

Russia's Policies towards a Changing Arctic: Implications for UK Security

Russia Studies Centre
Research Paper No. 12 (2017)

Dr Andrew Foxall

The Henry Jackson Society
June 2017

Summary

- The Arctic features increasingly prominently in policy and political discussions in Russia. This reflects both an effort by the state to secure the Arctic in order to exploit the region's economic potential, and a coordinated attempt on the part of the state to address an array of evolving – and potential – security threats in the region. These two drivers, domestic and international, are key to understanding Russia's policies towards the changing Arctic.
- In the view of many Russian officials, the existing international borders in the Arctic, which were agreed in the early 1990s, were imposed by the West on Russia when it was weak. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union controlled approximately one-third of the Arctic Ocean as its territorial waters; today, that figure is much lower. This view is indicative of a wider belief in Russian policymaking circles that the international system is unfair and is becoming increasingly unstable, making the possibility of conflict in the Arctic greater.
- Russia's policies in the Arctic prioritise security concerns, with economic and other issues subsumed into them. They entail the implementation of various measures designed to modernise the military's capabilities and prepare the military to meet threats identified by the Kremlin, and to ensure that the Arctic's economic potential is fully realised as Russia's strategic resource base. The Arctic policies are thus primarily about readiness: readiness to secure and to exploit Russia's interests.
- Russia's policies have involved considerable investments in arms procurement and both dual-purpose and military infrastructure, in restructuring the command structure of its armed forces, and in enhanced coordination between branches of state security. They also include an intense programme of military exercises involving various branches of the armed forces and domestic security services.
- Russia's Arctic policies face ongoing problems – due both to the scale of the activities involved and to the challenges of balancing priorities at a time of economic stagnation. While the first stage of Russia's official Arctic Policy, adopted in 2008, was completed on time, the second and third stages are both running behind schedule. In particular, there exists a disconnect between domestic efforts to 'modernise' the Arctic as soon as possible and international conditions which are less favourable to such modernisation.
- The UK can do little to prevent Russia's activities in the Arctic *per se*, but a more sophisticated assessment of these activities and their implications would aid the development of more effective policies, both domestically and internationally. Together with its NATO allies, the UK should encourage the alliance to adopt an Arctic strategy, and thereby ensure that there is a common understanding of the region's security challenges as well as a comprehensive policy to address them. In particular, NATO needs to rethink the nature of Article 5 in the context of the Arctic and recognise the renewed importance of the 'GIUK Gap'

1. Introduction

There is a prevailing belief in Western capitals that the Arctic is somewhat exempt from rising geopolitical tensions with Russia. Proponents of such a belief – in the political, policymaking, and expert communities – cite the Arctic as one of few ‘common’ or ‘shared’ interests between Russia and the West, and point to the fact that the eight states of the Arctic Council – Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the United States – have, over recent years, reached several agreements to promote greater cooperation in the region. These agreements include the 2008 Ilulissat Declaration and the 2011 legally-binding treaty, signed under the auspices of the Arctic Council, coordinating search and rescue activities in the Arctic.

Such a belief overlooks the extent to which Russia’s deteriorating relations with the West have already raised tensions in the region. Speaking in August 2014, President Vladimir Putin suggested he would be willing to take his country’s standoff with the West to the Arctic.¹ The following month, when the West imposed sectoral sanctions on Russia in response to its destabilisation of eastern Ukraine, some of those sanctions focused on Russia’s activities in the Arctic. Shortly afterwards, in March 2015, Putin called the Northern Fleet to full combat readiness as part of a large-scale nationwide military exercise.² Weeks later, a delegation of Russian ministers, including Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin, visited the North Pole.³

For almost two decades after the Cold War ended, Russia pursued an essentially pragmatic foreign policy, and this was reflected in its approach to the Arctic. Russia was a key participant in the creation of a new institutional landscape in the region in the 1990s and early 2000s. Even as Russia’s foreign policy became increasingly anti-Western, manifest in Putin’s speech to the Munich Security Conference in 2007, it continued to act cooperatively in Arctic matters. This cooperation survived Russia’s war with Georgia in 2008 and even intensified in the years following when, under the presidency of Dmitry Medvedev, significant deals were signed between Russian and Western firms – most notably between *Rosneft* and ExxonMobil in 2011. It continues, to some extent, today, even though Russia’s wider foreign policy has been fundamentally at odds with the West since 2014.

While it is now clear that Russia is pursuing an aggressive and revisionist foreign policy, there remains considerable uncertainty about what its intentions *vis-à-vis* the Arctic are.⁴ This paper looks at the changing nature of Russia’s military posture in the Arctic since 1991, its objectives for the region and the activities it is undertaking to achieve them, and assesses the implications of these for UK security. Whatever the motivations behind Russia’s policies towards the Arctic, it is clear that they are creating a new defence landscape in the region.

Should Russia’s military activities in the Arctic matter to UK, or Western, audiences? Yes. They matter because these activities are far greater in depth and scale than anything the West has undertaken in the

¹ Walker, S., Rogozin, L., Weaver, M., ‘Putin Likens Ukraine’s forces to Nazis and threatens standoff in the Arctic’, *The Guardian*, 29 August 2014, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/29/putin-ukraine-forces-nazis-arctic>, last visited: 6 June 2017.

² Grove, T., ‘Russia starts nationwide show of force’, *Reuters*, 16 March 2015, available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-military-exercises-idUSKBN0MC0J020150316>, last visited: 6 June 2017.

³ Nilsen, T., ‘Rogozin to top of the world after controversial Svalbard visit’, *Barents Observer*, 19 April 2015, available at: <http://barentsobserver.com/en/arctic/2015/04/rogozin-top-world-after-controversial-svalbard-visit-19-04>, last visited: 6 June 2017.

