

Putting the ‘N’ back into NATO: A High North policy framework for the Atlantic Alliance?

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On 8 May 2013, while on an official visit to Norway, NATO’s Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen candidly stated: “At this present time, NATO has no intention of raising its presence and activities in the High North.”² The Secretary General was simply reflecting the consensual level of ambition currently set by the 28 member states. Four years ago, however, at the beginning of 2009, things looked very different. Back then, NATO and the Government of Iceland had just organized a conference entitled “*Security Prospects in the High North*.” The seminar brought together ministers, chiefs of defence staff (CHODs), officials and academics from NATO countries, as well as representatives from NATO Headquarters and NATO Strategic Commands, to discuss the future security implications of a warming Arctic region. This included a possible role for the Atlantic Alliance and its partners. Symbolically convened in the capital of one of the five NATO member states with High North geography³—Reykjavik, Iceland—the conference was notable for the fact that it represented the first serious consideration of the Alliance’s interest and role in the region since the conclusion of the Cold War.

While it was then widely acknowledged that the collective defence provisions of the Washington Treaty (Article 5) were still eminently relevant to Allied northern circumpolar geography⁴, the introductory remarks of then Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer posited a number of new ideas for a renewed NATO role in the High North⁵. He did so to the backdrop of projections for increased commercial and touristic maritime traffic as well as energy, mineral and fisheries exploitation in a still harsh, High North operating environment.⁶



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² Gerard O’Dwyer, “NATO Rejects Direct Arctic Presence”, *DefenseNews*, 29 May 2013, available at: <http://www.defensenews.com/article/20130529/DEFREG/305290022/NATO-Rejects-Direct-Arctic-Presence> (accessed 10 June 2013); Mu Xuequan, “NATO not to increase presence in High North region: Rasmussen”, *Xinhua*, 8 May 2013, available at: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/world/2013-05/08/c_124683422.htm, (accessed 10 June 2013).

³ For the purposes of this paper, “High North” refers to territory and waters north of the 60th parallel, including those of the eight northern circumpolar states with membership of the Arctic Council (Canada, Denmark [Greenland], Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Russian Federation, United States).

⁴ The collective defence provisions of the Washington Treaty delimit only a southern boundary: the Tropic of Cancer.

⁵ Speech by NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer on security prospects in the High North, Reykjavik, Iceland, 29 January 2009, available at: <http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2009/s090129a.html> (accessed 10 June 2013).



[See Figures 1 and 2] The following were presented as areas where the Alliance could make a value-added contribution when working alongside other actors, in cases of risk to human life (e.g. cruise ship distress) and ecological calamities (e.g. oil spills):

- search and rescue (SAR) to leverage Allied experience and capabilities;
- disaster response through the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Center (EADRCC);
- energy security, consistent with the five mission areas agreed at the Bucharest Summit (information and intelligence fusion; projecting stability; promoting international and regional cooperation; supporting consequence management; supporting the protection of critical infrastructure);
- a consultative forum where the four NATO member states bordering the Arctic Ocean (Canada, Denmark [Greenland], Norway and United States) could exchange

information, discuss and share concerns regarding territorial disputes in the region;⁷

- adding common, High North security challenges (e.g. SAR, consequence management) to the NATO-Russia Council agenda to build mutual confidence and forge co-operation.

The Secretary General concluded with one particular note of caution:

“The indivisibility of the security of Allies has always been a core principle of NATO. And it’s a principle we ignore at our peril. Clearly, the High North is a region that is of strategic interest to the Alliance. But so are the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea, and the Mediterranean. There are many regions—but there is only one NATO. And we must ensure that, as we look today at the High North, 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.”

A Shortcut Across The Top of the World

The Northeast Passage, across the Arctic Ocean, provides a shorter alternative for cargo vessels travelling between Europe and Asia than using the Suez Canal. It is shorter than the Panama Canal route for some voyages between the North American west coast and Europe.

LENGTH OF A VOYAGE TO ROTTERDAM FROM:

YOKOHAMA, JAPAN
12,894 miles via Suez Canal,
8,452 miles via Northeast Passage

SHANGHAI, CHINA
12,107 miles via Suez Canal,
9,297 miles via Northeast Passage

VANCOUVER, CANADA
10,262 miles via Panama Canal,
8,038 miles via Northeast Passage



Source: The Russian Ministry of Transport

THE NEW YORK TIMES

Figure 1: Northern Sea Route compared to current shipping routes

Source: *The New York Times*, 11 September 2009

⁶ The Northern Sea Route could reduce transit time from Asia to Europe and North America by one third, compared to passage through the Suez Canal. Judged by the current distances involved in traveling from Asia to the US east coast, using the Northwest Passage would also achieve a reduction of around 30 percent. The region is projected to contain 13 percent of the world’s undiscovered oil resources and 30 percent of the gas resources in addition to an abundance of nickel, iron ore, and other rare earth materials. Significant fish stocks are expected to move farther north as the Arctic Ocean warms due to the effects of global warming.

⁷ For example, competing claims over extensions of national continental shelves are being adjudicated through the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS); the United States has a disagreement with Canada over territory in the Beaufort Sea and the status of the Northwest Passage; Denmark and Canada still disagree over the sovereignty of Hans Island. In 2008, the five states bordering the Arctic Ocean signed the *Ilulissat Declaration* pledging their commitment to the orderly settlement of any overlapping claims in the region.

