon's and Hitler's invasion of Russia. Though the rest of Europe caved in to their invasions despite all odds, Russia and the USSR, through the bravery, courage and grit of the people with the aid of "General Winter" were able to win the wars. Similarly, there is a need to study the victories of Vietnam over the French at Dien Bien Phu and the mighty Americans. These are shining examples of grit and determination to evict foreign invaders despite limited resources. A similar situation was faced by the American war machine in Afghanistan. Some of the reasons for the American failures include overconfident political leadership, a deficient military leadership, blind faith in advanced technology, over-reliance on firepower that killed or injured the civilian population, and most of all a determined enemy who made up for the lack of technology and advanced weapons with a dogged determination to struggle and die for a just cause<sup>30</sup>.

German philosopher Georg Hegel famously said, "The only thing that we learn from history is that we learn nothing from history". If Russia does not learn from history, then history will repeat itself, and internal fissures may take place that is accentuated by socio-economic limitations. In the modern world, economic strength is of utmost importance, and all nations must regulate military spending taking into account realistic threat perceptions. For this, it is essential to debate

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<sup>26</sup> Cohn J., Walton T.A., Lemon A., Yoshihara T. Re-introducing U.S. Theater-Range Missiles in a Post-INF World, May 21, 2019. URL: [https://csbaonline.org/uploads/documents/Leveling\\_the\\_Playing\\_Field\\_web\\_Final\\_1.pdf](https://csbaonline.org/uploads/documents/Leveling_the_Playing_Field_web_Final_1.pdf) (accessed 20 April 2022).

<sup>27</sup> United States State Department. U.S. withdrawal from the INF Treaty on August 02, 2019, Press statement Michael R. Pompeo, Secretary of State, August 02, 2019. URL: <https://2017-2021.state.gov/u-s-withdrawal-from-the-inf-treaty-on-august-2-2019/index.html> (accessed 20 April 2022).

<sup>28</sup> Deveraux B. Why Intermediate Range missiles are a focal point in the Ukraine, January 28, 2022. URL: [https://warontherocks.com/2022/01/why-intermediate-range-missiles-are-a-focal-point-in-the-ukraine-crisis/?utm\\_source=WOTR+Newsletter&utm\\_campaign=114a878190-\(accessed 20 April 2022\)](https://warontherocks.com/2022/01/why-intermediate-range-missiles-are-a-focal-point-in-the-ukraine-crisis/?utm_source=WOTR+Newsletter&utm_campaign=114a878190-(accessed 20 April 2022)).

<sup>29</sup> Roberts P.C. Washington has resurrected the Specter of Nuclear Armageddon, March 17, 2021. URL: <https://thesaker.is/washington-has-resurrected-the-specter-of-nuclear-armageddon/> (accessed 20 April 2022).

<sup>30</sup> Basevich A. Why can't Washington learn, January 23, 2022. URL: <https://tomdispatch.com/a-very-long-war> (accessed 20 April 2022).

this and take into account alternate viewpoints because when people with related backgrounds and opinions encompass the entire chain of intelligence compilation and policy formulation, group-think and tunnel vision are inescapable penalties.

In May 2019, there was no joint statement of the Arctic Council due to the US reluctance to include climate change. This was preceded by a speech by US Secretary of State Pompeo alleging that Russia and China both were disturbing the Arctic peace by military deployments in the Arctic<sup>31</sup>. This development and aggressive military signalling by both sides are undoubtedly aggravating the geopolitical situation in the Arctic [17, Runner E., Sokolsky R., Stronski P., pp. 2–23]. It is necessary to realise that it is in the interests of the United States and its military-industrial complex to project Russia as a threat to the stability of Arctic geopolitics. However, after the events of 2014, Russian experts are divided in their view of Arctic geopolitics between the neo-realists and the neo-liberalist schools of international relations [21, Godzimirski J., Sergunin A. pp. 25–31]. In our opinion, the official narrative with its stress on national security promulgated in official documents in Arctic State Policy (March 2020)<sup>32</sup> and Arctic Strategy (October 2020)<sup>33</sup>, as well as the National Security Strategy<sup>34</sup> released in July 2021, coupled with the need to publicise military exercises as a form of diplomatic signalling appears to be based upon Realpolitik, and this may be fraught with risks, especially for the development of the Arctic and the NSR due to the frailty of the Russian economy post sanctions, specially as it is based on exports of natural resources. The latter document notes the use of protectionist procedures, multiple sanctions and the preservation of the environment as reasons to restrict access of Russian companies to export markets, constrain the development of its industry, establish control over shipping routes and prevent the growth of the Russian Arctic<sup>35</sup>.