⁴ The notion of a Russian ‘Arctic’ is a recent, post-1991, conception. During the Soviet period, the notions of the Extreme North (*kraïnii sever*), Far North (*dalnii sever*) and Near North (*blizhnii sever*) were the accepted ways of looking at the region. These were socio-economic constructs, rather than based on latitude.

same region over the same period; the security analyst Pavel Baev has argued that Russia is “engaged in a one-sided arms race” in the Arctic.⁵ They also matter because these activities have not finished; Russia’s policies towards the Arctic run on various timescales, some through to 2020 and others to 2030. Moreover, Russia and the West continue to be separated by numerous disagreements, particularly (but not exclusively) over the structure of the international system. As Russia’s standoff with the West continues, the issues raised by these disagreements have the potential to become even starker.

2. Post-Soviet Russia’s Arctic Policy, 1991-2007

The immediate post-Cold War years saw a pronounced decrease in tension in the Arctic, as Russia abandoned many Soviet-era military facilities in the region, including air and radar bases on remote islands and huge quantities of nuclear waste on the seabed.⁶ At the same time, and in part to mitigate the risks posed by these facilities, there was a widening and deepening of international and regional cooperation, particularly on environmental issues. In 1991, the eight Arctic countries signed the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy, which paved the way for the establishment of the Arctic Council in 1996.⁷ The same year, the Arctic Military Environmental Cooperation project was established, by Norway, the United States, and Russia.⁸

An early sign of post-Soviet Russia’s recognition of the Arctic’s importance came in 2001 when the government endorsed its first Maritime Doctrine, which included a significant Arctic dimension. In December of the same year, Russia submitted an application to the United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (UNCLCS) which asserted that the Lomonosov and Mendeleev ridges are a continuation of Russia’s continental Siberian shelf. If accepted by UNCLCS, this application would increase Russia’s continental area by 1.2 million square kilometres. Three years later, in 2004, the Russian State Council Working Group on National Security Interests in the North released a report calling for Russia to be much more pro-active in its Arctic policy.

Russia’s application to UNCLCS was driven, in part, by time constraints. As with all signatories to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), Russia had up to 10 years from ratifying the Convention (which it did in 1997) to make claims for an extended continental shelf. But it was also driven by a belief, held by the Kremlin at the time and clearly articulated by senior government figures in the years since, that the international borders agreed in the early 1990s were unfair, having been imposed by the West on Russia when it was weak. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union controlled approximately one-third of the Arctic Ocean as its territorial waters. Today, that figure is much lower, around one-fifth, with a commensurate loss of access to potential resources in the region.

It was in the second half of the 2000s that the Arctic emerged at the forefront of the Kremlin’s geopolitical thinking. In July and August 2007, an international scientific expedition (officially called ‘*Arktika-2007*’)

⁵ Baev, P., ‘Russia’s Arctic Illusions’, *Brookings*, 27 August 2015, available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2015/08/27/russias-arctic-illusions/>, last visited: 6 June 2017.

⁶ In 2012, the Russian government catalogued Soviet and Russian nuclear waste in the Kara Sea. This included: at least one nuclear submarine, the K-27; 19 ships containing radioactive waste; 14 nuclear reactors, including five that still contain spent nuclear fuel; 735 other pieces of radioactively contaminated heavy machinery; and, 17,000 containers of radioactive waste. See, Digges, C. ‘Radiological survey of sunken K-159 finally puts to sea after mechanical delays’, *Bellona*, 1 September 2014, available at: <http://bellona.org/news/nuclear-issues/radioactive-waste-and-spent-nuclear-fuel/2014-09-radiological-survey-sunken-k-159-finally-puts-sea-mechanical-delays>, last visited: 6 June 2017.

⁷ Notably, issues of peace and security were excluded from the Arctic Council’s remit.

⁸ The United Kingdom joined in 2003.

travelled to the North Pole to collect data needed to substantiate Russia's UNCLCS application. It was the first of at least ten such expeditions over the past decade or so. As part of *Arktika-2007*, on 2 August, a Russian flag – made from corrosion-resistant titanium – was planted on the central Arctic seabed. Many observers labelled the event as the beginning of a 'new Cold War' between Russia and the West over the Arctic. The same month, Russia resumed the Cold War-era practice of long-range combat patrols, by the Air Force, over the Arctic. (Russia finally re-submitted its application to UNCLCS in August 2015).

3. Post-Soviet Russia's Arctic Policy, 2008-2013

A little under a year after the resumption of long-range combat patrols over the Arctic, Russia announced, in July 2008, that was also resuming surface patrols of Arctic waters by its Northern Fleet.⁹ Shortly afterwards, in September 2008, Russia adopted its first (and current) Arctic policy. Officially entitled *'Foundations of State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic in the period up to 2020 and Beyond'*, the Policy's declared aim is to preserve Russia's role as a 'leading' Arctic power. It identifies Russia's four 'national interests' in the region as: the utilisation of Russia's Arctic zone as a national strategic resource base; the preservation of the Arctic as a zone of peace and cooperation; the protection of the unique ecological systems of the Arctic; and, the use of the Northern Sea Route as a unified transportation link. The Policy makes clear that Russia considers the Arctic to be central to its economic and social development and global competitiveness.

The Arctic Policy is divided into three main stages. The first stage (2008-2010) was designed to substantiate Russia's application to the UNCLCS and establish a framework for the economic and infrastructural development of Russia's northern regions. The second stage (2011-2015) was due to lead to international legal recognition of Russia's external borders in the Arctic – primarily as a result of its UNCLCS application being successful – and an increase in Russia's extraction and transportation of resources. The third stage (2016-2020) foresees the Arctic transformed into Russia's leading strategic resource base. While the first stage of the Arctic Policy was completed on time, the second stage is running at least two years behind schedule. The third stage, meanwhile, has effectively been put on hold as a result of Western sanctions.

