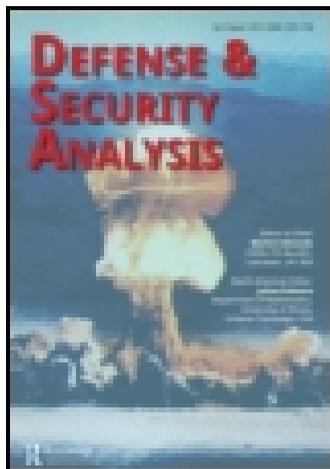


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Is Russia a revisionist military power in the Arctic?

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In contrast with a widespread perception of Russia as an expansionist power in the Arctic, this article argues that Moscow does not seek military superiority in the region. Rather, Moscow's military strategies in the Arctic pursue three major goals: first, to demonstrate and ascertain Russia's sovereignty over its exclusive economic zone and continental shelf in the region; second, to protect its economic interests in the High North; and third, to demonstrate that Russia retains its great power status and still has world-class military capabilities. The Russian military modernization programs are quite modest and aim at upgrading the Russian armed forces in the High North rather than providing them with additional offensive capabilities or provoking a regional arms race. The Russian ambitions in the Arctic may be high, but they are not necessarily implying the intentions and proper capabilities to confront other regional players by military means. On the contrary, Moscow opts for soft rather than hard power strategy in the Arctic.

Keywords: Russia; Arctic; military strategy; modernization of armed forces

Introduction

Russia's military strategies in the High North are a matter of controversy both in the mass media and academic community. Since the planting of a Russian flag at the bottom of the Arctic Ocean on the North Pole (August 2007), resumption of naval and strategic bomber patrols in the Arctic (2007) and the adoption of the Russian Arctic doctrine (September 2008), the Western journalists and analysts have often characterized Russia's Arctic policies as revisionist, expansionist, aggressive and even jingoistic or return to a "gunboat diplomacy."¹ However, in contrast with the Cold War era when the Soviet behavior was driven by ideological or geopolitical factors, the current Russian policies in the Arctic are explained by Moscow's pragmatic interests, such as competition for natural resources and/or control over the sea routes. According to some Western analysts, because of its economic weakness and technological backwardness Russia tends to make an emphasis on military-coercive instruments to protect its national interests in the Arctic and this will inevitably lead to the regional arms race, remilitarization of and military conflicts in the High North.²

On the other hand, there are authors (mostly Russian) who prefer to depict Russia's intentions in the Arctic in a complimentary way – as "innocent," "inward-looking," "purely defensive," oriented to "protection of its legitimate interests," etc.³ This group of experts emphasizes the fact that Moscow's primary interest lies in the development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation (AZRF) which is rich in natural resources and, at the same time, is underdeveloped in

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terms of economy, infrastructure, communication systems, social institutions and culture. According to them, Moscow does not pursue a revisionist policy in the Arctic. On the contrary, Russia is a status quo power which wants to solve all disputes in this region by peaceful means, with the help of international law and international organizations.

There is also a marginal (but a rather vociferous) group of Russian anti-Western political writers who are not afraid to call Russia a revisionist, expansionist or imperial state (not only in the Arctic but elsewhere).⁴ They believe that Moscow's Arctic policy must be assertive and proactive to resist the Western "encroachments" on "Russia's Arctic" and numerous anti-Russian conspiracies. They even criticize the Russian government for the lack of a sound and assertive strategy in the region or for concessions to other international players, for example the Russian–Norwegian treaty on delimitation of maritime territories of 2010 or providing a number of non-Arctic states with the status of permanent observer in the Arctic Council (AC).

Unfortunately, the vast majority of authors belong to the extreme schools; they are either too anti-Russian or openly pro-Russian in their analysis of Moscow's strategies in the Far North. There are quite few works that try to objectively analyze the Russian interests, motivation, behavior and specific strategies in the Arctic.⁵

It is an ambition of this article to discuss the question whether Russia is really a revisionist power in the Arctic or can it be evaluated in different, more positive, terms, particularly as a country that is interested in the region's stability and open to international cooperation in the High North? However, before addressing this main research question the Russian threat perceptions and doctrinal underpinnings of Moscow's military strategy in the region should be analyzed.

