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The Arctic at the Crossroads of Geopolitical Interests

The authors analyze the Arctic strategies of the United States, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the European Union (EU), and Russia. They also discuss Russian–Norwegian relations and the militarization of the Arctic.

Many states are showing a growing interest in the development of the Arctic. According to existing law, only the five countries that directly border on the Arctic—Canada, Denmark, Norway, the United States, and Russia—have the right to exploit its shelf. China and Japan would also like to participate if the legal regime governing development of the High North changes.

Different states' interests in the Arctic and their understanding of the shelf boundaries often collide.¹ Political coalitions, both multilateral and bilateral, may therefore emerge in the future. For example, Finland and Sweden, which have no direct outlet to the Arctic Ocean, take the view that the Arctic states, in striving to “divide” the region among themselves, are pursuing a shortsighted policy that is destabilizing the regional situation. These countries regard the natural riches of the Arctic as the

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property of all humankind; therefore, they argue that its resources should be developed in the framework of the broadest possible international cooperation. All who wish to be involved and who possess the requisite technological and financial capacities should have access to the region's resources (as regulated, of course, by international law).

The emerging struggle for control over the Arctic is not an accident. According to certain estimates, the region contains a quarter of the world's undiscovered hydrocarbon reserves.² If Arctic waters continue to lose their ice cover, there will be considerable economic advantage in using the Northern Sea Route for year-round freight transport by the shortest route from Europe to East Asia. For twenty of the world's twenty-four largest sea ports, shipping via the Northern Sea Route will yield significant savings in time and fuel.³ Trans-Arctic air traffic is growing rapidly. The region has great strategic importance for Russia and the United States. From underwater positions in the northeastern part of the Barents Sea one can strike most of the world's important targets, because the shortest trajectories for ballistic missiles to either hemisphere begin here.

U.S. Plans for the Arctic

The United States is in a special position, in that it has not signed the United Nations (UN) conventions on maritime law that permit signatories to register claims in disputes over the division of the shelf. A directive on U.S. Arctic policy adopted on 12 January 2009 (not long before George W. Bush left office) emphasizes: "The United States has broad and fundamental national security interests in the Arctic region and is prepared to operate either independently or in conjunction with other states to safeguard these interests."⁴

U.S. interests can be arranged in several groups. First, it has military–strategic interests, including missile defense and early warning systems; deployment of sea and air systems for strategic sealift; strategic deterrence; maritime presence and maritime security operations; and ensuring freedom of navigation and overflight. In defense of these interests, Washington is prepared if necessary to take unilateral action.

Second, the United States has an interest in ensuring its domestic security by preventing terrorist attacks or other criminal acts that increase its vulnerability in the Arctic region.

Third, the United States has political and economic interests—above all, in expanding its presence and activity with a view to ensuring its sea

power in the Arctic. Within the limits of its jurisdiction over the Arctic, Washington intends to do more than protect its sovereign rights within its exclusive economic zone and exercise “appropriate control” over the contiguous waters. Freedom of trans-Arctic overflights and freedom of navigation throughout the Arctic—including the Northern Sea Route, which passes by Russian territory—have been declared top national priorities.

Foreign experts point to a change in the motivation underlying U.S. activity in the High North. During the cold war, the chief consideration was the military—strategic confrontation with the Soviet Union, but now economic interests—access to the oil and gas resources of the Arctic—are of primary importance. The directive states:

Human activity in the Arctic region is increasing and is projected to increase further in coming years. This requires the United States to assert a more active and influential national presence to protect its Arctic interests and to project sea power throughout the region. . . . The United States seeks to ensure that energy development throughout the Arctic occurs in an environmentally sound manner, taking into account the interests of indigenous and local communities, as well as open and transparent market principles.⁵

In formal terms, Washington, even under George W. Bush, has favored multilateral diplomacy in relation to the Arctic. Evidently, this position primarily reflects the fact that—by comparison with Russia, Denmark, and Norway—the United States has the smallest Arctic sector, contiguous with Alaska. The aforementioned directive states that Washington would like to open a discussion on economic borders with all the countries that have an outlet to the Arctic Ocean. “Our approach is going to be dealing with our fellow Arctic nations in finding ways to access and develop, when it comes to energy specifically, that take into account conservation and the environment,” declared Benjamin Chang, a representative of the U.S. National Security Council, commenting on the content of the Arctic doctrine.⁶ Some analysts believe that the Americans’ “peace-loving” rhetoric shows that they are a long way behind their rivals in the area of Arctic development. The Bush directive appeared two months after the EU issued a communiqué on the Arctic (November 2008)—a document that lays the foundations for Europe’s Arctic policy. Experts from the nongovernmental organization Share the World’s Resources, which advises the UN Economic [and Social] Council, link the United States’

Arctic strategy to its more general hegemonic ambition of acquiring control over the world's crude oil reserves.⁷

But the Bush directive also states that the United States considers the Arctic Council (the most authoritative and representative organization in the region) merely a forum for discussion and opposes giving it the status of an international organization with the power to make binding decisions.⁸ Thus, the United States strives to preserve its freedom of action while keeping open the option of dialogue where it is advantageous.