Considering the above, there is a need to adopt a pragmatic approach and update various agreements introduced during the Cold War to maintain peace and avoid misunderstandings in respect of military deployments in the Arctic. The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)'s Vienna Document on "Confidence and Security Building Measures" is a vital document first signed in 1990 that is followed even today, the last update was in 2011. However, this

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<sup>31</sup> Rourke R. Changes in the Arctic: Background and Issues for Congress, March 24, 2022. URL: <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/R41153.pdf> (accessed 20 April 2022).

<sup>32</sup> Ukaz Prezidenta RF ot 5 marta 2020 g. N 164 «Ob Osnovakh gosudarstvennoy politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii v Arktike na period do 2035 goda» [Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of March 5, 2020 N 164 "On the Fundamentals of State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic for the Period up to 2035"]. URL: <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/000120200305001> (accessed 20 April 2022).

<sup>33</sup> Ukaz Prezidenta RF ot 26 oktyabrya 2020 g. N 645 «O Strategii razvitiya Arkticheskoy zony Rossiyskoy Federatsii i obespecheniya natsional'noy bezopasnosti na period do 2035 goda» [Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of October 26, 2020 N 645 "On the Strategy of Development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation in the Arctic for the Period up to 2035"]. URL: <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/Text/0001202010260033> (accessed 20 April 2022).

<sup>34</sup> Ukaz Prezidenta RF ot 2 iyulya 2021 g. N 400 «O Strategii natsional'noy bezopasnosti Rossiyskoy Federatsii [Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of July 02, 2021 N 400 "On the Strategy of National Security of the Russian Federation"]. URL: <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/47046> (accessed 20 April 2022).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

document does not include the advanced warning of naval exercises<sup>36</sup>. The 1972 agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union for Prevention of Incidents on and over the high seas (INSEAs) was a landmark document that was signed as a fallout of various incidents due to close encounters during the Cold War, but it needs to be revised<sup>37</sup>.

### *Influence of Arctic geopolitics on the NSR*

During the period of the Soviet Union, though the NSR was officially activated in 1932 with the formation of the Glavsevmorput, it was not open to international traffic except for the period of WWII due to national security considerations [22, Armstrong T.E., p. 136]. Even though there was an invitation accorded in 1967 that was supported by a trial voyage, it was never taken up by international shipping and reportedly tacitly withdrawn after the Arab-Israeli war<sup>38</sup>. The internationalization of the NSR began only in 1991. Slow progress was achieved thereafter due to the new Russia's economic difficulties. In the 21st century, there was a revival of interest in the Arctic and the NSR due to rising oil and gas prices. However, due to Western sanctions after Crimea, Russia's growth slowed, and it now needs financial assistance and technology to implement its Arctic strategy and the detailed development plan for the NSR. The Russian government's "Fundamentals of state policy in the Arctic", released in March 2020, acknowledges the non-adherence of timelines for the development of the NSR, including infrastructure of ports, navigation and communication facilities, icebreakers, auxiliary fleet, and Search and Rescue infrastructure. It categorises this as a "risk to national security"<sup>39</sup>. There could be three reasons attributed to this delay. Firstly, the non-allocation of the requisite funds for the development of the NSR due to fall in oil prices post 2014 and increasing requirements of the Russian military. This has translated into significant military expenditure in terms of purchasing power parity (PPP) which is considered to be a more realistic estimate as compared to the traditional exchange rate evaluation used by organizations such as the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) (see Fig. 3). This is particularly relevant due to the sharp fall in the value of the rouble after 2014 and the fact that military procurement in Russia is mostly internal. Both methods showed a high rate of military spending between 2005 and 2018, 125% in the case of market-rate evaluation and 90% in case of the PPP evaluation. However, it may be noted that Russian military expenditure, with a high percentage spent on new

<sup>36</sup> Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Vienna Document 2011 on Confidence and Security Building Measures, 2011 URL: 11042018-Incidents-Management-Review-Tom-Frear.pdf (europeanleadershipnetwork.org) (accessed 20 April 2022).