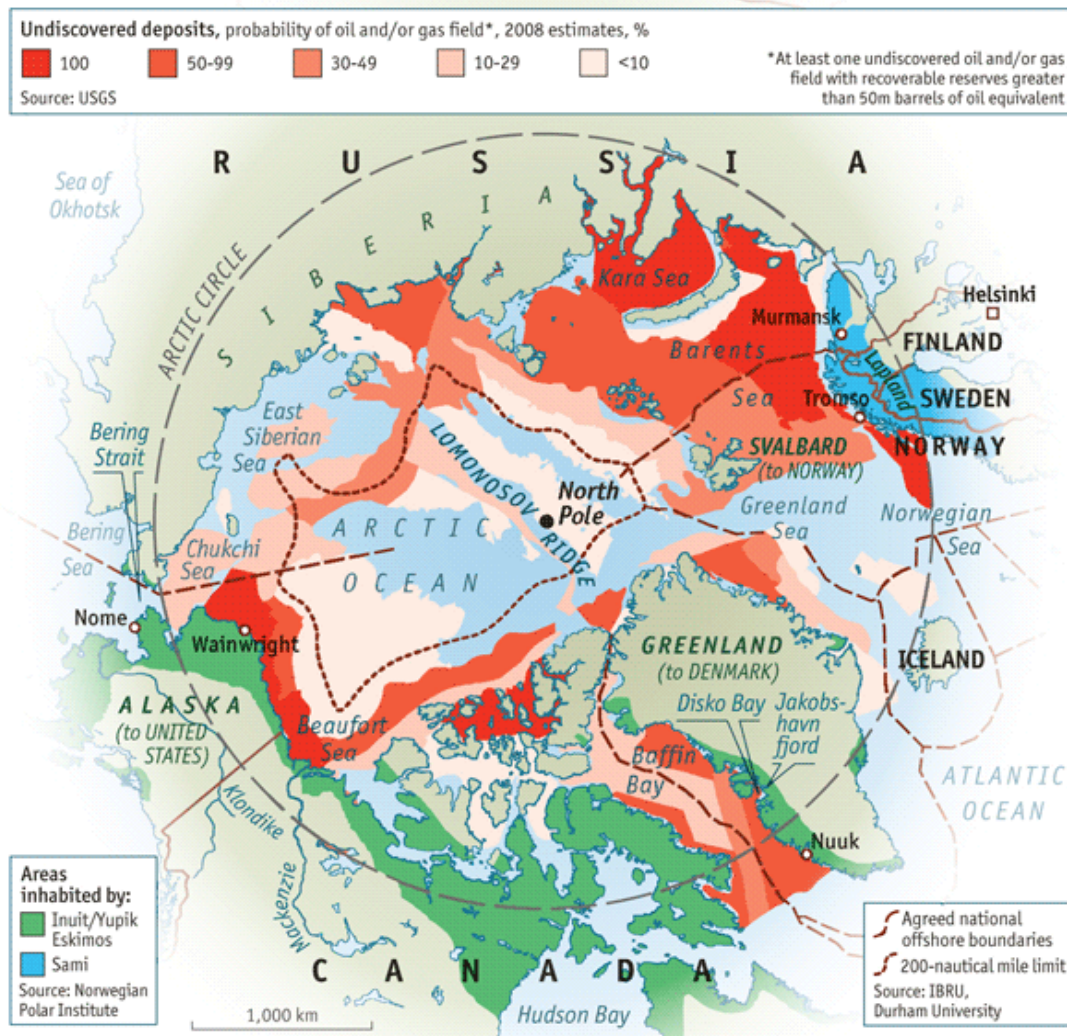


Figure 2: Arctic Energy Resources (13 and 30 percent of the world’s undiscovered oil and gas reserves respectively)
 Source: *The Economist*, 16 June 2012

Since 2009, however, aside from NATO’s ongoing air surveillance mission in Iceland,⁸ the Atlantic Alliance has largely been left “out in the cold” when it comes to shaping and contributing to security in the High North. Those Allies with an interest in the region have, by design or compulsion, turned to other fora to address their security concerns. NATO’s much-lauded 2010 Strategic Concept does not once mention the words “Arctic” or “High North”. The 2012 Chicago Summit Declaration was no different. So what happened?

This paper endeavours to explain the reasons for, and consequences of, NATO’s marginalization from contemporary Arctic security affairs since 2009. It then considers whether recent developments warrant a policy rethink. The paper concludes with thoughts on a range of options for a renewed NATO engagement in the High North, should member states favour a course adjustment.

⁸ Since May 2008, NATO Allies have at Reykjavik’s request periodically deployed fighter aircraft to Keflavik Air Base to police Icelandic airspace.



Let it be

Origins

Since decisions within NATO are taken by consensus, all 28 Allies must agree. A policy for the High North is no exception. Within months of the Reykjavik conference, it became increasingly apparent that Ottawa had significant reservations. In July 2009, Canada released its “*Northern Strategy*”.⁹ Coming on the heels of NATO’s January seminar, attended by Canada’s CHOD and senior foreign ministry officials, the document was revealing, for what it did not say, as much as for what it did. The Strategy set out an ambitious national rearmament program for Canada’s High North, with a view to asserting Canadian presence, sovereignty and providing SAR (e.g. new Arctic patrol vessels, a deep water port and more boots on the ground north of the 60th parallel). Equally, it underscored the importance of the bilateral Canada-US North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) for the monitoring and surveillance of northern airspace. But as regards NATO, it remained conspicuously silent.