The sharp increase in political attention on the Arctic, from the late 2000s onwards, was driven, to some extent, by the perception that the region contains significant reserves of hydrocarbons and other resources. In 2008, a probabilistic survey released by the US Geological Survey estimated that 13% of the world's remaining oil and 30% of its natural gas reserves are located in the Arctic, mainly offshore under less than 500 metres of water. Most of these resources are concentrated within Russia's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). With the price of oil reaching a pre-global financial crisis peak of US\$146 per barrel in July 2008, there were expectations that vast revenues would be harvested from the development of the Arctic.

The core messages of the Arctic Policy – that Russia intends to secure the region's resources and utilise the Northern Sea Route and will, if necessary, use its military to do these – have been repeated in numerous other policy documents since 2008. Examples of this include: the 'National Security Strategy to 2020', adopted in 2009; the 'Energy Strategy up to 2030', approved in 2009; the 'Strategy for the Development of the Arctic and National Security Provisions up to 2020', adopted in 2013; the 'Military

⁹ Sergunin, A., and Valery Konyshchev, *Russia in the Arctic: Hard or Soft Power?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015)

Doctrine', updated in 2014; the 'Transport Strategy up to 2030', adopted in 2014; and, the 'Maritime Doctrine', adopted in 2015.

4. Contemporary Interest, 2014 - Date

There is much political discussion in Russia about international stability and the possibility of conflict, particularly in the Arctic. This was evident before the sharp deterioration in relations between Russia and the West in 2014, but it has taken on new significance since then. Speaking in August 2014, President Putin called for Russia to "pay more attention to issues of development of the Arctic and the strengthening of our position".¹⁰ Shortly afterwards, in December, Russia adopted an updated Military Doctrine in which, for the first time, one of "The main tasks of the Armed Forces, other troops and bodies in peacetime" was stated to be "to protect national interests of the Russian Federation in the Arctic region".¹¹ A month or so after the doctrine was adopted, Sergey Shoigu, Russia's Minister of Defence, echoed these narratives, declaring that "A broad spectrum of potential challenges and threats to our national security is now being formed in the Arctic".¹²

Two events occurred in and around early 2014 that led to Russia rethinking its Arctic policy: economic stagnation and the war in Ukraine. Although independent of each other, they are not wholly unrelated.

Russia's GDP growth decreased year-on-year between 2010 and 2013, as the country's growth model - based on rising hydrocarbon prices, maximisation of capacity and resources, and macroeconomic stabilisation policies - reached its limits. When Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine, in March 2014, the West imposed economic sanctions on certain Russian individuals and entities. Much broader, sectoral sanctions were imposed later in 2014 in response to Russia's destabilisation of eastern Ukraine. These sanctions not only targeted individuals connected to Russia's Arctic policy, including Dmitry Rogozin and *Rosneft* Chairman Igor Sechin, but also prohibited Western firms from engaging in offshore oil exploration in the Arctic and dented Russia's efforts to gain long-term international financing for projects there.¹³

Russia's economy, already weak, was ill-equipped to deal with the impacts of sanctions. The fall in the global price of oil - from a post-global financial crash peak of US\$128 per barrel in March 2012 to less than US\$40 per barrel in January 2016 - compounded matters further.¹⁴ Capital outflow from Russia increased, Foreign Direct Investment into Russia decreased, the ruble lost half of its value, and the

¹⁰ Walker, S., Rogozin, L., Weaver, M., 'Putin Likens Ukraine's forces to Nazis and threatens standoff in the Arctic', *The Guardian*, 29 August 2014, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/aug/29/putin-ukraine-forces-nazis-arctic>, last visited: 6 June 2017.

¹¹ 'Voennaya doktrina Rossiyskoy Federatsii' [Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation], 25 December 2014, available at: <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/security/military/document129/>, last visited: 6 June 2017.

¹² Bender, J., 'Russian defense Minister explains why the Kremlin is militarizing the Arctic', *Business Insider UK*, 26 February 2015, available at: <http://uk.businessinsider.com/why-the-kremlin-is-militarizing-the-arctic-2015-2?r=US&IR=T>, last visited: 6 June 2017.

¹³ The third round of sanctions imposed by the EU, in September 2014 prohibits: "the provision of services for deep water oil exploration and production, arctic oil exploration and production or shale oil projects". The third round of US sanctions, imposed the same month, prohibits: "the provision, exportation, or reexportation, directly or indirectly, of goods, services (except for financial services), or technology in support of exploration or production for deepwater, Arctic offshore, or shale projects that have the potential to produce oil in the Russian Federation, or in maritime area claimed by the Russian Federation and extending from its territory." See 'COUNCIL REGULATION (EU) No 960/2014 of 8 September 2014 amending Regulation (EU) No 833/2014 concerning restrictive measures in view of Russia's actions destabilising the situation in Ukraine', *Official Journal of the European Union*, 12 September 2014, available at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=OJ:L:2014:271:FULL&from=EN>, last visited: 6 June 2017, and 'DIRECTIVE

4 UNDER EXECUTIVE ORDER 13662', *Office of Foreign Assets Control*, 12 September 2014, available at: https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Programs/Documents/EO13662_directive4.pdf, last visited: 6 June 2017.

¹⁴ Figures taken from, 'Crude Oil (petroleum); Dated Brent Daily Price', *Index Mundi*, 30 May 2017, available at: <http://www.indexmundi.com/commodities/?commodity=crude-oil-brent&months=603>, last visited: 30 May 2017.

economy entered into recession in 2015. As a result of sound monetary policy, including the decision to fully float the ruble in 2014, the economy is beginning to grow again, albeit rather modestly – the International Monetary Fund projects GDP growth of 1 to 1.5 percent between 2017 and 2020.¹⁵

The deterioration of relations between Russia and the West since 2014 has manifest itself in a multitude of ways. In practical terms in the Arctic, it has been most obvious in military modernisation, military assertiveness, and the development of the Northern Sea Route. Each of these has been visible in Russian policy.