Military experts argue for regarding the Arctic as a separate theater of operations, requiring adjustments of the responsibilities of the Pacific and European commands in favor of the Northern Command. In particular, they recommend the transfer of Alaska, with its North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) infrastructure, and part of the contiguous maritime territory. One proposal would make the Northern Command responsible for an enormous area of the circumpolar periphery—from Kamchatka proceeding north of Greenland to Franz Josef Land, the New Siberian Islands, and Wrangel Island.⁹

U.S. Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates, addressing troops in Alaska, noted: “Competition for Arctic resources will intensify, potentially raising new, unprecedented economic, political, and perhaps even security problems. I think your role here will become even more important as time goes on.”¹⁰ The same message is conveyed by plans to expand military satellite capability into the Arctic region.¹¹ The High North retains great military–strategic importance for Washington, and the Bush directive embodies this.

To implement the Arctic strategy, the goal is to speed up ratification of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea by the U.S. Senate. Ratification will not only attach the United States to a legal mechanism for coordinating its policy with other Arctic states but will also give it the option of expanding its extraction of mineral resources beyond the 200-mile limit.¹² True, it remains unclear how to reconcile the principle of free navigation for U.S. vessels with the restrictions imposed by the convention. That strong opposition to ratification continues to exist in the U.S. Congress is not surprising, since the consequences of this step are mixed. The most extreme opponents argue that it will undermine the country's defense capability. Negative consequences include:

—numerous environmental organizations, which are traditionally predisposed against the United States, will be able to appeal to courts at various levels;¹³

—U.S. companies extracting resources beyond the 200-mile limit will have to buy a license and pay taxes;

—the convention requires the United States to share certain technologies for the exploitation of natural resources with potential competitors and to change fishing practices;

—adjusting the shelf boundaries to correspond to the geological structure of the seabed will restrict U.S. Coast Guard activity north of Canada; and

—when disputes arise, the United States will come under the jurisdiction of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea.¹⁴

From a legal standpoint, American experts consider that the optimal choice would be to ratify the UN convention while revising it in favor of the United States, thereby retaining the greatest possible freedom of action.

The development of the icebreaker fleet occupies a special place in U.S. domestic debate. Here economic and military–strategic interests are closely interwoven. At U.S. Congressional hearings, Admiral Thad Allen noted that in 2009 Russia would complete a national program to build a new generation of nuclear-powered icebreakers.¹⁵ This program guaranteed Russia would have several heavy icebreakers even after 2020.¹⁶ Allen reminded his audience that the icebreaker *Fifty Years of Victory* [50 let Pobedy], commissioned in 2007, guaranteed Russian access to natural resources in the Arctic region. As a result, the United States needed to invest in the construction of new icebreakers, because the old ones were approaching the end of their useful lives.

Allen’s opinion was supported by Republican Congressman Don Young, who appealed to Congress to “appropriate the dollars that are necessary to build a new Arctic fleet for the future of this great nation.” Another Congressman, the Democrat Rick Larsen, noted that the United States had yielded its positions to all the other Arctic countries: “We are in a five-nation race in the Arctic, and running fifth.”¹⁷ Thus, the country’s two leading parties are in agreement on the question of the future of the U.S. icebreaking fleet.

Mead Treadwell, head of the U.S. Arctic Research Commission, takes a more moderate position. He is not opposed to developing the icebreaker fleet, but he thinks that in many instances changing natural conditions in the Arctic will make it possible to get by without its services. Global warming and the emergence of ice-free areas in the Arctic Ocean are opening up altogether new prospects for the United States: “An accessible

Arctic Ocean also means new or expanded routes for U.S. military sea-lift. . . . The advent of aircraft, missiles, and missile defense have made the Arctic region a major venue for projection of power and a frontier for protecting the security of North America, Asia, and Europe.”¹⁸ He also notes that the national interests of the United States in the Arctic are worth billions of dollars in the form of budget revenues and additional economic activity. In his words, icebreakers help “expand the territory of the United States,” and “about 15 percent of American oil is extracted from the shelf off the coast of Alaska.”^{19*} American experts point out, however, that the current economic crisis, which has struck the United States with special force, may lead to adjustments and delays in these programs.

As a compromise, the United States has decided to modernize its old icebreaker fleet. At the end of September 2008, the decision was made to return the U.S. Coast Guard’s heavy Arctic icebreaker *Polar Star* to service. The *Polar Star*, commissioned in 1976, is one of two heavy polar icebreakers capable of breaking through ice up to six meters thick. The “mothballed” vessel has spent the last two years in the port of Seattle. Congress has allocated \$30 million for its modernization. A note accompanying the bill explains: “One of the Coast Guard’s missions is to provide the United States with the capability to support national interests in the polar regions . . . the United States will need a maritime surface and air presence in the Arctic sufficient to support prevention and response regimes as well as diplomatic objectives.”²⁰

Like its predecessor, the Obama administration has activated anti-aircraft systems aimed at intercepting Russian long-range bombers patrolling the Arctic and the North Atlantic. U.S. nuclear submarines have increased their presence in the Barents Sea. At the same time, we should note that the Obama administration, preoccupied by immediate measures to overcome the economic crisis, has yet to work out its own Arctic strategy. We can expect that as the crisis recedes, Obama will turn his attention to this region, which is likely to lead to a more active U.S. policy in the Arctic (perhaps to the detriment of Russian interests).