If there were any lingering doubts about Canadian reticence, with respect to a reinvigorated role for the Alliance to address emerging security challenges in the High North, these were soon put to bed by January 2010. As reported in one of Canada’s leading dailies, during a meeting between the Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper and NATO Secretary General Rasmussen, the former cautioned against any such stance. Concerns about provoking the Russian Federation (at the time already engaged in a substantial northern rearmament program of its own)¹⁰ and about giving countries with no High North geography undue influence in the region, were apparently at the heart of the Canadian policy calculus. Whatever the underlying rationale, however, the verbal caution soon turned up in official policy documentation. In August, the “*Statement on Canada’s Arctic Foreign Policy*”¹¹ was released, forthrightly asserting that:

“The increasing accessibility of the Arctic has led to a widespread perception that the region could become a source of

conflict. This has led to heightened interest in the Arctic in a number of international organizations including NATO and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Canada does not anticipate any military challenges in the Arctic and believes that the region is well managed through existing institutions, particularly the Arctic Council.”

To be fair, outside observers might be forgiven for being perplexed by this particular pronouncement, in at least two respects:

- If no military challenges are anticipated, why does the document, reminiscent of the *Northern Strategy*, outline a national rearmament program, akin to what is ongoing in all major High North states?¹²
- Similarly, if there are no presaged military challenges, why does the Tri-Command “*Framework for Arctic Cooperation among NORAD, United States Northern Command and Canadian Joint Operations Command*” (developed starting in December 2010) make reference to “the immediate goal of promoting enhanced military cooperation in the preparation for and the conduct of defence, security, and safety operations in the Arctic”?¹³

Understandable confusion aside, however, the net effect has been the same. Essentially, when it comes to the Arctic, NATO has been told to “let it be”, which Canada like any member state, has the sovereign right to decide. Thus, for the better part of the last four years, as the Secretary General’s May 2013 statement suggests, the High North has largely been treated as being “low priority *de facto* out-of-area”, even though it is not out-of-area, to paraphrase one international Arctic security expert.¹⁴

As mentioned earlier, the one notable exception has been NATO’s Icelandic air policing mission. Somewhat paradoxically perhaps, given the aforementioned Arctic foreign policy statement, the then Canadian Defence Minister Peter MacKay had this to say about the mission:

“As a leading member of NATO and a close partner with Iceland, Canada is committed to doing its part to help protect the integrity of NATO’s airspace. Canada’s fleet of fight-

⁹ *Canada’s Northern Strategy – Our North, Our Heritage, Our Future*, Government of Canada, July 2009, available at: <http://www.northernstrategy.gc.ca/cns/cns.pdf> (accessed 7 June 2013).

¹⁰ Heather A. Conley *et al.*, *A New Security Architecture for the Arctic – An American Perspective*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, January 2012, pp. 31-32.

¹¹ *Statement on Canada’s Arctic Foreign Policy – Exercising Sovereignty and Promoting Canada’s Northern Strategy Abroad*, Government of Canada, August 2010, available at: http://www.cjoc.forces.gc.ca/fs-ev/2012/12/Tri_Command_Arctic_Framework_final__En_29_Nov_2012.pdf, (accessed 7 June 2013).

¹² Robert Huebert, “Arctic Sovereignty – Five NATO nations and Russia: finding a workable solution” in *NATO at 60 – What Choices and Challenges for the Alliance?*, Kyla Cham *et al.*, eds., Atlantic Council of Canada, Spring 2009, pp. 56-70.

¹³ *Framework for Arctic Cooperation among NORAD, United States Northern Command and Canadian Joint Operations Command*, 11 December 2012, available at: http://www.cjoc.forces.gc.ca/fs-ev/2012/12/Tri_Command_Arctic_Framework_final__En_29_Nov_2012.pdf (accessed 9 June 2013).

¹⁴ Huebert, p. 70.



er aircraft and our personnel are ideally suited for this operation, which also contributes to the security of Canada by helping to monitor and control the northeast air approaches to North America.”¹⁵

But even in Iceland, limits have been placed on NATO’s engagement as a security actor in the High North.

In his seminal report on “*Nordic Cooperation on Foreign and Security Policy*” of February 2009, former Norwegian Foreign and Defence Minister Thorvald Stoltenberg advocated for non-NATO Nordic countries, Finland and Sweden, to take on some of the responsibility for the surveillance of Icelandic airspace, as “this could become a practical example of cooperation under the Partnership for Peace [Pfp] program.”¹⁶ After much horse-trading and delay, Finland and Sweden will contribute to armed air policing, beginning in 2014. However, this will not be a part of Pfp: the two non-NATO countries will partake in a separate, new Nordic Air Policing mission, led by Norway and Denmark. Why? Because some members of the Alliance, reportedly, did not wish to set too much of a precedent, for interested partners elsewhere in the world.¹⁷

Consequences

The policies of some member states—notably Norway’s—have continued to actively promote the idea of leveraging the Atlantic Alliance’s capabilities, interoperability, operational experience and partnership frameworks, with the likes of Russia, to fill what is seen as the High North’s collective security void. As Norway’s national High North policy states, “In NATO, Norway has promoted a renewed focus on the Alliance’s core areas—including those in the north—based on long experience that a clear security policy creates stability and predictability for all parties.”¹⁸ Nevertheless, in the absence of consensus, no such NATO policy has emerged. As touched on earlier, the result has been that member states and partners with an interest in the region have, either for reasons of preference or prag-

matism, turned to a number of other (sometimes *ad hoc*) initiatives and arrangements to address their defence and security concerns. A number of them assume a decidedly regional bent as well. In addition to the previously mentioned Canada-US Tri-Command Arctic cooperation framework and the Nordic Air Policing mission, the following is illustrative:

- Although not Arctic Council agreements (due to the exclusion of military security from its mandate),¹⁹ the first legally binding accords among the Council’s eight member states on *Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue in the Arctic* (2011) and *Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response* (2013) have been approved;
- The first meeting of the same eight states’ CHODs in Goose Bay, Canada (2012) to share best practices, including military support to civilian authorities in the North, high latitude SAR and military interrelations with indigenous populations;
- The annual Arctic Security Forces Roundtable (ASFR) with senior officers from Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway, Russia, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States (2012). Avowedly, ASFR constitutes a “forum to share ideas, focusing on communications amongst security forces, domain awareness and [to] just know what is going on in the Arctic with the increase in traffic”;²⁰
- The first Extended Nordic-Baltic Eight (NB8) Defence Ministerial, convened in Norway (2012), with representatives from Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Sweden, plus Germany, the United Kingdom and Poland. On occasion, this forum has been described in the popular media as a “mini-NATO”;
- Norwegian military Exercise *Cold Response*, which in its 2012 edition drew 16 000 troops from 15 NATO member states and Pfp countries, including Canada, France, the Netherlands, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States, to practice crisis response operations in cold weather conditions. Exercise *Cold Response 2014* is scheduled to focus on high intensity warfare and terrorist threats;

¹⁵ Jorge Benitez, “Canada deploys ‘mostly’ unarmed jets to NATO air policing mission over Iceland”, *Atlantic Council*, 28 March 2013, available at: <http://www.acus.org/natosource/canada-deploys-mostly-unarmed-jets-nato-air-policing-mission-over-iceland> (accessed 11 June 2013).

¹⁶ Thorvald Stoltenberg, *Nordic Cooperation on Foreign and Security Policy – Proposals presented to the extraordinary meeting of Nordic foreign ministers in Oslo on 9 February 2009*, p. 11, available at: http://www.mfa.is/media/Frettatilkynning/Nordic_report.pdf (accessed 11 June 2013).

¹⁷ Edward Lucas, “A Nordic Defensive Shield”, *European Voice*, 14 March 2013, available at: <http://www.europeanvoice.com/article/imported/a-nordic-defensive-shield/76658.aspx> (accessed 11 June 2013).

¹⁸ *The High North: Visions and Strategies*, Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, November 2011, p. 19, available at: http://www.regjeringen.no/upload/UD/Vedlegg/Nordområdene/UD_nordomrodene_innmat_EN_web.pdf (accessed 6 June 2013).

¹⁹ The Arctic Council’s founding text—the “Ottawa Declaration”—specifically excludes from its mandate issues related to military security. See: *Declaration on the Establishment of the Arctic Council – Joint Communiqué of the Governments of the Arctic Countries*, Ottawa, 19 September 1996, available at: <http://www.international.gc.ca/arctic-arctique/ottdec-decort.aspx?lang=eng> (accessed 11 June 2013).

²⁰ Rick Seavetta, “Despite the cold: U.S. military partnerships key to Arctic crisis response”, *US European Command Media Library*, 2 October 2012, available at: <http://www.eucom.mil/article/24329/despite-the-cold-u-s-military-partnerships-key-to-arctic-crisis-response> (accessed 7 June 2013).



- Exercise *Northern Eagle*, comprised in 2012, of Norwegian, Russian and US naval forces practicing maritime interdiction operations, force protection, SAR, navigation and aviation operations, as well as ashore maritime command and control in the High North;

- Norwegian invitational Exercise *Arctic Tiger 2012* with NATO and PfP countries, including: Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Switzerland, Turkey and the United Kingdom. The aim here was to practice interoperability between different air assets, including: “Fighters, fighter-bombers, recce aircraft, SEAD forces (Suppression of Enemy Air Defences), electronic jammers, CSAR helicopters (Combat Search and Rescue), Boeing E-3A early warning aircraft and KC-135 tankers [...]”²¹

Given all this security and defence activity since 2009, when the decision was made to keep the Alliance proper largely out of the High North strategic equation, one may ask whether a policy rethink is in order. Despite some earlier, well-intentioned statements to the contrary, military challenges spanning the areas of safety, security and defence in the High North clearly do exist and need to be addressed together. So what has spurred this course of events over the last several years?

The times they are a-changin’

Opportunities

Over the last four years the rapid pace of environmental change in the High North has become increasingly evident. In September 2012, for instance, Arctic sea ice reached its lowest level on record and scientists are now projecting an ice-free summer as early as 2030. A 2013 study, moreover, has offered the most comprehensive collection in history of satellite data on the earth’s north and south poles. It confirms that the polar ice caps have melted faster in the last 20 years than in the last 10 000, and more so in Greenland than in Antarctica.²²

With such monumental environmental change at play, new economic opportunities, and hence increased human activity in the High North, have also proceeded at a quickening rate. For example, the Northern Sea Route was open for around six months last year with the resultant milestone of the world’s first instance of liquefied natural gas (LNG) transported via an Arctic route—in this case, Norwegian-produced gas transported from Russia to Japan. In the same year, some 1.25 million metric tons of cargo took the same route, with projections for 2013 estimated to be 1.5 million and 40 million by 2021.²³ [See **Figure 3**] Furthermore, in the Bering Strait alone, cruise ship traffic was up by 25% in 2011 compared to the situation three years before, with the upward trend projected to continue apace.²⁴