<sup>37</sup> Frear T. Lessons Learned? Success and Failure in managing Russia-West accidents 2014-2018. Euro-Atlantic Security Policy Brief, April, 2018. URL: <https://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/11042018-Incidents-Management-Review-Tom-Frear.pdf> (accessed 20 April 2022).

<sup>38</sup> Armstrong T. quoted in Mulherin N.D. The Northern Sea Route its development and evolving state of operations in the 1990s. US Army Corps of Engineers, Cold Regions Research and Engineering Laboratory, April, 1996. URL: <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA310144.pdf> (accessed 20 April 2022).

<sup>39</sup> Ukaz Prezidenta RF ot 5 marta 2020 g. N 164 «Ob Osnovakh gosudarstvennoy politiki Rossiyskoy Federatsii v Arktike na period do 2035 goda» [Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of March 5, 2020 N 164 "On the Fundamentals of State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic for the Period up to 2035"]. URL: <http://publication.pravo.gov.ru/Document/View/000120200305001> (accessed 20 April 2022).

procurement under the State Armament Program-2020 as compared to other countries, has largely been focused on rebuilding Soviet military bases in the Arctic and also on new platforms and weapon systems that would be deployed in the Arctic. The expenditure may also be catering for the replacement of a large proportion of obsolete Soviet military platforms or equipment and enhanced external threat perceptions enunciated in the Russian National Security Strategy (2021), which presumably takes into account the strategies proposed for the US by influential think tanks such as the RAND Corporation <sup>40</sup>, and the Center for Security and Budgetary Assessments (CSBA) <sup>41</sup>. Furthermore, Russian military expenditure, even in terms of PPP is still low as compared to the United States (see Fig. 4).

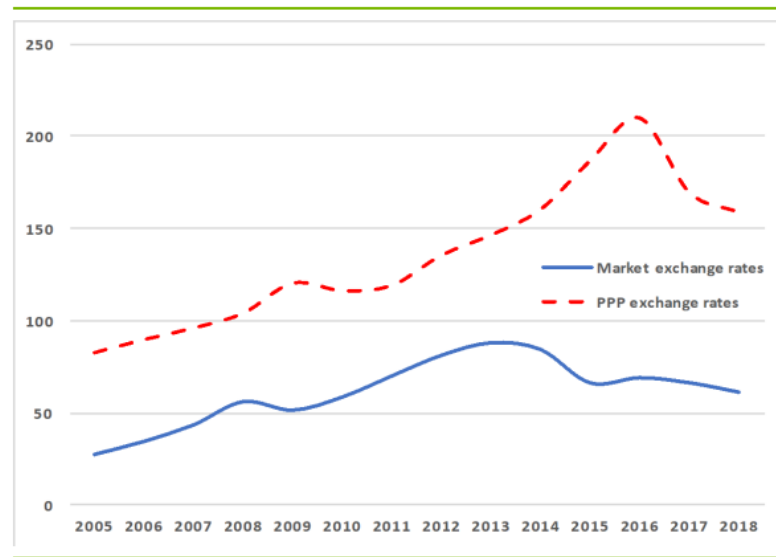


Fig. 3. Russian military expenditure at market exchange rates and PPP exchange rates, 2005-2018 USD billion Source: SIPRI; IMF; CNA <sup>42</sup>.

<sup>40</sup> Rand Corporation. Overextending and Unbalancing Russia. Assessing the Impact of Cost Imposing Options, 2019. URL: [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_briefs/RB10014.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB10014.html) (accessed 22 April 2022).