*Translated from Russian. Treadwell’s testimony, available at www.arctic.gov/testimony/treadwell-09-26-06-icebreakers.pdf4 (accessed 13 January 2012), includes statements that icebreakers “extend U.S. sovereignty in the Arctic” and “many regions requiring surveys [to see if their natural resources belong to the United States] are adjacent to Alaska.” He does not mention the 15 percent, although it is a standard estimate of oil carried by the Alaska pipeline.—Ed.

The Formation of NATO's Arctic Policy

NATO's involvement in the Arctic takes the form of greater pressure on the nonaligned states of the region (Finland and Sweden) to bring them even closer to the alliance. This approach has created pro-NATO forces in these countries. For example, a government report on Finnish defense and security policy released in January 2009 does not rule out the possibility of Finland someday joining NATO. Foreign Minister Alexander Stubb, a member of the National Coalition Party, openly advocates the country's accession to the alliance.²¹ Similar tendencies can be observed in Sweden. Although specialists still assess the pro-NATO forces' chances as quite poor, we must question the sincerity of NATO's promises to confine itself to "soft" security issues in the Arctic.

Since 2008 NATO has substantially expanded its activity in the High North. The alliance's most prominent representatives have made a series of statements on the Arctic; meetings and expert seminars have addressed its problems. NATO defined its priorities in the region most clearly at a conference on security prospects in the High North held in Reykjavik at the end of January 2009. In formal terms, NATO will focus its attention on so-called "soft" security—the ecological consequences of global warming and of human activity in the Arctic, the risks of ecological and manmade disasters, and so on. This focus does not, however, exclude a purely military component of NATO policy, as reflected in a series of exercises conducted under the aegis of the alliance.

In fact, NATO has declared a new priority: the global competition for resources. As envisioned by NATO leaders, the main factors influencing the alliance's military potential and development are "political conditions in the world community, the operational—strategic situation, and reserves of resources and their distribution at the global level." This view is confirmed by statements made by former NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer to the effect that "it is necessary to discuss the question of what role the North Atlantic Alliance will be able to play in solving the task of controlling energy flows at the global level. . . . [Ensuring] the free supply of energy has always been one of its priorities."* That

*Translated from Russian. The official English version of de Hoop Scheffer's speech at www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-77003E4C-F5A7B982/natolive/opinions_50077.htm?selectedLocale=en (accessed 13 January 2012) gives the relevant sentence as: "Today's conference provides a unique opportunity for us to take a detailed look at

is, NATO is set the task of consolidating its grip on regions that contain existing and prospective deposits of energy resources and routes of their transportation.

Scheffer has declared in this connection that NATO has a strategic interest in the Arctic. The alliance's Arctic states (the United States, Canada, Norway, and Denmark), however, disagree over where to draw the 200-mile boundary and the shelf boundaries; these disputes can be viewed as justification for broadening the Exclusive Economic Zones. Scheffer proposes turning NATO into a forum in which these four countries could discuss their differences. He appealed: "we must ensure that, as we look today at the High North, and perhaps in the future at other regions, we do not get drawn down the path of regionalization—because that is the path to fragmentation. And that is a path we must avoid at all costs."²² This statement means that the Arctic states should not have sole jurisdiction over the use of the region's energy resources. To justify the alliance's military presence, Scheffer observed that certain states were expanding their military potential and activity in the Arctic. This statement can refer only to Russia, although he did not say so directly.

Exercises conducted in Norway on 13–26 March 2009 under the code name Cold Response show that Scheffer's statements and NATO's involvement are aimed precisely at Russia. According to the scenario of Cold Response, "The large nondemocratic state 'Nordland' has declared its rights to an oil deposit located in the territorial waters of the small democratic state 'Midland.'" However, the entry into the war of Midland's allies leads to victory. Russian experts believe that the exercises were conducted to improve the defense of the interests of Norway and other NATO countries in the Arctic. According to Vegard Finberg, a representative of the Norwegian Defense Ministry, the authors of the scenario had in mind not only Spitsbergen but any other territory where a dispute could arise.²³

Foreign specialists disagree over the reasons and motives underlying NATO's involvement in the High North. According to one view, NATO, sensing challenges from other international organizations concerned with European, transatlantic, and global security (the UN, the EU, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe [OSCE],

some of those challenges; for us to consider potential developments; share views on the likely security implications; and identify possible roles for NATO."—Ed.

the Council of the Baltic Sea States, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council [BEAC], the African Union, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, etc.), is trying to uphold its role as chief guarantor of regional and global security and thereby prove that it is needed and effective in a changing world. This claim has become increasingly questionable. NATO is trying to demonstrate that, while it still has the potential to deter any military threat, it is actively transforming itself into an organization with new peacekeeping tasks: dealing with the consequences of natural and manmade disasters, search and rescue, the fight against illegal migration and drug trafficking, and other challenges to “soft” security. NATO plans to focus on precisely such problems in the Arctic.