As the LNG case suggests, the economic implications of High North warming have not been limited to the eight circumpolar states themselves. Over the last four years, there has been a marked upsurge in international interest and presence in the region as the global economic ramifications—both real and potential—begin to strike home. The following is indicative:

- As one of the largest trading nations in the world with few natural resources of its own, Japan is primarily interested in the navigation and resource potential of the region. In 2012, for example, the Japanese Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism initiated a study on the usability of the Northern Sea Route.²⁵
- South Korea, too, has increased its focus on future northerly sea routes to ensure stable energy supplies and strengthen its shipbuilding, logistics and trading sectors. In September last year, for example, the South Korean President Lee Myung-bak and Norwegian Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg signed a Memorandum of Understanding, pledging to help their nations’ shipping firms open up new sea lanes through the High North, in an environmentally sustainable manner.²⁶
- In 2011 and 2012, two Chinese companies signed 20- and 50-year leases respectively, for piers at North Korea’s

²¹ Ulrich Metternich, “Arctic Tiger in Norway”, *NATO Tiger Association*, 2012, p. 1, available at: www.natotigers.org (accessed 9 June 2013).

²² “Polar ice sheets melting faster than ever”, *DW*, 4 February 2013, available at: <http://www.dw.de/polar-ice-sheets-melting-faster-than-ever/a-16432199> (accessed 9 June 2013).

²³ Balazs Koranyi, “Ice levels, rule changes to boost Arctic northern sea route”, *Reuters*, 29 May 2013, available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/05/29/shipping-arctic-idUSL5N0EA0RF20130529> (accessed 6 June 2013).

²⁴ Conley *et al.*, p. 8.

²⁵ Aki Tonami and Stewart Watters, “Japan’s Arctic Policy: The Sum of Many Parts”, *Arctic Yearbook 2012*, pp. 93-103, available at: <http://www.arcticyearbook.com/> (accessed 12 June 2013).

²⁶ Chang Jae-soon, “S.Korea, Norway agree on partnership for Arctic development”, *Yonhap News Agency*, 12 September 2012, available at: <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/national/2012/09/12/57/0301000000AEN20120912008951315FHTML> (accessed 11 June 2013).

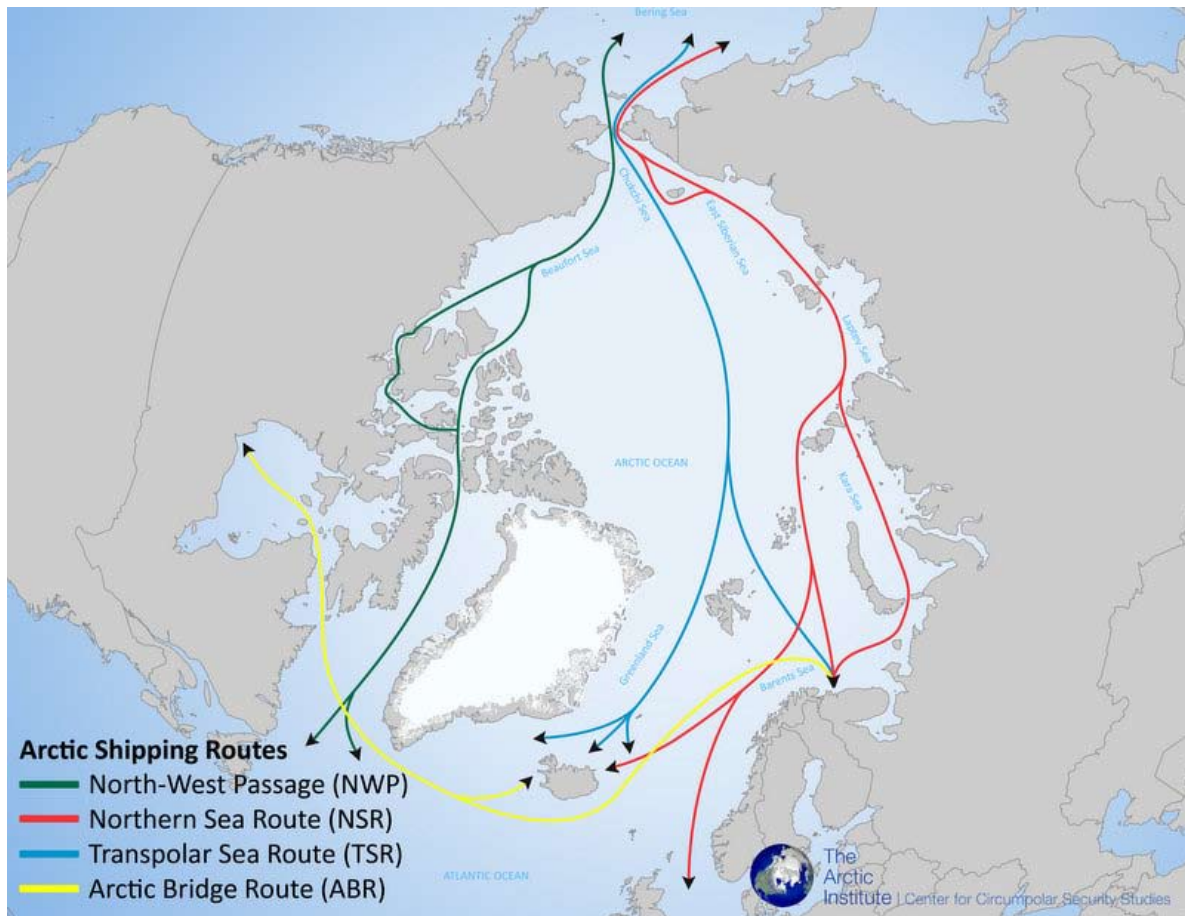


Figure 3: Projected Arctic Shipping Routes

Source: *The Arctic Institute: Center for Circumpolar Security Studies, October 2012*