<sup>41</sup> Center for Security and Budgetary Assessments. Leveling the playing field and Unbalancing Russia. Assessing the Impact of Cost Imposing Options, 2019. URL: <https://csbaonline.org/research/publications/leveling-the-playing-field-reintroducing-us-theater-range-missiles-in-a-post-INF-world/publication/1> (accessed 22 April 2022).

<sup>42</sup> Connolly R. Russian Military Expenditure in comparative perspective: A Purchasing Power Parity estimate. (2022). URL: [https://www.cna.org/CNA\\_files/PDF/IOP-2019-U-021955-Final.pdf](https://www.cna.org/CNA_files/PDF/IOP-2019-U-021955-Final.pdf) (accessed 20 April 2022).

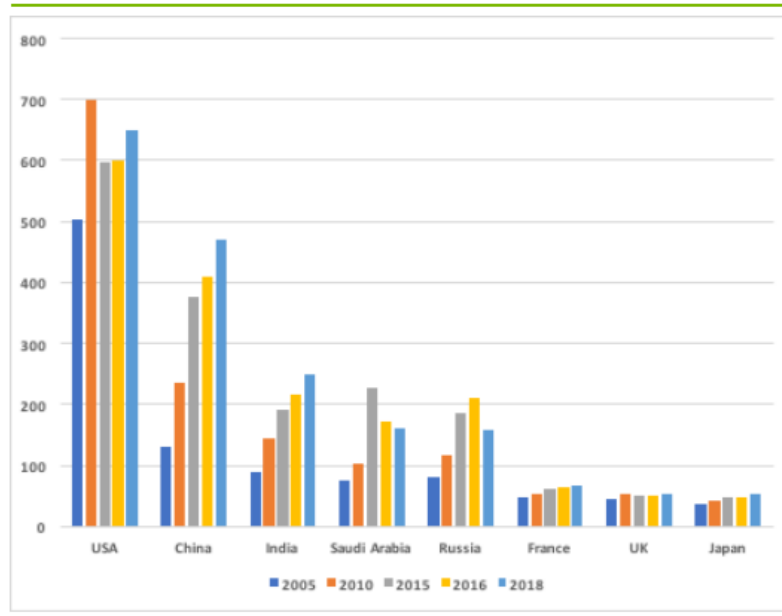


Fig. 4. Military expenditure of selected powers at PPP exchange rates, 2005-2018 USD billion Source: CAN <sup>43</sup>.

Secondly, there is a dependence on foreign technology for certain aspects of development. For example, new generation icebreakers are being built with the help of Korean shipyards <sup>44</sup>. There are also ships being built in China with the help of the Dutch company Damen. In addition, navigation and communication equipment for implementing Search and Rescue (SAR) along the NSR is also dependent upon foreign suppliers. For example, the use of the Global Maritime Distress Maritime Safety System, flight data recorders, gyrocompasses, radars, thermal imagers and video surveillance systems. Certain marine engines used for various ships and auxiliary craft are also sourced from abroad. Furthermore, the International Association of Classification Societies took a decision in March 2022 to exclude the Russian Maritime Register of Shipping <sup>45</sup>. This would mean that timelines of activities related to foreign partners would inevitably be affected. Thirdly, Russia has been cautious about inviting foreign partners for the development of the NSR, except for the development of oil and gas fields (for example, Yamal LNG and Arctic LNG-2 projects) and for the building of icebreakers.

In view of the aforementioned, it is not surprising that current traffic on the NSR is mainly focused on natural resources and there is limited international transit shipping [23, Gunnarson B., Moe A., p. 1–12]. The NSR will be acceptable not only for commercial viability but also for safety, service and convenience, and this is presently inadequate due to the status of the NSR ports [24, Wang D., Li D., Gong Y., Wang R., Wang J. and Huang X., p. 11]. Another research study indicated

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Financial Times. Russia's Arctic Gas ambitions at risk as sanctions imperil LNG icebreakers, March 28, 2022. URL: <https://www.ft.com/content/2164d1e3-ee68-43ab-8c3d-61bd6ccde239> (accessed 19 April 2022).