Threat perceptions

Along with the significant economic interests the Russian perceptions of the Arctic to a larger extent are still based on security considerations. For example, the Kola Peninsula and the adjacent area are still considered a region of special strategic importance to Russia's national security. The direct access to the Arctic and Atlantic oceans, a relatively close proximity to potential US/NATO targets, and a relatively developed military infrastructure make this region well suited for strategic naval operations.⁶ The strategic importance of the Kola Peninsula is above all explained by the fact that it hosts two-thirds of the Russian sea-based nuclear forces. As some military analysts emphasize, the nuclear deterrent remains not only a key element of the Russian military strategy, but serves also as a symbol and guarantee of Russia's great power status. Maintaining strategic nuclear capabilities is, therefore, one of the highest priorities of Russia's military policies both in the North and globally.⁷

The Russian military analysts believe that the Archangelsk Air Defense Sector is still crucial for the prevention of surprise attack over the North Pole. The Norwegian Sea still can serve as the main launch area for Western seaborne attack, so, these analysts maintain, the Russian Navy should still be concerned about the readiness of its anti-submarine forces in the Arctic.⁸

Both the Russian politicians and military repeatedly point to allegedly increasing political and military pressures from the USA and other NATO member states in the High North. They believe that the West/NATO wants to undermine Russia's positions in the region. They emphasize the fact that Russian armed forces in the Arctic are still facing NATO just across the border. The Arctic coastal states' armed forces modernization programs are predominantly treated in the alarmist way.

Moscow has been worried about the new US military strategy in the Arctic that envisages Washington's increased security activities in the region.⁹ President Vladimir Putin has immediately reacted to the new US doctrine by ordering the Russian Defense Ministry to accelerate

the creation of the Arctic Group of Forces (AGF), modernization of the Northern Fleet and reopening the Soviet-time air and naval bases along the Northern Sea Route (NSR).¹⁰

The Russian strategists are also concerned about the future US plans in the Arctic.¹¹ For instance, given the ice-free Arctic in the foreseeable future (at least for the part of the year) the Russian military analysts do not exclude the possibility that the USA could permanently deploy a nuclear submarine fleet and sea-based anti-ballistic missile (ABM) systems in the Arctic Ocean. In this case, the USA will create capabilities for intercepting Russian ballistic missile launches and making a preventive strike. For the above reasons, this school of strategic thought recommends Russia not only to keep its strategic forces at the present level but also to regularly modernize them.

The Canadian military activities and plans in the Arctic are perceived by Moscow with growing anxiety as well. For example, Ottawa plans to build a military training center and maritime infrastructure facilities in the town of Resolute Bay, which is located 595 kilometers from the North Pole and in the area of the strategically important Northwest Passage. To strengthen the capacity of the Coast Guard, Canada plans to build deep-water berths (in the city of Nanisivik), a new icebreaker named “Diefenbaker,” and three patrol vessels capable of operating in ice conditions. The latest Canadian space satellite RADARSAT-II, the joint Canadian–American system NORAD and intelligence signals interceptor station in the town of Ehlert (Ellesmere Island, Canadian Arctic Archipelago) will all be used to monitor the Arctic maritime and air spaces. Programs have been scheduled to modernize and increase the units of Canadian rangers to 5000 people by the end of 2012. They are largely recruited from the local indigenous populations and are expected to monitor and carry out search and rescue (SAR) operations in the Arctic.