4.1 Military Modernisation

Russia has been modernising its military since 2008. Shortly after the Russia-Georgia war, then-Minister of Defence Anatoly Serdyukov announced a program of reform and improvement. The plan was to spend 20 trillion rubles on weapons systems between 2011 and 2020, with the intent of modernising 70 percent of the armed forces by the end of the decade. In 2011, 20 trillion rubles was equal to about US\$640 billion. In the past five years, Russia's ruble has decreased markedly in value. In 2017, the same 20 trillion rubles amounts to around US\$350 billion. Nevertheless, Russia has continued to spend significantly on its military, investing around 4 to 5 percent of its GDP since 2014.

As part of this modernisation, Russia has established a new military district – Arctic Joint Strategic Command – to coordinate all of its activities in the Arctic, and it has made considerable investments and dramatically improved the capabilities of its forces in the three military districts that border the region (Far Eastern, Leningrad and Siberian). In addition, it has created new Arctic brigades; commissioned a new icebreaker fleet, which will join the Northern Fleet (see Table 1); re-opened Soviet-era military bases in the Arctic; and, deployed a missile early-warning radar in the Arctic. As in the Cold War, the Arctic is the staging ground for Russia's strategic nuclear capabilities, most obviously its SLBMs (Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missiles). Although located in the Arctic, many of these capabilities have applicability beyond the region itself.

Table 1: Northern Fleet in Numbers⁶

	1988	2000	2017
Submarines (including ballistic missile submarines)	350 (62)	85 (27)	41 (8)
Ships	670	290	38

Speaking in August 2014, Colonel General Viktor Bondarev, commander-in-chief of the Russian Air Force, announced that the Kremlin intends to repair and modernise approximately 50 military airfields in the Arctic by 2020,¹⁷ as part of a nationwide programme to upgrade the country's 150 airfields. By the

¹⁵ 'Russia: Gross domestic product, constant prices (Percent change)', *World Economic Outlook Database*, October 2016, available at: http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2016/02/weodata/weorept.aspx?pr.x=71&pr.y=12&sy=1993&ey=2021&scsm=1&ssd=1&sort=country&ds=.&br=1&c=922&s=-NGDP_RPCH&grp=0&a=, last visited: 30 May 2017.

¹⁶ The figures for 1988 and 2000 are taken from: 'Written evidence submitted by Dmitriy S. Tulupov', House of Commons Defence Sub-Committee inquiry into Defence in the Arctic, UK Parliament, 7 March 2017, available at: <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/defence-subcommittee/defence-in-the-arctic/written/46500.pdf>, last visited: 6 June 2017. The figures for 2017 are taken from: 'List of active Russian Navy Ships – 2017', 10 February 2017, available at: <http://russianships.info/eng/today/>, last visited: 6 June 2017.

¹⁷ 'Russia to upgrade 50 military airfields by 2020', *Tass Russian News Agency*, 11 August 2014, available at: <http://tass.com/russia/744503>, last visited: 6 June 2017.

end of the year, a base had been opened on Wrangel Island and a Soviet-era base had been re-opened on Cape Schmidt, giving Russia four operational airfields in the Arctic. In 2015, Dmitry Bulgakov, Russia's Deputy Defence Minister, announced that a further ten airfields in the Arctic would be operational by the end of 2015,¹⁸ bringing the total number of its operational airfields in the Arctic to 14.

Before Putin signed a decree, in December 2016, abolishing the Federal Agency for Special Construction (*Spetsstroy*),¹⁹ *Spetsstroy* was in the midst of building or reconstructing three airfields (the Severomorsk-1 airfield in Murmansk, the Nagurskoye airfield on Alexandra Land Island, and the Tiksi airfield in the Sakha Republic) and carrying out provisional work to build two more (the Severomorsk-3 airfield in Murmansk, and Naryan-Mar airfield in Arkhangelsk Region).²⁰ The airfield on Alexandra Land will have deployments of Su-24 or MiG-31 jets,²¹ and is close to the major new 'Arctic Trefoil' military base, which was unveiled in April 2017.

In addition, Russia is also restoring aerodromes in the Arctic, including the Rogachyovo airfield on Novaya Zemlya, and airfields in Tiksi, Vorkuta, Alykel, and Anadyr. Construction of the latter four is expected to continue until 2021.²² Since 2014, the Temp aerodrome, located on the Kotelny Island of the New Siberian Islands archipelago, has been modernised.²³ The facility, known as the 'Northern Clover' (*Severnii Klover*), is Russia's northern-most base; it houses the 99th Arctic Tactical Group and is able to receive aircraft round the year, including the Ilyushin Il-76 military transportation planes.²⁴

Russia is not being secretive about its Arctic build-up. When the Arctic Trefoil base was unveiled, the Defence Ministry posted a series of images and a virtual tour on its website.²⁵ Nor is the symbolic importance of the build-up being overlooked by the Kremlin. Speaking ahead of the 2017 Victory Day parade, commander of Russia's ground forces Colonel-General Oleg Salyukov announced that "Arctic military equipment will participate in the parade for the first time"²⁶ – and indeed it did.

4.2 Military Assertiveness

Since 2014, Russia has held numerous military exercises in the Arctic (see Table 2). In September 2014, Russia staged its largest post-Soviet military exercises, Vostok-2014, in which 100,000 servicemen, 1,500 tanks, 120 aircraft, 5,000 pieces of military hardware, and 70 ships were mobilised at 20 ground, sea and air ranges, including in the northern regions of Chukotka and Kamchatka.²⁷ While these exercises were consistent with preparing for the defence of the Far East against a traditional nation-state actor (China), they also contained preparation for offensive 'hybrid warfare' along Russia's borders.²⁸ The following year,

¹⁸ Panda, A., 'Russia to build 10 Arctic airfields by 2016' *The Diplomat*, 15 January 2015, available at: <http://thediplomat.com/2015/01/russia-to-build-10-arctic-airfields-by-2016/>, last visited: 6 June 2017.