<sup>45</sup> Classification Society - Russian Maritime Register of Shipping. The International Association of Classification Societies has taken an illegal decision to exclude the Russian Maritime Register of Shipping, March 11, 2022. URL: <https://rs-class.org/news/general/mezhdunarodnoy-assotsiatsiyey-klassifikatsionnykh-obshchestv-prinyato-nezakonnoe-reshenie-ob-isklyuch/> (accessed 19 April 2022).



that uncertainties in the political and safety spheres are presently viewed as risk factors for the deployment of vessels on Arctic routes [25, Tseng P-H., Cullinane K. pp. 422–438].

The current budgetary and human resource support for the NSR project is considered insufficient by international experts [15, Laruelle M., p. 21; 26, Moe A., pp. 15–16]. The Russian economy is heavily dependent upon oil and gas revenues. Most of the regions of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation are afflicted with out migration of skilled manpower, which is likely to affect the growth of the infrastructure of the NSR unless mitigated by government support [27, Shaparov A.E., Kharisovna F.K., Magomedov A.K., and Bhagwat J., pp. 10–12]. The government's socio-economic policies would need to focus on these critical aspects for the smooth and timely development of the NSR.

Although there were statements by the Russian President seeking international cooperation for the development of the NSR, mentioning in the “Basic principles of Arctic State policy” (2020) and “Strategy for the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation” (2020). After the Crimean-Donbass crisis in 2014, the focus was on the security of the route in terms of introducing regulations for foreign ships to take permission to transit the NSR [26, Moe A., pp. 4–10]. The 2013 regulations aimed at identical rules for both Russian and foreign vessels taking into account UNCLOS and the rights and freedoms contained therein. It mandated the use of a Russian icebreaker and a Russian ice pilot onboard. The US strategy for the Arctic region, released in 2013 and 2019, advocates “freedom of the sea” in the Arctic. However, UNCLOS is specific with respect to freedom of the sea (Article 87). On May 29, 2015 the US government issued a diplomatic note to Russia expressing concern over provisions of the NSR regulatory scheme that, according to it was inconsistent with international law, especially the need for foreign-flagged vessels to take permission to use the NSR [28, Vylegzhanin A., Bunik I., Torkunova E., Kienko E., pp. 293–300]. In 2019, a regulation for 45 days advance notice to be given for transit by warships was introduced after passage of the French warship Rhone in September 2018 [26, Moe A., pp. 4–10]. However, this law was not enacted, presumably due to the reticence of the Russian government to mention warships separately. However, regulations for rules of navigation along the NSR issued by the Russian Federation in 2020 stated that they are applicable to all ships, and applications must be submitted “no later than 15 working days before the expected date of entry of the vessel into the waters of the Northern Sea Route”<sup>46</sup>. A new law was also introduced for protection of the Russian shipping industry in respect of the carriage of oil and natural gas [26, Moe A., pp. 4–10] in 2018<sup>47</sup>, the latter being similar to American regulations. This law was introduced clearly to aid the Russian shipbuilding industry taking into account the deteriorated economic situation post-sanctions in 2014.

<sup>46</sup> Postanovleniye Pravitel'stva RF ot 18 sentyabrya 2020 g. N 1487 "Ob utverzhdenii Pravil plavaniya v akvatorii Severnogo morskogo puti [Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation “Concerning approval of the Rules of Navigation in the Water Area of the Northern Sea Route” of 18 September 2020, N 1487], September 18, 2020 URL: <http://static.government.ru/media/acts/files/1202009220024.pdf> (accessed 20 April 2022).

<sup>47</sup> Shelf nakryvayut flagom. [The (Continental) Shelf is Being Covered by the Flag], Kommersant, June 16, 2015. <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2747598> (accessed 19 April 2022).