In 2010, the Canadian government announced that it was buying 65 new F-35 Lightning II fighters from the USA for a total of \$16 billion, including aircraft maintenance for 20 years. It is not quite clear for what purpose Canadians are going to use these fighters in the Arctic. According to some Canadian experts, these purchases are more likely a security guarantee for the future than a response to today’s challenges. More specifically, these acquisitions aim at developing a proper potential for air and naval monitoring of Canada’s Arctic coastline. These and other initiatives have led to a doubling of Canada’s total military spending compared to the late 1990s.¹²

Moscow is especially worried about NATO’s growing activities in the Arctic that have been substantially expanded since 2008. 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 has intention to focus on the soft security issues – 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 the Kremlin’s view, NATO has, in fact, 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.”¹³

Moscow points out that the NATO naval intelligence operations in the area are still rather active. NATO’s military exercises in Russia’s immediate proximity – regardless of their small scale – are interpreted as evidence of the West’s aggressive ambitions in the region. According to the Russian experts, the large-scale exercises in Norway under the code name *Cold Response*, which are held by the NATO on a regular basis since 2006, are aimed precisely at Russia.¹⁴

The experts disagree over the reasons and motives underlying NATO’s involvement in the High North. According to one view, NATO, being challenged by other international

organizations, is trying to uphold its role as the main 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, SAR, 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 amidst the global economic crisis). Second, the alliance is itself driven 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 US–Canadian, Danish–Canadian and Danish–Norwegian conflicts over specific Arctic policy issues (definition of Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZs), division of the continental shelf, etc.). According to some accounts, it was Canada who blocked the formulation of NATO’s formal Arctic doctrine and further expansion of alliance’s activities in the region.¹⁵

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. Some small NATO member states feel themselves that 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 USA, which has lagged behind other countries in joining the contest for Arctic resources. The USA, 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 mutually complementary rather than exclusive.

On the whole, both Russian practitioners and experts are unanimous in the expectation that NATO will continue to expand its activity in the Arctic. This can have some negative implications for Russia (at least at the perception level). The Russian strategists believe that there is a risk – that NATO can try to sideline Russia in the emerging Arctic security system as it does, for example, in Europe. They also fear that some NATO member states such as Norway and Denmark will continue to use the alliance to strengthen their positions in the region vis-à-vis Russia, and Russia, therefore, has to prepare itself for an uneasy dialog with NATO to find acceptable forms of cooperation in the Arctic.

To sum up, Russia has quite substantial reasons to play an active role in the Arctic. It has important economic, social, environmental and military-strategic interests in the region and it is proclaimed at the official level that these interests will be protected. There is a clear tendency toward the increasing role of the soft security-related interests, such as ensuring Russia’s access to the natural resources and transport routes in the region. At the same time, as some Russian strategists believe, there are a number of security threats and challenges in the region that require preservation and further development of a certain military potential and presence in the High North.

Russia’s strategic vision of the Arctic: evolving doctrines

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and prior to the early 2000s, the Kremlin paid little attention to the Arctic. With the end of the Cold War, the region has lost its former military-strategic significance for Moscow as a zone of potential confrontation with the NATO/USA. In the Yeltsin era, the economic potential of the region was underestimated. Moreover, in the 1990s, Russia’s Arctic regions were perceived by the federal government as a burden or source of various

socioeconomic problems rather than an economically promising region. The far northern regions were almost abandoned by Moscow and had to rely on themselves (or foreign humanitarian assistance) in terms of survival.

The situation started to slowly change in the early 2000s when the general socioeconomic situation in Russia has improved and the Putin government with its ambitious agenda of Russia's revival has come to power. On 14 June 2001, the Russian Cabinet has approved the draft of the document titled "Foundations of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic"¹⁶ where the Russian national interests and main strategies in the Arctic were formulated. It took, however, seven years (and another President) to develop a coherent version of the Russian Arctic strategy.

On 18 September 2008, President Medvedev approved the "Foundations of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic Up to and Beyond 2020"¹⁷, which was the first Russian post-Soviet Arctic strategy. It should be noted that Moscow was one of the first among the Arctic states who managed to adopt such a document. Only Norway was ahead of Russia in shaping its official doctrine for the North in 2006.

A six-page document listed the Russian national interests in the region: to develop the resources of the Arctic; turn the NSR into a unified national transport corridor and line of communication and maintain the region as a zone of peace and international cooperation. According to plans for the multifaceted development of the northern territories, by 2016–2020 the Arctic should have become Russia's "leading strategic resource base."