¹⁹ Its duties will be taken over by the Ministry of Defence from 1 July 2017.

²⁰ 'Russia's Spetsstroy to build 9 airfields in Arctic' *Russia beyond the Headlines*, 21 July 2016, available at: https://rbth.com/news/2016/07/21/russias-spetsstroy-to-build-9-airfields-in-arctic_613739, last visited: 6 June 2017.

²¹ Staalesen, A., 'Fighter jets for Russia's new Arctic base', *The Independent Barents Observer*, 22 April 2016, available at: <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/2016/04/fighter-jets-russias-new-arctic-base>, last visited: 6 June 2017

²² Staalesen, A., 'Air Force builds new Arctic frontier' *The Independent Barents Observer*, 13 January 2017, available at: <https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/security/2017/01/air-force-builds-new-arctic-frontier>, last visited: 6 June 2017.

²³ First steps to modernise the base were taken in late 2013, when a temporary airstrip for flying in supplies and personnel was established by a naval task force. Much of the initial infrastructure was landed by this force, whose flagship is the Kirov-class Battlecruiser *Petr Velkiy*.

²⁴ 'Russia to upgrade 50 military airfields by 2020', *Tass Russian News Agency*, 11 August 2014, available at: <http://tass.com/russia/744503>, last visited: 6 June 2017.

²⁵ 'Arkticheskiy Trilistnik' [Arctic Trefoil], available at: <http://mil.ru/files/files/arctic/Arctic.html>, last visited: 6 June 2017.

²⁶ Peck, M., 'Russia is deploying special anti-aircraft missiles to the Arctic', *The National Interest*, 23 April 2017, available at: <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/russia-deploying-special-anti-aircraft-missiles-the-arctic-20304>, last visited: 6 June 2017.

²⁷ McDermott, R., 'Vostok 2014 and Russia's hypothetical enemies (part one)', *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 23 September 2014, available at: <https://jamestown.org/program/vostok-2014-and-russias-hypothetical-enemies-part-one/>, last visited: 6 June 2017.

²⁸ McDermott, R., 'Vostok 2014 and Russia's hypothetical enemies (part two)', *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 30 September 2014, available at: <https://jamestown.org/program/vostok-2014-and-russias-hypothetical-enemies-part-two/>, last visited: 6 June 2017.

in March 2015, Putin announced a snap military exercise in the Arctic in which the Northern Fleet was called to “full combat readiness”, 38,000 ground troops were mobilised, and 110 aircraft, 41 warships, and 15 submarines were involved.²⁹ The exercises, which expanded to cover much of Russia, focused on the territorial defence of Russia’s peripheries, in particular the Kola Peninsula and outlying Arctic islands.³⁰

Not all of Russia’s military exercises in the Arctic have been large-scale. In July 2014, three landing ships from the Northern Fleet conducted missile exercises around the Rybachi Peninsula, roughly 20 miles from the Norwegian border.³¹ In February 2015, shortly after NATO announced that it intended to bolster its presence in Eastern Europe,³² the Northern Fleet, including several Borei-class ballistic missile submarines, conducted exercises in the international waters beneath the North Pole.³³ Later the same year, in September, the Northern Fleet rehearsed the defence of the New Siberian Islands from a sea-based attack; as part of this, a cruise missile was fired from Kotelny Island at a target in the Laptev Sea. In August 2016, a three-day exercise in Murmansk Oblast involved the use of mobile and stationary fog machines throughout Severomorsk, a closed town and the base of the Northern Fleet.

As well as military exercises, Russian strategic bombers, in particular Tupolev Tu-95 and supersonic Tu-160 bombers, regularly fly over the Arctic Ocean. The practice, as previously noted, of long-range strategic bomber patrols was resumed in 2007, and since 2014 the number of Russian incursions into other Arctic states’ airspace has increased significantly.

In May 2014, Finland scrambled its fighter jets when two Russian-owned planes were suspected of flying over the Gulf of Finland without authorisation.³⁴ Three months later, Russian aircraft entered Finnish airspace thrice in one week. By comparison, Finnish Minister of Defence Carl Haglund explained that four to six such incidents a year were the norm prior to 2014.³⁵ Finland was not alone. In 2014, Norway intercepted 74 Russian warplanes conducting air patrols on its coast – up from 58 interceptions in 2013.³⁶ The nearby Baltic States have not been immune, either. Between 2013 and 2014, NATO reported an increase in the number of interceptions of Russian military jets near the Baltic Sea from 43 to 140. This is a result both of an increase in instances of Russia flying aircraft in Baltic airspace and an improvement in NATO’s air policing capabilities. In total, NATO intercepted Russian military jets near the Baltic Sea on 410 occasions between 2014 and 2016.³⁷

²⁹ Grove, T., ‘Russia starts nationwide show of force’, *Reuters*, 16 March 2015, available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-military-exercises-idUSKBN0MC0JO20150316>, last visited: 6 June 2017.

³⁰ Conley, H.A. and Caroline Rohloff, ‘The New Ice Curtain: Russia’s Strategic Reach into the Arctic’, Centre for Strategic & International Studies (2015), available at: https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/publication/150826_Conley_NewIceCurtain_Web.pdf, last visited: 16 June 2017.

³¹ Staalesen, A., ‘Navy shooting in the borderland’ *Barents Observer*, 30 July 2014, available at: <http://barentsobserver.com/en/security/2014/07/navy-shooting-borderland-30-07>, last visited: 6 June 2017.