Therefore, it can be inferred that Russia has made changes with respect to the control, management and development of the NSR in response to geopolitical developments that it considers a threat to its security, including economic interests. However, in the past, some Russian experts recommended a policy of international cooperation and internationalization rather than nationalization of the Arctic from the point of view of progress [14, Heininen L., Sergunin A., Yarovoy G., pp. 91–92]. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to create and sustain a favourable political climate.

One of the reasons why international shipping companies may not be venturing into the Arctic is the uncertain political situation [23, Gunnarson B. and Moe A., pp. 10–12]. This is a factor that needs to be taken into account by the Russian government. The development of an international transport corridor necessitates adherence to international norms, and this has to be facilitated by a favourable geopolitical and geo-economic situation for international investors and shipping companies.

The special operation in Ukraine has had its fallout on cooperation within the Arctic Council because the remaining seven countries issued a joint declaration ceasing cooperation<sup>48</sup>. Sweden and Finland are now thinking about joining NATO<sup>49</sup>. Despite the Crimean crisis in 2014, the Arctic Council continued cooperation reinforcing Arctic exceptionalism. It is hoped that cooperation will resume as in the past<sup>50</sup>, especially with respect to SAR, because the Arctic is a unique region where countries cannot progress without cooperation. The heavy economic sanctions imposed, including the unprecedented sanctions on the Central Bank, indicate that Russia is likely to undergo an economic downturn<sup>51</sup>. This would undoubtedly have an effect on the allocation of funds for the development of the NSR. It would be unrealistic to expect that companies would provide two-thirds of the required funds<sup>52</sup> under the prevailing inflation and economic conditions.<sup>53</sup> Even though, the Russian President proclaimed that Arctic projects should be continued<sup>54</sup>; it may be prudent to carry out a fresh cost-benefit analysis, and only pursue projects that are likely

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<sup>48</sup> US State Department. Joint Statement on Arctic Council Cooperation Following Russia's Invasion of Ukraine, March 06, 2022. URL: <https://www.state.gov/joint-statement-on-arctic-council-cooperation-following-russias-invasion-of-ukraine/61bd6ccde239> (accessed 20 April 2022).

<sup>49</sup> The Atlantic Council. Going Nordic: What NATO membership would mean for Finland and Sweden, April 15, 2022. URL: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/going-nordic-what-nato-membership-would-mean-for-finland-and-sweden/> (accessed 20 April 2022).

<sup>50</sup> Byers M. Arctic Cooperation endures for now, October, 2015. URL: <https://globalbrief.ca/2015/10/arctic-cooperation-endures-for-now/> (accessed 20 April 2022).

<sup>51</sup> The New York Times. Bleak Assessments of Russia's Economy clash with Putin's rosy claims, April 18, 2022. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/18/world/europe/russian-economy-bleak-assessments.html> (accessed 20 April 2022).

<sup>52</sup> Reuters. Rosatom sees NSR cost at 735 million roubles, Russian budget to provide a third, June 24, 2019. URL: Rosatom sees Northern Sea Route costs at 735 billion roubles, Russian budget to provide a third | Reuters (accessed 20 April 2022).

<sup>53</sup> Kommersant. Naibullina: The Russian economy can live on reserves for some time, April 18, 2022. URL: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/53160398> (accessed 20 April 2022).

<sup>54</sup> Russian Federation. Meeting on the development of the Arctic zone. April 13, 2022. URL: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/68188> (accessed 20 April 2022).

to garner economic gains. This is particularly relevant as vital projects such as building next-generation icebreakers may be impacted due to the sanctions imposed<sup>55</sup>. The NSR is a prestigious project for Russia. However, the ambitious targets set earlier may need to be revised taking into account geopolitical and geo-economic realities, especially as Russia is unlikely to revise military spending under the present circumstances<sup>56</sup>.