The strategic security goal was defined as "maintenance of the necessary combat potential of general-purpose troops (forces)," strengthening the Coastal Defense Service of the Federal Security Service (FSS) and border controls in the AZRF and establishing a technical control over straits and river estuaries along the whole NSR. Thus, the AGF was charged not simply with defending territory but also with protecting Russia's economic interests in the region. In turn, this required an increasing potential of the Northern Fleet, which was (and is) seen as an important instrument for demonstrating Russia's sovereign rights in the High North and protecting its economic interests in the region.

Although the document was mostly designed for the domestic needs (particularly, it aimed at setting priorities for the AZRF development) many foreign analysts tended to interpret the Strategy-2008 as a "solid evidence" of Russia's revisionist aspirations in the region.¹⁸ For them, the Russian plans to "define the outer border of the AZRF", create the AGF and build a network of border guard stations along the coastline of the Arctic Ocean were the best proofs of Moscow's expansionism in the region. The Kremlin's mantras on a purely defensive nature of these initiatives were taken with great skepticism.

The National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation through 2020, released in May 2009, also underlined the quest for energy resources, which are considered to be the potential means for Russia to remain a great power. The document confirmed Russia's interest in the Arctic, which was elevated to the status of the Caspian Sea and Central Asia as one of the main energy battlegrounds of the future.¹⁹

Since the Strategy-2008 was of a rather general nature, it should be specified and regularly updated by other documents. On 20 February 2013, a document titled "The Strategy for the Development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation"²⁰ was approved by President Vladimir Putin. This document is both the follow-up and update of the Strategy-2008.

It should be noted that this document cannot be considered as Russia's full-fledged Arctic doctrine because it covers only the AZRF rather than the whole Arctic region. In this sense the article is comparable with the Canadian and Norwegian strategies for the development of their northern territories. The Strategy-2013 has some international dimensions, including, for example, Moscow's intention to legally define Russia's continental shelf in the Arctic Ocean and file its new application to the UN Commission on Continental Shelf or the need for international

cooperation in areas such as exploration and exploitation of natural resources, environment protection, preservation of indigenous people's traditional economy and culture, etc. However, the main objective of the document is – first and foremost – to provide a doctrinal/conceptual basis for the AZRF sustainable development, i.e. it is designed for the domestic rather than international consumption.

The new Russian strategy is much more open for international cooperation to solve numerous Arctic problems and ensure the sustainable development of the region at large. Similar to the 2008 document, the Strategy-2013 emphasizes Russia's national sovereignty over the AZRF and NSR and calls for the protection of country's national interests in the area. However, along with this rather traditional stance the new strategy has an impressive list of priority areas for cooperation with potential international partners. This provides the Strategy-2013 with a more positive international image than the previous document.

In contrast with the Strategy-2008, the recent document lacks any description of Russia's national interests in the AZRF. Given a special Russian Security Council's meeting "On the protection of national interests of the Russian Federation in the Arctic" (September 17, 2008) it was expected that the new doctrine will improve and further develop the Strategy-2008's section on Russia's national interests in the region which were described quite vaguely and fragmentary. However, the Strategy-2013 only episodically refers to Russia's national interests in the Arctic, not specifying or systemically describing them.

As far as purely military aspects of the Strategy-2013 are concerned the document sets up the following tasks:

- Ensuring a favorable operative regime for the Russian troops deployed in the AZRF to adequately meet military dangers and threats to Russia's national security.
- Providing the AGF with military training and combat readiness to protect Russian interests in its EEZ and deter potential threats to and aggression against the country.
- Improving the AGF's structure and composition, providing these forces with modern armaments and infrastructure.
- Improving air and maritime space monitoring systems.
- Applying dual-use technologies to ensure both AZRF's military security and sustainable socioeconomic development.
- Completing hydrographic works to define more precisely the external boundaries of Russia's territorial waters, EEZ and continental shelf.²¹