Opponents of this view believe that NATO is unlikely to conduct an effective policy in the region. First, it has limited scope and resources for rapidly creating the necessary infrastructure (especially amid the global economic crisis). Second, the alliance is itself riven by internal discord on matters concerning the Arctic. A number of NATO member-states have their own ambitions and claims on this region, which has led to U.S.–Canadian, Danish–Canadian, and Danish–Norwegian conflicts over specific Arctic policy issues (definition of zones of economic influence, division of the continental shelf, etc.). Another version of this view paints NATO as an instrument by which individual states strive to advance their own interests in the Arctic rather than the vehicle of a united policy for the Western community.

For example, Norway, which assigns the High North a leading place in its domestic and foreign policy, has long called for strengthening NATO’s role in the Arctic. Speaking at the Oslo Military Society in January 2009, Norway’s defense minister spoke of his country’s intention to call NATO’s attention to questions of the High North and observed that the alliance is now showing heightened interest in the region. Norwegian officials and independent experts point out that on its own, Oslo cannot defend its economic and military-strategic interests in the Arctic or create the necessary military potential.

Similar considerations also guide some of the other participants in the unfolding “battle” for the Arctic—Canada and Denmark, for example. Like Norway, they are not in a position to stand up to more powerful rivals on their own. On the one hand, they hope that NATO will defend their interests in the face of Russia’s growing strength in the region; on the other hand, they hope that NATO will arbitrate disputes over Arctic

issues among its member-states and restrain increasing pressure from the United States, which has lagged behind other countries in joining the contest for Arctic resources. The United States, conversely, hopes to use its authority in NATO to exert pressure on its competitors within the alliance.

Finally, a third point of view presents the first two approaches as not mutually exclusive and possibly complementary.

On the whole, officials and experts are unanimous in the expectation that NATO will continue to expand its activity in the Arctic. What consequences will this have for Russia? To all appearances, negative ones. Given the existing nature of Russia's interactions with NATO, it will be difficult to normalize relations even where interests coincide. Amid an intense competition for Arctic resources, NATO will probably squeeze Russia out, just as it squeezes Russia out of Europe on security questions. It is obvious that the United States, which has not ratified the conventions on maritime law, will use NATO to strengthen its positions in the region. Norway will strive to persuade the alliance to settle territorial disputes. Russia must therefore prepare itself for a long and complex struggle to uphold its interests and lawful rights.

The EU's Arctic Policy

Since the 1990s, the EU has shown an active interest in the Arctic, citing as justification its concern over the competition among various powers for the natural resources of the High North, over territorial disputes and the claims of several countries to control the northern sea straits, and over ecological deterioration in the region.

At first, the European Union mostly confined its activities in the Arctic within the framework of the Northern Dimension (ND).²⁴ In the early 2000s, the idea of an "Arctic aspect" was popular in the EU, and this idea found reflection in the new concept of the ND adopted in November 2006.²⁵ The EU actively cooperated with three regional organizations concerned with Arctic problems—the Barents Euro-Arctic Council, the Arctic Council, and the Nordic Council of Ministers (NCM).²⁶ In October 2007 the European Commission adopted the Action Plan for an Integrated Maritime Policy, which touched on such problems as the division of the continental shelf and the exploitation of sea straits in the Arctic.²⁷

In March 2008 the European Commission and the High Representative of the EU drafted a joint document titled "Climate Change and

International Security.”²⁸ Great attention was devoted to ecological problems. In particular, the following problems were highlighted: destruction of the established ecosystem as a result of the melting of polar ice; negative consequences of economic activity in connection with the development of the region’s natural resources and the increasing number of international trade routes; and intensified competition among Arctic powers for the use of natural resources and sea straits in the Arctic.

To prevent dangerous tendencies, it was proposed:

—to intensify the activity of regional organizations under the aegis of the renewed ND;

—to work out an Arctic strategy for the EU with special emphasis on ensuring equal access by various countries to the natural resources and trade routes of the region; and

—to establish a dialogue with Arctic countries that do not belong to the EU on the question of how global climate change might affect international security.²⁹

A series of experts from Russia, Norway, the United States, and Canada (that is, countries not belonging to the EU) have viewed this document as a strong attempt by the European Union to claim a role in Arctic affairs. It has also been noted that much of the impetus pushing the EU toward a more aggressive Arctic policy has come from three North European member-states—Denmark, Sweden, and Finland—that feel excluded from Arctic affairs despite having significant interests in the region.

In November 2008 the European Commission released a communiqué on “The European Union and the Arctic Region,” designed to sketch the main contours of the EU’s Arctic strategy.³⁰ An accompanying memorandum stated: “The EU has to state its position concerning a unique region of strategic importance which is located in its immediate vicinity.”³¹ “The Arctic,” declared EU Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner at the presentation of the communiqué, “is a unique and vulnerable region located in the immediate vicinity of Europe. Its evolution will have significant repercussions on the life of Europeans for generations to come.”³²

The memorandum sets goals and makes recommendations for the organization of scientific research into Arctic problems and on questions pertaining to indigenous peoples, fishing, extraction of hydrocarbons, navigation, political and legal structures, and interaction with regional organizations.