port of Rajin, providing access to the Sea of Japan with a view to Rajin's future use as an Arctic shipping hub.²⁷ In February this year, one Chinese analyst predicted that, by 2020, as much as 15% of the country's trade would move through the Northern Sea Route. Already boasting the largest foreign embassy in Reykjavik, in April, China signed a free trade agreement with Iceland—its first such agreement with a European country. “Beyond shipping routes and the use of Icelandic ports, [China] is also interested in Arctic energy resources and space-research facilities.”²⁸ Eco-tourism has also been on the agenda and Chinese mining companies have in turn been some of the most active in exploring opportunities in Greenland. China's polar-research

icebreaker, *Xue Long*, has already visited the Arctic on several occasions, with a second icebreaker expected to be operational in 2014. Not surprisingly, Chinese analysts with an interest in the High North increasingly refer to their nation as a “near Arctic state” or “Arctic stakeholder”.

- Singapore is interested in High North economic opportunities for its offshore and marine industry, despite the risks to its status as a major hub port, as alternative northern maritime routes open up. In January 2012, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs appointed a Special Envoy for Arctic Affairs.²⁹
- Publically, India has emphasized scientific interest in the High North. Yet, India too is believed to have inter-

²⁷ Linda Jakobson and Jingchao Peng, “China's Arctic Aspirations”, *SIPRI Policy Paper 34*, November 2012, available at: http://books.sipri.org/product_info?c_product_id=449, (accessed 15 May 2013).

²⁸ “The rice man cometh – Free trade with Iceland”, *The Economist*, 20 April 2013, available at: <http://www.economist.com/news/china/21576444-foothold-europe-what-rice-man-cometh> (accessed 15 May 2013).

²⁹ Stewart Watters and Aki Tonami, “Singapore: An Emerging Arctic Actor”, *Arctic Yearbook 2012*, pp. 104-113, available at: <http://www.arcticyearbook.com/> (accessed 12 June 2013).



est in hydrocarbon exploration, most likely in concert with the Russian Federation.³⁰

- Without focusing here on the interest expressed by individual European states such as Italy, the European Union as a whole has also been closely monitoring economic and other developments in the High North. As the “*Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council on Developing a European Union Policy towards the Arctic Region: progress since 2008 and next steps*” stated:

*“The EU has strong links with the Arctic: not only from historical, economic and geographical perspectives, but also as an importer of natural resources and through its wider concern for the global environment. The Arctic offers both challenges as well as opportunities that will significantly affect the life of European citizens in future generations [...] The EU believes it should contribute responsibly to the Arctic, through its funding programmes as well as promoting safe and sustainable management and use of resources in the region.”*³¹

Against this background, it should not come as too much of a surprise that, as the focal point for multilateral, sustainable governance for development in the High North, the Arctic Council admitted Japan, South Korea, China, Singapore, India and Italy as Permanent Observers, at its latest ministerial meeting on 15 May 2013 (the EU’s application was “affirmatively” received, although a final decision was deferred).³² The six new Permanent Observers join the ranks of non-circumpolar France, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain and the United Kingdom (all equally NATO member states), which had been granted this status in previous years. As Danish Foreign Minister Villy Soevndal declared, regarding this year’s important May milestone: “It [...] reflects the fact that many countries outside the Arctic area also have legitimate interests in the development of the region.”³³ That view was shared by his US counterpart, Secretary of State John Kerry, who on the occasion of the new Observers’ admittance, also stated: “There is nothing that should unite us quite like our concerns for both the promises and the challenges of the northernmost reaches of the earth. The consequences

of our [Arctic] nations’ decisions don’t stop at the 66th parallel.”³⁴

Challenges

The increased international interest and human activity in the High North, from Asia, Europe and elsewhere, however, also carries with it increased security concerns, arguably approaching at a pace and scale not even anticipated by NATO’s former Secretary General back in 2009. They of course include the risk of human (e.g. cruise ship distress) and ecological (e.g. oil spills) disasters in the High North, as previously mentioned. But a survey of contemporary High North security discourse reveals that the list also encompasses preoccupation with future challenges to regional state sovereignty, and even the specter of terrorism, piracy and unlawful commerce, as the top of the world opens up to more and more of humanity. Addressing such risks and threats comes with the added challenge of a harsh operating environment. As one study explains:

*“While Arctic economics, border protection, and the projection of sovereignty are significant drivers in the future of the Arctic, they do not overshadow a third major factor that will shape the region’s future security architecture: the region’s extreme climatic operating conditions and lack of satellite communication. The near absence of satellite coverage is coupled with a vacillation of the sea ice, limited hydrographic mapping, difficulties of ice forecasting, and the mobility constraints of ice-strengthened equipment. A coherent surveillance of ice thickness does not currently exist, a critical factor when operating tankers, oil platforms, and cruise ships in the Arctic. The extreme Arctic temperatures have the potential to influence any operation and require specific training.”*³⁵

Because of the austere operating environment, it is the military—the force of last resort—to which northern circumpolar states have progressively turned to provide the kind of anticipated capabilities and knowhow needed to address the emerging regional security challenges outlined above in support of civilian authorities and industry. Most have recognized, too, that they can ill afford to “go it alone”

³⁰ Meena Menon and Sandeep Dikshit, “India gets observer status in Arctic Council”, *The Hindu*, 15 May 2013, available at: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/world/india-gets-observer-status-in-arctic-council/article4717770.ece> (accessed 12 June 2013).