To conclude this section, the Strategy-2013 is a good invitation to further discussions on Russia's Arctic policies rather than a comprehensive and sound doctrine. To become an efficient national strategy in the region, it should be further clarified, specified and instrumentalized in a series of federal laws, regulations and task programs. The Russian Arctic strategy should be also better designed for the international consumption. Despite the fact that the new Russian doctrine clearly addresses the soft security problematic, the foreign audiences – by the virtue of inertia – continue to perceive that kind of Russian documents as manifestations of Moscow's expansionist plans in the High North. For this reason, the future Russian doctrinal documents should not start from the Cold War-type threat and risk analysis that implies that the country operates in the hostile international environment. On the contrary, such documents should emphasize the opportunities for international cooperation and Russia's readiness to collaborate with other regional players. Probably Russia should suggest a special program for international cooperation in the Arctic (separate from the AZRF developmental strategy) where the Kremlin could explain in detail Russia's national interests in the region and its strategic vision of the Arctic, including the specific priorities for international cooperation.

Russian military policies in the Arctic

Contrary to the Western alarmists’ worries about Moscow’s military pre-eminence in the Arctic, the Russian military presence in the region has considerably decreased over the last two decades. Both components – naval and air force – of the Russian armed forces in the region are inferior to the NATO ones (see [Tables 1](#) and [2](#)).

It should be also noted that in contrast with the Cold War period when Russian military strategies in the Arctic were dictated by the logic of global political and military confrontation between two superpowers (USSR and USA) or two military blocs (Warsaw Pact and NATO), the current Moscow’ military policies in the region are driven by completely different motives. As the threat of a global nuclear war has disappeared, these strategies aim at three major goals: first, to demonstrate and ascertain Russia’s sovereignty over the AZRF (including the EEZ and continental shelf); second, to protect its economic interests in the High North; and third, to demonstrate that Russia retains its great power status and has world-class military capabilities.

The demonstration of Russia’ military power and its regional presence in the Arctic are mainly done through strategic bomber and naval patrols as well as land and naval exercises.

The air force is perceived by Moscow as a central element in its demonstration of power. Overflights of Russian military aircraft over the Arctic fell from 500 per year during the Soviet period to only half a dozen in the 1990s and at the start of the 2000s. In 2007, Russian strategic bombers flew over the Arctic for the first time since the end of the Cold War. Two Tu-95MS, based in the Saratov region at the Engels aviation base with mid-flight refueling capability, now regularly patrol the Arctic. These overflights drew heavy criticism from Norway, Canada, UK and the USA who have seen these patrols as evidence of Russia’s return to the Soviet-like military practices and growing strategic ambitions in the Arctic. However, as the most authoritative Western military experts point it out, the resumption of the Arctic strategic bomber patrols may be interpreted more in terms of the desire not to lose capacities and, above all, as a political tool rather than the sign of a renewed aggressiveness in the region.²²

As far as the air force potential available for operations in the Arctic is concerned, Russia has a fleet of aging long- and medium-range bombers. There are 63 turbo-propelled Tu-95MSs, which are very old (designed in the 1950s) but still the mainstays of the Russian strategic aviation. The Russian air force also has 18 more modern, long-range Tu-160 *Blackjacks* bombers, as well as 80 Tu-22M *Backfire* medium bombers that were especially feared by NATO in the Cold War period for their anti-ship capacities. It should be noted that these planes are not stealthy and are easily detected when flying at high altitude, despite additional electronic countermeasures recently added to the Tu-160 and Tu-22M. Moreover, the shortage of mid-air refueling tankers remains

Table 1. The Russian armed forces in the Arctic.