In particular, it identifies three main priorities for the future policy of the European Union in the region:

- protecting the Arctic environment and indigenous peoples;
- ensuring stable development of the region and rational use of its natural resources; and
- developing a mechanism for multilateral cooperation in the Arctic.³³

The last point receives special attention. The press release issued by the European Commission on adoption of the communiqué states: “Enhancing the European Union’s contribution to Arctic cooperation will open new perspectives in our relations with the Arctic states. The EU is ready to work with them to increase stability, to enhance Arctic multilateral governance through the existing legal frameworks as well as to keep the right balance between the priority goal of preserving the environment and the need for sustainable use of natural resources, including hydrocarbons.”³⁴ The document notes the need for broad dialogue on questions of Arctic policy on the basis of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, and the key roles played by the Northern Dimension and the Arctic Council (in whose work Russia takes an active part) in cooperation in the Arctic.

As experts from the Norwegian Secretariat of the BEAC observe, however, the document barely mentions Russia, the EU’s largest neighbor in the Arctic.³⁵ In their opinion, it is imperative for Europe and the European Union to take Russia into account in choosing their Arctic priorities. Both sides will benefit from this.

There is also hardly any mention of the BEAC itself, which has become a vehicle of regional transborder cooperation in the European North between five Russian regions (with the participation of the federal authorities) and neighboring Norway, Sweden, and Finland.

Gunnar Sander, a researcher at the European Environmental Agency, emphasizes that the European Commission’s communiqué on the Arctic attaches no special significance to potential security problems but does note the importance of stability, cooperation, and preservation of the marine environment. At the same time, he thinks, the EU appreciates the need for a new and stronger structure of governance in the Arctic. In his opinion, the Arctic Council in its present form lacks the necessary political influence. He asks the question: “Where are the multilateral strategies for this region that need to be formulated?”³⁶ Speaking in Kirkenes at a conference of the Research Council of Norway on the High North, Sander noted significant changes in the European Commission’s position on the Arctic. Whereas before 2007 it had sufficed to know that

the Arctic was somewhere far away, now it was attracting growing interest. The unprecedented rate at which the Arctic ice was melting and the Russian flag deposited on the seabed at the North Pole had awakened the commission's interest in the Arctic region. In Sander's opinion, the European Commission was in the process of familiarizing itself with the Arctic, and the communiqué outlined general strategies that still required considerable elaboration.

In contrast to Sander, Finnish Minister of Labor Tarja Kronberg regards security aspects in the North as quite important, and she would like Finland to involve itself in the rapidly developing cooperation between Norway and Sweden in this field. The Northern Dimension should guarantee security in the High North. Again, however, nothing is said of Russia's role in this system.³⁷

Based on the above, we may conclude that for the foreseeable future the EU will attempt with increasing vigor to strengthen its presence in the region and more resolutely uphold its rights to the Arctic. However, unlike NATO, the United States, and Norway, the European Union will do this without any marked stress on military power, preferring to use diplomatic and economic methods.

Russia's Arctic Strategy

Russia's interests in the Arctic are determined by several factors. Economic interests are the most important. This region currently provides about 11 percent of Russia's national income, as Arctic mines account for over 90 percent of its nickel and cobalt, 60 percent of its copper, and 96 percent of its platinoids. Hydrocarbon reserves in the zone of Russia's potential economic influence in the Arctic are estimated at 5 billion tons of fuel equivalent.³⁸ Moreover, if the Arctic ice continues to melt, Russia may extract considerable economic gains from the development and exploitation of the Northern Sea Route—the shortest connection between European and Far Eastern sea and river ports. A promising field of activity is the creation and servicing of transpolar air routes. A Russian presence in the Arctic has a direct bearing on national security. Should the United States permanently deploy a nuclear submarine fleet and sea-based ABM systems (under active development in the United States) in the region, Russia will create regional capacities for intercepting ballistic missile launches and inflicting a preventive strike.

Nevertheless, the Russian Federation tries to take a balanced position,

seeking cooperation with other states while bearing in mind their military activity in the Arctic. Anton Vasil'ev, a representative of the Russian foreign ministry, has declared that “many of the assessments in the mass media concerning a possible confrontation in the Arctic, up to and including a third world war, seem to me alarmist and provocative.”³⁹ The Russian leaders plan to focus their main efforts on expanding the boundaries of Russia's continental shelf beyond the 200-mile limit in the direction of the pole, if they succeed in demonstrating to the UN commission that the shelf is an extension of the Lomonosov and Mendeleev ridges. Russia does not seek sovereignty over the territory concerned but merely the right to prospect for and use mineral resources and the seabed.

In September 2009 President Medvedev approved the “Foundations of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic up to and Beyond 2020” [Osnovy gosudarstvennoi politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii v Arktike na period do 2020 goda i dal'neishiu perspektivu]. It lists the RF's interests: to develop the resources of the Arctic; turn the Northern Sea Route into a unified national transport corridor and line of communication; and maintain the region as a zone of international cooperation. According to plans for the multifaceted development of the northern territories, by 2016–20 the Arctic should have become Russia's “leading strategic resource base.”