³¹ *Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council on Developing a European Union Policy towards the Arctic Region: progress since 2008*, European Commission and High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 26 June 2012, JOIN(2012) 19 final.

³² It has been widely reported that Canada maintains some reservations emanating from the EU ban on products derived from the northern seal hunt.

³³ “Arctic Council admits Japan, China, 5 others as observers”, 16 May 2013, *Japan Today*, available at: <http://www.japantoday.com/category/world/view/arctic-council-admits-japan-china-5-others-as-observers> (accessed 10 June 2013).

³⁴ Steven Myers, “Arctic Council Adds 6 Nations as Observer States, Including China”, *The New York Times*, 15 May 2013, available at: <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/16/world/europe/arctic-council-adds-six-members-including-china.html> (accessed 10 June 2013).

³⁵ Conley *et al.*, pp. 11-12.



in such conditions. Hence, the national northern rearmament plans. Hence, the interest in regional and multinational defence and security fora and Arctic military exercises described earlier, even when the Atlantic Alliance, the NATO-Russia Council and PFP frameworks that could, conceivably, contribute to northern security have been largely removed from the equation. The US approach is telling. As stated in December 2012 by General Charles Jacoby, Commander of US Northern Command, in charge of Arctic military capability development since 2011:

*“Earlier this year, [US Coast Guard] Admiral Papp and I identified four key capability gaps in the Arctic. Those are communications, domain awareness, infrastructure and presence. We need to focus our investment in enhancing capabilities in each of those areas over time [...] We are using our exercise programs to explore those capabilities gaps and look for high-payoff investments that we can make. The different stakeholders need to work together to share in building these capabilities. We need an inclusive approach to this challenge [...]”*³⁶

This inclusive perspective was reinforced in the US “*National Strategy for the Arctic Region*”, released in May this year:

*“What happens in one part of the Arctic region can have significant implications for other Arctic states and the international community as a whole. The remote and complex operating conditions in the Arctic environment make the region well-suited for collaborative efforts by nations [...]”*³⁷

In the context of security, a number of non-circumpolar NATO member states have been more than willing to contribute to this inclusive approach, as several of the military discussions and exercises described above clearly underscore. Why? Because the indivisibility of Allied security encompasses the High North, with the concomitant preparedness to respond to crises there. Concerns about how to respond effectively to threats of piracy to future European commercial traffic, or to European tourists caught in distress in the region, also undoubtedly figure in the equation. Similarly to the five northern circumpolar NATO member states, fellow Allies also have an interest in understanding and preparing for possible shifts in the global military balance.

As one analysis recently forecast:

*“The Arctic Ocean, which is still largely closed to human activities by its extensive ice pack, may at some point in the future become a large expanse of open water allowing unhindered navigation. If so, we can forecast that the navies of many nations will be deployed in the Arctic, where they will undoubtedly engage in various activities.”*³⁸

Or, as another has observed:

*“With the Northern Sea Route, Moscow’s Pacific fleet can easily reinforce those in the Atlantic and vice versa, overcoming the two-front problem that has bedeviled Russian strategy as far back as its devastating defeat in the Tsushima Straits back in 1905.”*³⁹

Judging from the participation of several PFP countries in the military activities outlined previously, many of the same security challenges seemingly preoccupy their governments and militaries as well. Moreover, it is not inconceivable that several Southeast Asian and other states share those concerns too. One day, they might also wish to explore how they could contribute to matters of military security in order to maintain the High North as “a zone of peace and stability”, as described by the Arctic Council’s May 2013 vision for the region.⁴⁰

So, if the reasons behind the development of a defence and security architecture for an emerging, post-Cold War High North are clear, the question remaining is: Are the security initiatives taken over the last four years, largely excluding NATO and its partnership frameworks, the optimal way to safeguard Alliance and partners’ interests, including Russia? Most importantly, is there a better way to preserve that sacrosanct principle of the indivisibility of Allied security when dealing with an issue that is, in *de jure* terms, decidedly not out-of-area? The final section of this paper endeavours to provide some answers.

Bridge over troubled water?

To address the last question first: as the primary stakeholders, the eight circumpolar states have every right to conclude agreements on SAR and disaster response, as well as to convene their CHODs for discussions. However, the

³⁶ Jorge Benitz, “America, Allies, & the Arctic: NORTHCOM Commander Talks Polar Strategy”, 18 December 2012, *Atlantic Council*, available at: <http://www.acus.org/natosource/america-allies-arctic-northcom-commander-talks-polar-strategy> (accessed 9 June 2013).

³⁷ *National Strategy for the Arctic Region*, President of the United States, The White House, May 2013.

³⁸ Maintaining the Order in the Arctic Ocean: Cooperation and Confrontation among Coastal Nations”, Chapter 2 in *East Asian Strategic Review*, The National Institute for Defense Studies – Japan, May 2011.

³⁹ Benitz.