	USSR in 1980s	Russia in 2010s
Submarines	172	30
Of them Ship Submarine Ballistic Nuclear (SSBN)	39	7
SSBN in permanent patrol	10–12 (6–7 in Arctic)	1–2
Aircraft carriers	2	1
Larger ships	74	17
Auxiliary vessels	200	33
Aircrafts	400	100
Helicopters	–	40

Source: Alexei Arbatov, ‘Arktika i strategicheskaya stabil’nost’ [The Arctic and Strategic Stability], in *Arktika: Zona Mira I Sotrudnichestva* [The Arctic: Zone of Peace and Cooperation], ed. Andrei Zagorski (Moscow: Institute of World Economy and International Relations, Russian Academy of Sciences, 2011), 65–67.

Table 2. US and NATO forces capable of operating in the Arctic.

	USA in 1980s	USA in 2010s	NATO in 2010s
Submarines	78	33	85
Of them SSBN	28	6	8
SSBN in permanent patrol	–	6–8	–
Submarines armed with cruise missiles <i>Tomahawk</i>	–	39	–
Aircraft carriers	7	4	6
Larger ships	90	49	100
Ships for landing troops	24	14	–
Aircraft	700	360	200

Source: Arbatov, 'Arktika i strategicheskaya stabil'nost'.

the most serious problem affecting the operational capabilities of Russian strategic aviation. Several Arctic air bases have been reactivated in Anadyr, Monchegorsk, Olenia, Tiksi, Vorkuta and – more recently – on the Kotelny Island (Novosibirsky Archipelago) although with quite limited and dual-use (military and civilian) capacities.²³

No credible plans to modernize the above fleet are known. In 2009, the Russian government granted a contract to Tupolev company to develop a new stealth bomber the PAK-DA that would replace the Tu-22M, the Tu-160 and the Tu-95MS. The prototype is scheduled to fly in 2020 and the aircraft is expected to enter service only in 2025–2030. However, these plans can be changed if other programs (for example, the 5th generation fighter Sukhoi T-50/PAK-FA) would become a more important priority for the Russian Air Force. Because of the long time frame for the development of the PAK-DA, it was decided to upgrade the Tu-22M and produce 10 more Tu-160s before 2020. Some experts suggest that probably many present Russian strategic and medium-range bombers will no longer be operational by 2025–2030 and the air force will then be left only with its aging Tu-160 and Tu-95 fleet.

As far as the naval patrolling is concerned, since 2007, Russia resumed long-range patrols in different parts of the world. This was symbolized by the patrols undertaken by the nuclear-powered guided-missile cruiser *Peter the Great* through the Mediterranean and Caribbean Seas, and the South Atlantic and Indian Oceans. In 2008, Russia confirmed that it was expanding its current level of operations in the Arctic. The Navy resumed its warship presence in the Arctic Ocean with military ships patrolling near Norwegian and Danish defense zones. It also increased the operational radius of the Northern Fleet's submarines, and under-ice training for submariners has become a priority task.

Russia has ambitious plans to modernize its navy deployed to the High North. For example, after the *Peter the Great's* successful trip around the world in 2007, the Ministry of Defense announced that it would upgrade three other heavy nuclear-powered missile cruisers, the *Admiral Lazarev*, the *Admiral Nakhimov* and the *Admiral Ushakov*. Currently, the *Admiral Kuznetsov*, the only Russia aircraft carrier, operates with the Northern Fleet, hosting 20 fighters and 10 anti-submarine helicopters on board. The destroyer *Vice-Admiral Kulakov*, recently repaired, was integrated into the Northern Fleet in 2011. The naval aviation includes 200 combat aircrafts and 50 helicopters.

Looking at the problems that the Northern Fleet currently faces, it should be noted that the fleet needs coastal ships and frigates able to conduct rapid intervention operations. Several are currently under construction, but they have already experienced numerous delays. The purchase of two *Mistrals* helicopter carriers from France and the project to build eight *Admiral Gorshkov* class and six *Krivak* class frigates which is constantly delayed will not be enough to renew Russia's ocean-going surface ships.