The strategic security goal is defined as “ensuring a favorable operational regime in the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation, including maintenance of the necessary combat potential of general-purpose troops (forces) of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation and other troops, military formations, and military agencies in this region.”⁴⁰ This implies the need to strengthen the Coastal Defense Service of the Federal Security Service and border controls in the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation and to establish technical control over straits and river estuaries along the whole Northern Sea Route. Thus, the Arctic Group of Forces is charged not simply with defending territory but also with protecting Russia's economic interests in the region. Some experts consider that this will require increasing the strike potential of the Northern Fleet—above all, by strengthening naval aviation.⁴¹

Despite prolonged efforts to create legal and institutional mechanisms for cooperation, Russia has not yet succeeded in regulating its relations with Norway. The Russian presence on Spitsbergen remains an occasion for conflict. Plans to build a fish-processing plant, which will compete with Norwegian firms, were not well received. In recent months, the

Norwegian governor of Spitsbergen has taken a whole series of restrictive measures: he has expanded nature conservation zones to which access by Russian scientists and tourists is restricted or prohibited, required helicopters to obtain advance permission before landing, and introduced rules for the registration of all scientific projects in a special data base. When the Russian side responded to these measures by denying Norwegian scientists investigating biological resources in the Barents Sea access to the Russian economic zone, this was viewed as a discriminatory act.

Norway continues to object to Russian fishing around Spitsbergen. Since Norway introduced a 200-mile economic zone around the archipelago, it has regarded such fishing as poaching. Forcible arrests of Russian trawlers by the Norwegian navy have become more frequent. As Russia does not recognize the aforementioned decision by Norway and considers this area open to international economic activity, in 2004 Russia's Northern Fleet started regular patrols of the waters around Spitsbergen. Norwegian experts especially objected to this move, viewing it as a sign of Russian imperial ambitions and of Moscow's unwillingness to cooperate with Oslo to settle territorial and economic disputes. Norway also has claims to part of the Arctic shelf, but these claims are much more modest than those of other states.

At the same time, there are promising developments in Russian–Norwegian relations—in particular, the joint exploitation of energy resources under the shelf of the Barents Sea (especially the Shtokman deposit). Norway can benefit from cooperation with Russia, which is unable to develop these deposits on its own and needs foreign partners. For the sake of cooperation with Russia on these issues of strategic importance for Norway, it would be more advantageous for Oslo to moderate its position on Spitsbergen and prevent further militarization of the situation around the island.

It is necessary in this connection to note the results of the meeting that took place between Russian President Dmitrii Medvedev and Norwegian Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg in April 2010. After the meeting it was officially declared that agreement in principle had been reached on how to draw the border line in the Barents Sea and the Arctic Ocean (this had been the object of prolonged negotiations). The subsequent signing of such an agreement would make it possible to settle many problems, including the development of oil and gas deposits and fishing in disputed areas. The Norwegian prime minister observed that the disagreements between Russia and Norway were already on the way to being resolved

one stage at a time. In particular, an agreement had been signed in 2007 on the Varanger Fjord.⁴²

Despite this positive step in Russian–Norwegian relations, the most important issue remains unclear. The joint declaration of 27 April 2010 says that the parties have agreed to divide the disputed section of the Barents Sea—a total area of 175,000 square kilometers and the richest section in terms of fish and oil and gas resources—“into two equal halves” but does not indicate exactly how this is to be done. Iurii Evdokimov, former governor of Murmansk oblast, considers that a division into northern and southern parts would severely disadvantage Russia because “all the riches are situated in the southern part, which contains many known and projected deposits.”⁴³ If the disputed section is divided into western and eastern parts, however, then a reciprocal balance of interests will be achieved. The final documents have not yet been signed,* so it is not clear whether Russia will be able to obtain favorable conditions or have to make concessions to Norway.

Denmark takes the hardest line against Russia. Denmark lays claim to part of the Arctic shelf, trying to prove that the Lomonosov Ridge is an extension of the Greenland Plate. After the Russian expedition of 2007, Denmark (with the United States) hastened to send its own expedition to the Arctic to search for evidence in its favor.

The Militarization of the Arctic

As a predictable extension of the tendency to increase competition for control over the Arctic, the region is undergoing militarization in several areas.

First, the Arctic powers are expanding their military presence in the region. Recent years have seen a substantial rise in the number of Russian, American, and Norwegian vessels and in Russian aircraft on military patrol in the sea and air spaces of the Arctic. Thus, in 2008 Russian long-range bombers conducted eighty-seven flights in the region.⁴⁴ In response, the United States and Norway also activated anti-aircraft systems to intercept these flights.

The Western countries plan to strengthen their multilateral military cooperation in the Arctic. In a report on North European cooperation in

*The documents were signed in September 2010.—Ed.

the defense and foreign policy fields presented at the beginning of February 2009, former Norwegian Foreign Minister Thorvald Stoltenberg presented proposals for cooperation among the five countries of Northern Europe (Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, and Iceland) in thirteen areas of defense. The most important priorities mentioned in the report included the creation of joint rapid reaction naval forces, an icebreaker fleet, an amphibious element, civil defense forces for use in natural and manmade disasters, and a unified system for training personnel for these services. In Stoltenberg's opinion, implementation of these measures might enable the five countries to realize substantial savings in security operations.⁴⁵