³² Sharkov, D., ‘Biggest NATO reinforcement since the Cold War sets frontline against Russia’, *Newsweek*, 5 February 2015, available at: <http://www.newsweek.com/biggest-nato-reinforcement-cold-war-sets-frontlines-russian-threat-304722>, last visited: 6 June 2017.

³³ Sharkov, D., ‘Russia sends nuclear submarine troops on arctic exercise’, *Newsweek*, 6 February 2015, available at: <http://www.newsweek.com/russia-sends-nuclear-submarines-arctic-exercise-304931#.VNexDFJdYH0.twitter>, last visited: 6 June 2017.

³⁴ Saul, H., ‘Finland scrambles jets after two Russian aircraft violate airspace’, *The Independent*, 22 May 2014, available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/finland-scrambles-jets-after-two-russian-aircrafts-violate-airspace-9415541.html>, last visited: 6 June 2017.

³⁵ ‘Finland’s Fighter Jets on Alert as Russia Violates Airspace’, *Bloomberg*, 29 August 2014, available at: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-08-28/finland-puts-fighter-planes-on-alert-as-russia-violates-airspace>, last visited: 6 June 2017.

³⁶ Barno, D., Bensahel, N., ‘The Anti-access challenge you’re not thinking about’, *War on the Rocks*, 5 May 2015, available at: <https://warontherocks.com/2015/05/the-anti-access-challenge-youre-not-thinking-about/>, last visited: 6 June 2017.

³⁷ Sharkov, D., ‘Russian aircraft intercepted 110 times above Baltic in 2016’ *Newsweek*, available at: <http://www.newsweek.com/nato-intercepted-110-russian-aircraft-around-baltic-2016-538444>, last visited: 6 June 2017.

Table 2: List of Selected Russian Military Exercises in the Arctic Since 2014

Year	Details
July 2014	Over the course of five days, three landing ships from the Northern Fleet conducted missile exercises around the Rybachi Peninsula.
September 2014	As part of the 'Vostok-2014' exercises, 100,000 servicemen, 1,500 tanks, 120 aircraft, 5,000 pieces of military hardware, and 70 ships were mobilised at 20 ground, sea, and air ranges, including in the Chukotka and Kamchatka regions.
February 2015	The Northern Fleet, including several Borei-class ballistic missile submarines, conducted exercises in the international waters beneath the North Pole.
March 2015	The Northern Fleet was called to "full combat readiness"; 38,000 ground troops were mobilised, and 110 aircraft, 41 warships, and 15 submarines were involved. ³⁸ Exercises were conducted in much of Russia, including the Kola Peninsula and outlying Arctic islands.
Aug 2015	More than 1,000 servicemen, 14 aircraft, 34 pieces of special and military hardware belonging to Northern Fleet were involved in an exercise on the Taymyr Peninsula. ³⁹
Sept 2015	The Northern Fleet rehearsed defending the New Siberian Islands, practising missile, air defence, and artillery firings. During the exercises, a cruise missile was launched from Kotelny Island at a target in the Laptev Sea. ⁴⁰
Oct 2015	A detachment of combat ships from the Northern Fleet carried out a 56-day campaign in the Arctic, ⁴¹ which included eight tactical exercises (some of which were live fire) and 17 naval military exercises with anti-aircraft missile and artillery systems. For part of the exercises, the detachment was accompanied by an icebreaker ship. ⁴²
Aug 2016	For three days, the Northern Fleet conducted an exercise into how well a smoke screen could conceal Severomorsk's military base in the event of confrontation. Biological, chemical, and radiological-warfare units were involved. ⁴³
May 2017	The Northern Fleet rehearsed an attack on its main submarine base in Severomorsk, the city where its headquarters are based. ⁴⁴

Submarines from the Northern Fleet frequently conduct operational patrols from their bases. These are not confined to the Arctic *per se*, but have included patrols through the so-called Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom (GIUK) Gap into the North Atlantic. These, and other activities, reflect the ambitions

³⁸ Grove, T., 'Russia starts nationwide show of force', *Reuters*, 16 March 2015, available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-military-exercises-idUSKBN0MC0JO20150316>, last visited: 6 June 2017.

³⁹ 'Northern Fleet interservice exercise started in the Arctic', *Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation*, 24 August 2015, available at: http://eng.mil.ru/en/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12053582@egNews, last visited: 6 June 2017.

⁴⁰ 'Northern Fleet held exercise with missile, air defence and artillery firings in the Arctic', *Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation*, 17 September 2015, available at http://eng.mil.ru/en/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12056488@egNews, last visited: 6 June 2017.

⁴¹ 'Otryad boevikh korably Severnogo flota vipolnil zadachi arkticheskogo pokhoda i pribil v Severomorsk', *Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation*, 10 October 2015, available at: http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12060554@egNews, last visited: 6 June 2017.

⁴² 'Otryad boevikh korably Severnogo flota vipolnil zadachi arkticheskogo pokhoda i pribil v Severomorsk', *Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation*, 10 October 2015, available at: http://function.mil.ru/news_page/country/more.htm?id=12060554@egNews, last visited: 6 June 2017.

⁴³ Pignat, L., 'Russia, in military exercise, pits fog of war against dogs of war', *The New York Times*, 11 August 2016, available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/12/world/europe/severomorsk-russia-exercises.html>, last visited: 6 June 2017.

⁴⁴ 'Napadenie otrazheno. V Arktike proshli voennic ucheniya', *Yamal-Region Teleradiokompaniya*, 3 May 2017, available at: <http://yamal-region.tv/news/25117/>, last visited: 6 June 2017.

of the Russian military, particularly the navy. While submarine numbers are not at the same level as those maintained during the Cold War, they have increased markedly since 2014, according to Admiral Mark Ferguson, the US Navy's top commander in Europe.⁴⁵

4.3 Northern Sea Route

Access to the Arctic Ocean is becoming easier as the average extent of summer sea ice declines, and there is an increasing sense of urgency in Russia to assert sovereignty over the Northern Sea Route (NSR) – a route that would significantly decrease transportation costs and carbon dioxide emissions for a journey between Europe and East Asia. Since 2008, successive policy documents, including the 2014 Transport Strategy and 2015 Maritime Doctrine, have emphasised the need to develop the NSR and its attendant infrastructure. Russia has re-written its domestic legislation to define the NSR in such a way as to position Russia as the sole authority for the route and it has created an institutional framework to support this – the Northern Sea Route Administration, a federal state institution, was established in 2013.