### **Recommendations**

It is essential for Russia to project itself as a cooperative power in the Arctic. Showcasing its military build-up in the Arctic, especially in the light of recent events in Ukraine is only likely to reinforce the Western viewpoint that Russia advocates a so-called “power” strategy in the Arctic and will consequently slow down the development of the Arctic and NSR due to lack of interest by other countries. Firstly, it may also be prudent for Russia to re-evaluate its current policy of widely publicising military exercises in the area and also weapon or platform inductions, as these contribute to enhancing military rhetoric and may lead to avoidable misunderstandings. Secondly, it may consider rationalising military requirements and spending in view of the limited capabilities of NATO and the US Navy to operate off the NSR. Thirdly, to counteract the USA and NATO, it may explore the possibility of having bilateral non-aggression pacts with Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Canada. The below-mentioned measures to de-escalate militarisation may also be considered individually with the Arctic Council countries if they are not willing to discuss it on a multilateral basis. Fourthly, it could follow a policy of outreach to all interested countries to participate in the development of the NSR. Establishing joint forums on the lines of China’s Belt and Road Initiative and regular meetings of an internationally constituted expert advisory panel are likely to bring better dividends and more international interest than the current declaratory measures that are being followed. Finally, it needs to work with other Arctic Council countries to enhance confidence-building measures and establish defence cooperation forums. The US–Russia Syria de-confliction measures between 2015–2017 could be a model to be followed. The following specific measures are suggested to facilitate demilitarisation and de-escalation in the Arctic:

- (a) Restart the Arctic Chiefs of Defence forum (ACHOD), including Russia.
- (b) Reactivate the Arctic Security Forces Round table (ASFR). It can play a supporting role to the ACHOD.
- (c) Advance warning of naval exercises in accordance with norms existing for other military exercises.

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<sup>55</sup> Financial Times. Russia’s Arctic Gas ambitions at risk as sanctions imperil LNG icebreakers, March 28, 2022. URL: <https://www.ft.com/content/2164d1e3-ee68-43ab-8c3d-61bd6ccde239> (accessed 20 April 2022).

<sup>56</sup> The Washington Post. Russia test fires new intercontinental ballistic missile, April 20, 2022. URL: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/russia-test-fires-new-intercontinental-ballistic-missile/2022/04/20/ec14e20a-c0e0-11ec-b5df-1fba61a66c75\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/russia-test-fires-new-intercontinental-ballistic-missile/2022/04/20/ec14e20a-c0e0-11ec-b5df-1fba61a66c75_story.html) (accessed 20 April 2022).

- (d) Update the 1972 agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union for Prevention of Incidents on and over the high seas (INSEAs). This may include the following aspects:
- (i) Surface ships, submarines and aircraft are not to close the coast of other countries to less than 24 nautical miles.
  - (ii) Surface ships, submarines and aircraft are not to close each other less than three nautical miles when in international waters or airspace.
- (e) Introduction of hotlines between Arctic Defence Ministers and Chiefs of Defence.
- (f) Update the OSCE's Vienna Document on "Confidence and Security Building Measures".

### Conclusion

The conducted research shows that military posturing has resulted in increased tensions in the Arctic. This has reached levels not seen since the Cold War. The Arctic is undoubtedly an arena of great opportunity. However, this can only happen if the current sabre-rattling measures are restricted. This will require concerted efforts by all Arctic Council countries, including Russia, who may also consider reviewing military spending, which is only in the interest of the US political leadership and the military-industrial complex. The need for an institutionalised military dialogue in the Arctic has been reemphasised. Based on our analysis, we can conclude that it is in Russia's national interest to support its goal to maintain the Arctic as a zone of international cooperation. This is crucial if it intends to develop the NSR as an international competitive transport corridor. Given the current infrastructure bottlenecks and hesitancy of shipping companies accentuated due to the current crisis in Ukraine, Russia is unlikely to achieve its aim without significant domestic budgetary support as well as international cooperation and investment. In order to achieve this, it needs to establish a favourable political climate. Notwithstanding the strained geopolitical climate, it needs to re-emphasise bilateral cooperation with its Arctic neighbours to counteract NATO influence in the region. It could also utilise its chair of the Arctic Council from 2021 to strengthen peace and cooperation in the Arctic by pushing for the introduction of a military dialogue forum and also for updated confidence-building measures relating to the deployment of naval and air forces in order to avoid misperceptions, reduce risk and prevent inadvertent escalation.

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