The rise in the number of military exercises in the Arctic must be regarded as part of such cooperation. In 2008 Canada conducted the largest exercises in the history of its military presence in the region. Two American submarines of the Los Angeles class participated in Ice Exercise 2009, designed to test operations under Arctic conditions and ensure the security of scientific research. In January 2009 a massive exercise of sappers and explosives technicians took place under NATO's aegis off the northern coast of Norway. This exercise, named EODEX (Explosives Ordnance Disposal Exercise), involved specialists from ten countries: Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Lithuania, Germany, the Netherlands, France, Belgium, Estonia, and Turkey. Its purpose was to train teams under extreme winter conditions. Participants practiced winter navigation, diving under ice, and underwater demolitions work. As already noted, NATO's Cold Response exercises in March 2009 tested joint actions to rebuff the aggression of a potential adversary.⁴⁶

The Arctic powers have accelerated the modernization of their armed forces. The Norwegian navy has ordered five of the newest frigates, which it plans to equip with high-technology strike missiles (three frigates have been supplied to the navy so far). By the end of 2007 five patrol ships of the Nomen design, developed especially for work in Norwegian coastal waters, had been commissioned.⁴⁷ In 2009 the budget of the Norwegian navy was 3 billion krone—240 million krone more than in the previous year. In 2008 the Norwegian government decided to purchase forty-eight American Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) aircraft to replace Norway's obsolescent F-16 fighters. It plans to spend 150 billion Norwegian krone for these purposes.⁴⁸ In 2008 the Finnish air force was allocated 200 million euros for the creation of a new radar system to monitor its airspace in the direction of Russia.⁴⁹ The Russian Federation plans to modernize its

fleet of long-range bombers (TU-95MS, TU-160, and TU-22MZ), and to add three atomic-powered submarines of the Borei class to the Northern Fleet. As already noted, the United States plans to modernize its heavy icebreaker fleet, which belongs to the Coast Guard and is regarded as a vital instrument for controlling northern straits and for ensuring access to the natural resources of the Arctic. We have already mentioned that some states (Norway and Russia) are making more active use of naval forces to defend their economic interests in the region.

* * *

The Arctic is drawing increasing attention both from the main regional players and from the world as a whole. Here are concentrated enormous natural riches, on whose rational exploitation the future of all humankind depends. The region could also turn into a transport corridor of global importance. At the same time, the Arctic has more than a few problems—connected, above all, with ecology, unresolved territorial disputes, and in some cases the calamitous situation of indigenous peoples. Unfortunately, various international actors still choose to compete rather than to cooperate in this region. Parties often try to solve problems not by political and legal means but by force. A dangerous tendency toward militarization of the Arctic is clearly in evidence. It is essential that Russia and the whole international community consider finding mutually acceptable solutions to prevent the escalation of negative trends. In our view, a paradigm based on cooperation and mutual accommodation of interests is preferable to the further intensification of confrontation in this region, which will become increasingly important over the foreseeable future.

Notes

1. “Arkticheskaia bezopasnost’ severnykh stran,” *BarentsObserver*, 9 February 2009 (www.barentsobserver.com [this and all Web addresses accessed 13 January 2012—Ed.]). There are territorial disputes in the Arctic between Canada and Denmark, between Canada and the United States, and between Russia and Norway.

2. “Kanada napravliaet voiska v Arktiku” (www.dni.ru/economy/2008/9/7/148603.html).

3. For example, the route from Japan to Germany will be cut almost in half.

4. “National Security Presidential Directive (NSPD-66) and Homeland Security Presidential Directive (HSPD-25),” 9 January 2009 (<http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2009/01/print/20090112-3.html>).

5. “National Security Presidential Directive.”

6. “SShA budut bliusti svoi interesy v Arktike,” *BarentsObserver*, 13 January 2009 (www.barentsobserver.com).

7. M. Chossudovsky, “North American Integration and the Militarization of the Arctic” (www.stwr.org/global-conflicts-militarization/north-american-integration-and-the-militarization-of-the-arctic.html).

8. The Arctic Council was created in 1996. The members of this organization are the five Arctic states (Russia, the United States, Canada, Norway, and Denmark) and the three near-Arctic countries (Iceland, Finland, and Sweden). Organizations of the indigenous inhabitants of the Arctic are permanent members of the council. A number of intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations, as well as non-Arctic states (France, Germany, Britain, Spain, the Netherlands, Poland), have observer status.

9. Alan L. Kollien, *Toward an Arctic Strategy* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, 2009), pp. 21–23.

10. Fred W. Baker III, “Gates Stops in Alaska to Talk with Troops” (www.defenselink.mil/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=54584).

11. “Remarks by General Gene Renuart at the AFCEA Solutions Series Conference. Washington, DC, 19 May 2009 (www.northcom.mil/News/Transcripts/051909.html).

12. The zone is widened to 350 nautical miles if convincing evidence is presented to the effect that the seabed is a geological extension of the mainland.

13. The United States is the world’s largest source of environmental pollution, accounting for up to 80 percent.

14. Kollien, *Toward an Arctic Strategy*, pp. 10–11.

15. Allen is commander of the U.S. Coast Guard, which is in charge of the icebreaker fleet.

16. “SShA gotoviatsia k voine za Arktiku” (www.dni.ru/polit/2008/7/17/145832.html).

17. *Ibid.* [Don Young and Rick Larsen quoted from www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CHRG-110hhrg43754/html/CHRG-110hhrg43754.htm—Ed.].