A priority in developing the NSR is the renewal and expansion of Russia's icebreaker fleet. Russia currently has 40 icebreakers, many of which were constructed in the 1970s or 1980s and all but one of which is expected to be decommissioned by 2020. In 2014, Russia had four nuclear-powered icebreakers. That number now stands at three (the 'Sovetskiy Soyuz' was decommissioned in 2016), but is set to increase. There are currently 11 in production, and in June 2016 its newest icebreaker, the so-called 'Arktika' – at 173 metres in length and 30 metres in width, it is said to be the world's biggest and most powerful – was launched. It is set to go into service in May 2019.⁴⁶ Two further nuclear icebreakers of the same class, the 'Sibir' and the 'Ural', are scheduled for completion in November 2020 and November 2021 respectively. In addition, Russia is expanding its diesel-electric icebreaker fleet with the development of a new class, the so-called Ilya Muromets. The lead ship of the new fleet, the eponymous Ilya Muromets, was launched in July 2016, while another three have been ordered by the Ministry of Defence.⁴⁷

Russia has significant economic ambitions for the NSR, and its icebreaker fleet is central to achieving these; in 2013, Russia adopted a new law stipulating that any ships entering the NSR must use an icebreaker escort (or have on board a pilot specialising in icy conditions).⁴⁸ Speaking in March 2017, Evgeny Ambrosov, Senior Executive Vice-President of Russian shipping company *Sovcomflot*, suggested that the tonnage of shipping passing through the NSR would reach around 20 million tons by 2020,⁴⁹ while the Ministry of Transport has suggested that the volume of cargo will reach 40 million tons by the same year. These estimates are wildly optimistic.

As shown in Table 3, below, the largest volume of cargo that has transited the NSR over recent years is 1.35 million tons, in 2013. Last year, this figure was only 214, 513 tons. Not only has the weight of cargo decreased over this period, so too has the number of transits made. In 2013, there were a total of 71 transits compared with 19 in 2016. An additional trend is that the share of domestic transits (those

⁴⁵ Schmitt, E., 'Russia bolsters its submarine fleet, and tensions with U.S. rise', *The New York Times*, 20 April 2016, available at:

https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/21/world/europe/russia-bolsters-submarine-fleet-and-tensions-with-us-rise.html?_r=0, last visited: 6 June 2017.

⁴⁶ Staalesen, A., 'Government approves new date for launch for world's most powerful icebreaker', *The Independent Barents Observer*, 1 April 2017, available at:

<https://thebarentsobserver.com/en/arctic/2017/04/government-approves-new-date-launch-worlds-most-powerful-icebreaker>, last visited: 6 June 2017.

⁴⁷ Gady, F-S., 'Russia to commission world's largest nuclear icebreaker in 2019', *The Diplomat*, 28 February 2017, available at:

<http://thediplomat.com/2017/02/russia-to-commission-worlds-largest-nuclear-icebreaker-in-2019/>, last visited: 6 June 2017.

⁴⁸ 'Navigating the Northern Sea Route: Status and Guidance', American Bureau of Shipping, 2014, available at:

http://ww2.eagle.org/content/dam/eagle/publications/2014/NSR_Advisory.pdf, pg. 8, last visited: 6 June 2017.

⁴⁹ 'SFC: Northern Sea route's traffic volume set to triple by 2020', *World Maritime News*, 30 March 2017, available at:

<http://worldmaritimeweb.com/archives/216440/scf-northern-sea-routes-traffic-volume-set-to-triple-by-2020/>, last visited 6 June 2017.

exclusively between Russian ports) has decreased – from 60 percent of transits in 2013 to 37 percent in 2016 – suggesting that the route is becoming increasing international, even if international transits are at a negligible level.

Table 3: List of Transits and Cargos of the Northern Sea Route, per year.

Year	Total Number of Transits	Number of Domestic Transits	Total Cargo (Metric Ton)	Domestic Cargo (Metric Ton)
2013 ⁵⁰	71	43	1,355,897	414,506
2014 ⁵¹	53	53	668,517	668,517
2015 ⁵²	18	11	39,586	4,648
2016 ⁵³	19	7	214,513	14,441

In order to provide adequate support for the ships transiting the NSR (and because there are so few ports along the route), Russia announced in 2009 that it would establish ten Search and Rescue centres between the eastern- and western-most edges of the Route, Port Provideniya and Murmansk respectively. At the beginning of 2014, two of the centres – located in Dudinka and Naryan-Mar – were operational. The centre at Archangelsk was completed in 2015, and six others are due to be completed by 2020.⁵⁴ These centres, as with the upgraded and updated airfields and new radar stations in the Arctic, are dual-purpose in the sense that they serve both military and non-military purposes. This is in line with Russia's obligations under two recent Arctic Council agreements; the 2011 Nuuk Declaration, and the 2013 Agreement of Marine Oil Pollution, Preparedness, and Response.

5. Conclusions

Russia is the largest Arctic state and its Arctic coastline, which runs for more than 17,500 km, accounts for half of the total Arctic coastline. The Arctic hosts Russia's strategic nuclear fleet (the Northern Fleet) and accounts for around 20 percent of its GDP and 22 percent of its exports. Russia's 'national interests' in the region, as defined by the 2008 Arctic Policy, are genuine and legitimate, and as the physical landscape of the region changes, most obviously through becoming ice-free, it is natural that Russia's posture towards the region should also change.