Keeping nuclear deterrence capabilities is crucial for the future of the Northern Fleet. The older sea-based nuclear deterrent is in the process of deep modernization. Presently, Russia has six operational Delta III and six Delta IV strategic submarines. According to the Russian Defense Ministry, there are no plans to modernize the older Delta III class submarines. They were built during the 1980s and will be decommissioned in the near future. Only the Delta IV submarines undergo the process of modernization. They will be provided with a new sonar system and the new Inter Continental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) *Sineva* (Skiff SSN-23) which entered service in 2007. *Sineva* is a third-generation liquid-propelled ICBM, which is able to cover a distance up to 8300 kilometers and to carry either 4 or 10 nuclear warheads.²⁴ Russia is planning to equip its Delta IV class submarines with at least 100 *Sineva* missiles, which are to stay on alert status until 2030. The *Sineva* missiles can be launched from under the ice while remaining invisible to enemy's satellites until the last moment.²⁵

Another class of the Russian strategic submarines, the *Typhoons*, which are considered as the world's largest, will be re-equipped with long-range cruise missiles. For the time being, only one *Typhoon*-class strategic submarine, the *Dmitri Donskoy*, has been modernized and deployed to the Northern Fleet. It serves to conduct test firing for the *Bulava* system, a new generation solid-fuel Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missile, designed to avoid possible future US ABM defense weapons, and which can cover a distance of more than 9000 km.²⁶

It is planned that in the future, the *Typhoon*-class submarines should be replaced with the new *Borey*-class fourth-generation nuclear-powered strategic submarines. The first *Borey*-class submarine, the *Yuri Dolgoruky* – that was the first strategic submarine to be built in Russia since the collapse of the Soviet Union – has been in operation by the Northern Fleet since January 2013. Two other *Borey*-class submarines, the *Alexander Nevsky* and the *Vladimir Monomakh*, run the sea trials and the fourth one, *Prince Vladimir*, is under construction at the Severodvinsk shipyard.²⁷ These three submarines will be placed with the Pacific Fleet. The *Borey*-class submarines, which are to be deployed to the Northern Fleet will be based at the Gadzhievo navy base (about 100 km from the Norwegian border), where new infrastructure is being built to host them. This new generation of the Russian strategic submarines is almost invisible at deep ocean depths and – having several types of cruise missiles and torpedoes – it will be able to carry out multipurpose missions, including attacks on enemy aircraft carriers and missile strikes on coastal targets. According to the Defense Ministry's plans, the building of eight *Borey*-class submarines (four for the Northern Fleet and four for the Pacific one) should be completed by 2020, which once again seems too ambitious and unlikely.

To provide the logistical and administrative support to the Northern Fleet, a new Arctic Center for Material and Technical Support with a staff of more than 15,000 was created in 2012.

As far as the land forces are concerned the 200th independent motorized infantry brigade, with soldiers trained in a special program and equipped with modern personal equipment for military operations in Arctic, will be based at Pechenga close to the Norwegian border town of Kirkenes and be operational by 2016. It should be noted that these plans will not increase Russia's offensive capabilities because the above-mentioned unit will replace the two brigades (the marine and army ones) that are currently located near Pechenga.

Along with the army, air force and navy, the efforts to strengthen the Border Guards Service's (which is subordinated to the FSS) control over the region were made. An Arctic border guards unit was created as early as in 1994. Its aim was to monitor the circulation of ships and poaching at sea. The unit was reorganized in 2004–2005. In 2009, it was announced that new Arctic units had been established in border guard stations in Arkhangelsk and Murmansk. They started to patrol the NSR – for the first time since the Soviet time. Now the border guards are assigned with the task to deal with the new – soft security – threats and challenges, such as the establishment of reliable border control systems, the introduction of special visa regulations to certain regions

and the implementation of technological controls over fluvial zones and sites along the NSR. It is currently controlled from the air by border guard aircrafts and on the land and sea by the North-Eastern Border Guard Agency; the Russian border guards further plan to establish a global monitoring network from Murmansk to Wrangel Island. All in all, Moscow plans to build 20 border guard stations along the Arctic Ocean's coastline.²⁸

All the power structures (army, navy, border guards and the Ministry of Emergency Situations) are charged with implementing the AC agreement of 2011 on the creation of a Maritime and Aeronautical Sea and Rescue System. Each country is responsible for its sector of the Arctic and Russia has the biggest one. The SAR agreement's signatories undertake joint exercises on a regular basis. As many experts believe, the SAR activities are a clear sign of the shift from the armed forces' purely military functions to the soft security missions.