18. *Ibid.* [quoted from www.arctic.gov/testimony/treadwell-06-24-08.pdf, accessed 13 January 2012, where the two quoted sentences appear in reverse order—Ed.].

19. *Ibid.*

20. “SShA namereny kontrolirovat’ Arktiku” (www.dni.ru/society/2008/9/25/149804.html) [quoted from Ronald O’ Rourke, “Coast Guard Polar Icebreaker Modernization: Background, Issues, and Options for Congress,” 5 December 2011, at www.fas.org/sgp/crs/weapons/RL34391.pdf, p. 59—Ed.].

21. “Finland Could Join Nordic Air Surveillance Effort in Iceland,” 4 February 2009 (www.hs.fi/english/article/Finland+could+join+Nordic+air+surveillance+effort+in+Iceland/1135243275799).

22. “Speech by NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer on Security Prospects in the High North. Reykjavik, Iceland,” 29 January 2009 (www.nato.int). [quoted from www.nato.int/cps/en/SID-77003E4C-F5A7B982/natolive/opinions_50077.htm?selectedLocale=en—Ed.].

23. V. Diatlikovich and I. Grebtsov, “Shel’f tsveta khaki,” *Russkii reporter*, 2–9 April 2009, p. 28.

24. Finland proposed the idea of the ND in 1997; it acquired real organizational

and financial contours in 2000. For a more detailed discussion of the ND, see P. Joenniemi and A. Sergunin, *Russia and the European Union's Northern Dimension: Clash or Encounter of Civilizations?* (Nizhnii Novgorod, 2003).

25. *The Northern Dimension: Policy Framework Document and Political Declaration, November 13, 2006* (Brussels: Council of the European Union, 2006).

26. The BEAC was created in 1993 at Norway's initiative and currently includes Norway, Russia, Finland, Sweden, Iceland, and the European Commission.

27. "Arctic Communication. MEMO/08/726," 20 November 2008 (Brussels, 2008) (<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=MEMO/08/726&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>).

28. "Climate Change and International Security. Paper from the High Representative and the European Commission to the European Council. SI 13/08," 14 March 2008 (Brussels, 2008) (www.consilium.europa.eu/ueDocs/cms_Data/docs/pressData/en/reports/99387.pdf).

29. *Ibid.*, pp. 8–11.

30. "The European Union and the Arctic Region. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council. COM(2008)763 final," 20 November 2008 (Brussels, 2008) (http://eeas.europa.eu/arctic_region/docs/com_08_763_en.pdf).

31. "Arctic Communication. MEMO/08/726."

32. "The Arctic Merits the European Union's Attention—First Step Towards an EU Arctic Policy" (<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/08/1750&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>).

33. "The European Union and the Arctic Region," p. 3.

34. "The Arctic Merits the European Union's Attention."

35. "Arkticheskaia strategiiia ES bez rossiiskogo izmereniia," *BarentsObserver*, 21 November 2008 (www.barentsobserver.com).

36. "ES ne bespokoiat problemy arkticheskoi bezopasnosti," *BarentsObserver*, 27 November 2008 (www.barentsobserver.com).

37. "Novye napravleniia dlia Severnogo izmereniia," *BarentsObserver*, 2 October 2008 (www.barentsobserver.com).

38. "Spetssluzhbam Rossii ukazali tseli v Arktike" (www.dni.ru/economy/2008/9/12/149006.html).

39. "Rossiia ne khochet voevat' za Arktiku" (www.dni.ru/polit/2008/10/22/151708.html).

40. "Osnovy gosudarstvennoi politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii v Arktike na period do 2020 goda i dal'neishuiu perspektivu" (www.rg.ru/2009/03/30/arktika-osnovy-dok.html).

41. Diatlikovich and Grebtsov, "Shel'f tsveta khaki," p. 28.

42. "RF i Norvegiia dogovorilis' o razgranichenii akvatorii Barentseva moria" (<http://ria.ru/politics/20100427/227303051.html>).

43. "Norvegiu perestal pugat' mezal'ians s Rossiei" (www.gzt.ru/topnews/economics/-norvezhskaya-myshj-legla-v-postelj-s-russkim-/303367.html?from=lcolumnndownfromindex) [site not functioning as of 31 January 2012—Ed.].

44. "Rossiia budet modernizirovat' strategicheskie bombardirovshchiki," *BarentsObserver*, 11 February 2009 (www.barentsobserver.com).

45. "Arctic Dimension for Nordic Security," *BarentsObserver*, 9 February 2009 (www.barentsobserver.com).

46. "Executing the Maritime Strategy: Navy Office of Information" (www.navy.mil/navco/page/rhumb_lines.html); Diatlikovich and Grebtsov, "Shel'f tsveta khaki," p. 28; "Ucheniia NATO u poberezh'ia Severnoi Norvegii," *BarentsObserver*, 17 February 2009 (www.barentsobserver.com).

47. "Samaia sovremennaia beregovaia okhrana v mire," *BarentsObserver*, 18 November 2008 (www.barentsobserver.com).

48. "Norvegiia vybrala amerikanskii istrebiteli," *BarentsObserver*, November 18, 2008 (www.barentsobserver.com).

49. "Novye finskie radary dlia slezheniia za Rossiei," *BarentsObserver*, 18 November 2008 (www.barentsobserver.com).

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