The key tensions between Russia and the West arise not from the existence of Russian national interests in the Arctic, but instead from some of the activities Moscow is undertaking to protect them. It is understandable that Russia should, for example, establish search-and-rescue centres along the Northern

⁵⁰ 'NSR Transit 2013', Centre for High North Logistics (CHNL) Information Office, available at: http://www.arctic-lio.com/docs/nsr/transits/Transits_2013_final.pdf, last visited: 6 June 2017.

⁵¹ 'NSR Transit 2014', Centre for High North Logistics (CHNL) Information Office, available at: http://www.arctic-lio.com/docs/nsr/transits/Transits_2014.pdf, last visited: 6 June 2017.

⁵² 'NSR Transit 2015', Centre for High North Logistics (CHNL) Information Office, available at: http://www.arctic-lio.com/docs/nsr/transits/Transits_in_2015.pdf, last visited: 6 June 2017.

⁵³ 'NSR Transit 2016', Centre for High North Logistics (CHNL) Information Office, available at: http://www.arctic-lio.com/docs/nsr/transits/Transits_2016.pdf, last visited: 6 June 2017.

⁵⁴ Sakhuja, V., 'Search and Rescue in the Northern Sea Route', *The International Expert Council on Cooperation in the Arctic*, 20 February 2015, available at: <http://www.iccca.ru/en/legislation/strategies/item/363-search-and-rescue-in-the-northern-sea-route>, last visited: 6 June 2017.

Sea Route and restructure its security forces in order to account for the increase human activities in the Arctic. It is less understandable, however, why Russia should launch snap large-scale military exercises in the Arctic or why Russia's military jets should buzz the airspaces of other Arctic states.

Whatever the motivations for its actions, Russia's activities in the Arctic are creating a new defence landscape in the region. Although these activities have been evident for much of the past decade, they have had a greater sense of urgency since 2014.

6. Recommendations

The UK is one of the Arctic's nearest neighbours – Shetland's Out Stack is only 320 nautical miles south of the Arctic Circle – and it has a long-standing history of engagement, exploration, and research in the region. In the Arctic, as elsewhere, the UK has traditionally played a leading role in upholding the international system; it has 'observer' status to the Arctic Council and is a participant in the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable. This system greatly benefits UK interests, insofar as it acts to dampen geopolitical competition and thus enables the UK to concentrate its strategic and economic resources on building up its wealth, prosperity, and position in the wider world.⁵⁵

There is little the UK can do to prevent Russia's activities in the Arctic *per se*, but a more sophisticated assessment of these activities and their implications would aid the development of more effective policies. In addressing Russia's activities in the Arctic, thus, there are a number of things that the UK can do:

- **Encourage NATO to Adopt an Arctic Strategy.** NATO has long overlooked the Arctic; its most recent Strategic Concept, published in 2010, does not even contain the word 'Arctic'. This should change. The alliance should adopt an Arctic strategy and thereby ensure that there is a common understanding of the region's security challenges as well as a comprehensive policy to address them.
- **Lead NATO's Rethinking of the Nature of Article 5 in the Context of the Arctic.** Russia has demonstrated, over recent years, an ability to employ a wide range of measures to influence events throughout the West, including information and cyber operations, diplomatic offensives, economic coercion, and traditional military power. Any combination of these could be applied to the Arctic. NATO's Article 5 is the cornerstone of Western security, but it is ill-suited to dealing with Russia's 'multi-dimensional' warfare. The UK should take a leading role in fundamentally rethinking the nature of Article 5. Such a rethinking must reassure NATO's members in the Arctic – as well as its regional allies, Finland and Sweden – that, even at the earliest stages of 'multi-dimensional' warfare, effective counter-measures will be employed.
- **Ensure that NATO Recognises the Renewed Importance of the 'GIUK Gap'.** The 'GIUK Gap', the strategic choke point in the North Atlantic between Greenland, Iceland, and the United Kingdom, is of renewed importance to global geo-strategy. It is from this location that Russia could project its naval power into the Atlantic and raise tensions with NATO through, for example, airspace and sea-space incursions, and mock air and sea attacks on member states and

⁵⁵ Depledge, D., Dodds, K., 'No "Strategy" Please, We're British': The UK and the Arctic Policy Framework', *RUSI Journal*, 159(1): 24-31.

their allies. To protect the alliance's interests, NATO should increase its presence in the North Atlantic through, inter alia, increasing the role played by MARCOM (Maritime Command) and restoring SACLANT (Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic) powers.

- **Support Russia's Return to the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable.** Short of a Declaration from the Arctic Council on military conduct in the Arctic, the UK should support Russia's return to the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable (ASFR). Held annually since 2011, the ASFR gathers delegates from the eight Arctic states as well as from France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the UK. Derailed by the Ukraine crisis, Russia has not attended meetings since 2013. The ASFR provides an important forum in which 'soft' security questions are discussed and, as such, Russia should be invited to resume participation. This would not only represent an attempt to minimise future disagreement and conflict, but would - if accepted by Moscow - provide a means of establishing Russia's regional intentions.

About the Author

Dr Andrew Foxall is Director of the Russia Studies Centre at The Henry Jackson Society. He is the author of the book *Ethnic Relations in Post-Soviet Russia* (2014) as well as numerous articles on economic, political, and security trends in Russia and the other post-Soviet states. Andrew holds a DPhil from the University of Oxford.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful for discussions with, and comments from, Timothy Stafford, Axel Rigault, Lincoln Pigman, and two other reviewers on earlier drafts.



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The Henry Jackson Society
Millbank Tower,
21-24 Millbank, London, SW1P 4QP
Tel: 020 7340 4520

www.henryjacksonsociety.org
Charity Registration No. 1140489

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