As mentioned above, the Russian military is used not only for the purely security purposes but also for non-military/civilian needs. For example, in preparing a new submission for the Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf Russia uses not only the academia but also the military. The objective of the Russian Navy's mission within the framework of the expedition *Arktika-2012* was to prove that its landmass extends to the North Pole by drilling into the sea floor to collect rock samples for scientific analysis. In September 2012, the *Kalitka*, a *Losharik*-class nuclear-powered auxiliary submarine, was used to guide the *Kapitan Dranitsyn* and *Dickson* icebreakers in drilling three boreholes at two different sites on the Mendeleev ridge, collecting over 500 kg of rock samples.²⁹ This was the first known mission for the *Kalitka*. Equipped with space-station-grade air and water regeneration systems, the submarine can remain submerged for months. During this operation, it remained 2.5–3 kilometers below the surface for 20 days. It should be noted that though the battery-powered civilian *Mir* stations used in the *Arktika-2007* expedition can also operate at such depths, they can only stay submerged for 72 hours. The *Kalitka* was mounted to the underside of a larger nuclear-powered auxiliary submarine (the *Orenburg*, a redesigned *Kalmar* or *Delta III* stretch) to transport it to the drilling site and was supported by the larger boat during the operation.

To sum up, the Russian modernization programs do not affect the regional military balance. Other coastal states (of the Arctic Ocean) have also begun to upgrade their military equipment and military doctrines with a view to a better control of the Arctic, but it has nothing to do with an arms race. As, for example, the Canadian Standing Committee on National Defense concluded in its 2010 report,

there is no immediate military threat to Canadian territories. [...] The challenges facing the Arctic are not of the traditional military type. [...] Rather than sovereignty threats we face what might best be termed policing threat. These do not require combat capability.³⁰

Conclusion

The overall assessment of Moscow's military strategies in the region demonstrates that the Russian ambitions in the Arctic region may be high, but they are still far from being realized, and they are not necessarily implying the intentions and proper capabilities to confront other regional players by military means. Russia may be eager to develop powerful armed forces in the Arctic, but its plans to modernize its strategic air force, to recreate a strong navy, to modernize its fleet of strategic submarines, to lay down new icebreakers and replace the old ones and to establish new FSS border control and SAR units are difficult tasks. It is hard to imagine that Russia has the financial and technical capacities as well as managerial skills to meet these objectives in the foreseeable future.

It should be noted that the Russian military modernization programs are rather modest and aim to upgrade the Russian armed forces in the High North rather than provide them with additional offensive capabilities or restore the Soviet-time huge military potential. Given the financial constraints, these programs have recently become less ambitious and more realistic. Now they are comparable with the military modernization programs of other Arctic players. The Russian military increasingly aims at defending the country's economic interests in the region and control over the huge AZRF territory rather than expanding its "sphere of influence."

To conclude, the general "balance sheet" of Russia's Arctic strategy is quite positive. It is safe to assume that in the foreseeable future Moscow's strategy in the region will be predictable and pragmatic rather than aggressive or spontaneous. In contrast with the internationally widespread stereotype of Russia as a revisionist power in the High North, we believe that Moscow will continue to pursue a double-faceted strategy in the region. On the one hand, such a strategy aims at defending Russia's legitimate economic and political interests in the region. On the other hand, Moscow is open to cooperation with foreign partners that are willing to partake in exploiting the Arctic natural resources, developing sea routes and solving numerous socioeconomic and environmental problems of the region. In doing so, Russia will prefer to use non-violent, diplomatic, economic and cultural methods as well as to act *via* international organizations and fora rather than on a unilateral basis. This brings the Russian behavior (at least regionally, not globally) closer to the soft power model albeit there is a long way to go to Russia fully fitting in this frame.

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