⁴⁰ *Vision for the Arctic*, Arctic Council, MM08-15 May 2013-Kiruna, Sweden.



five that hold membership in NATO arguably shoulder particular responsibility for remaining vigilant as regards creeping, restrictive regionalism in all defence- and security-related issues in the High North. Why? Because excessive regional exclusivity risks a dilution of Alliance solidarity over time, in one of the most rapidly changing parts of the globe, where by virtue of the Washington Treaty, all 28 member states have a collective interest and responsibility. Encouragingly, the list of military-related meetings and exercises outlined above suggests that those five are somewhat mindful of the dangers of undue regional exclusivity and are open to working with fellow, non-circumpolar Allies, to address security concerns in the High North. The new US Arctic policy says as much. Indeed, the particularly challenging operating conditions of the High North, where no one nation has the capacity to act alone, also explain the logic of more, not less Allied collective engagement, leveraging shared capacities and experience. However, why that engagement has to date been primarily outside NATO proper does, with the benefit of hindsight, seem rather odd. Keeping NATO out of the Arctic has not kept non-circumpolar Allies away. When almost half of NATO's members are now represented on the Arctic Council (and others are expressing interest) to address non-military issues in the High North, it is not too improbable to foresee a greater role for the Alliance in addressing the undeniable safety, security and defence challenges that exist there as well.

By extension, the fact that Russia and a number of other PFP nations have, over the last four years, already been working with Allies to address military-related challenges in the High North, suggests it is perhaps time to also revisit the idea of forging cooperation in the Arctic through NATO's existing partnership frameworks. This would conceivably serve to lessen the requirement for *ad hoc* arrangements which few other standing international organizations are in a position to offer. The Arctic Council, for instance, cannot be a multilateral forum for the discussion of military-related security matters by virtue of its founding text. Moreover, a survey of recent EU Arctic policy documents, including the aforementioned EU joint communication, suggests that the region is not high on the agenda of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). Therefore, in response to the first question posed above, it can be argued that: "In a consideration of secu-

rity in the Arctic, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) emerges as a natural candidate."⁴¹ This includes developing High North security cooperation with Russia. With sufficient areas of tension between the West and Russia elsewhere in the world, the High North need not be one. As described earlier, the harsh operating environment by default reinforces mutual dependencies. On the list of the NATO-Russia Council's current priorities, work on logistics, SAR and academic exchange could be made immediately relevant to the High North – including, in the not-too-distant future, work on counter-terrorism and counter-piracy too.⁴²

So if there is some logic to greater NATO engagement in the High North, what might it look like? The following offers some thoughts on three potential models of a "NATO bridge" over the melting ice and warming waters of the High North, with all the emerging security challenges they entail. These are presented on a descending scale in terms of level of ambition.

1. Comprehensive High North policy framework

At its most ambitious, the Alliance would develop a comprehensive High North policy framework addressing safety, security and defence challenges in both North American and European northern circumpolar geography. It would pledge the member states' commitment to the indivisibility of Allied security in addressing those challenges. The framework would recognize the primary (as distinct from exclusive) role of the eight High North states, including their indigenous populations, in the governance of the region and their vision for the Arctic as an environmentally sustainable zone of peace and stability to which the Alliance is equally committed. It would acknowledge that an extensive legal framework applies to the Arctic Ocean, including the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). It would further recognize the remarkable international cooperation already established in the High North and pledge to leverage the Alliance's existing partnership frameworks, such as the NATO-Russia Council and PFP, to further that cooperation in the areas of safety, security and defence.

In addition to the five potential Alliance contributions identified by former Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer in 2009, NATO's comprehensive High North policy framework would include the following initiatives:⁴³

⁴¹ Conley *et al.*, p. 30.

⁴² Author's discussion with officials from the Cooperation and Regional Security Division, International Military Staff, NATO Headquarters, 14 June 2013.

⁴³ Elements of this section are drawn in part from: Jadwiga Zakrzewska, "Security in the High North: NATO's Role", Rapporteur to the Sub-Committee on Transatlantic Relations, *NATO Parliamentary Assembly*, 28 March 2013, 071 PCTR 13 E; Conley *et al.*, pp. 34-35.

- A forum for consultation for NATO members, interested partners (including PfP and Partners Across the Globe [PAG]) and regional stakeholders to discuss and share information on High North safety, security and defence;
- Joint and multilateral military training and exercises, defence procurement and acquisition for High North contingencies, consistent with the Alliance's core tasks;
- Sustained air surveillance and policing over Iceland, including the active advocacy for armed contributions from interested PfP nations without prejudice to out-of-area initiatives with partners;
- Collated, Allied satellite imagery for weather forecasting, disaster prevention and environmental impact assessment;
- Through the NATO-Russia Council, partnership with Russia on High North logistics, as well as on missions for the scientific mapping of the Arctic seabed (including de-classified Cold War hydro-mapping) and on meteorological studies, in order to contribute to safer passage in Arctic waters;
- Alliance involvement in the recent agreements on *Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue in the Arctic* and *Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response*;

- Maritime Command (MARCOM) and NATO Shipping Centre support to the development of an international code of safety for ships operating in polar waters (Polar Code), led by the International Maritime Organization (IMO).⁴⁴

2. European High North policy framework

Should the notion of a direct NATO contribution to the security of North American High North geography prove a bridge too far for certain Allies, member states could lessen their level of ambition and focus primarily on the European High North. This approach would be similar to the task division that occurred in 2011 between US NORTHCOM and US European Command (EUCOM), whereby the former covers the North American Arctic (alongside NORAD and Canada) and the latter, the European Arctic including Greenland. [See Figure 4] Given that EUCOM is already active in the region, forging mutually reinforcing actions with NATO would be a logical result. Most of the initiatives of the comprehensive High North framework option would be retained, however, with a circumscribed European Arctic geographic focus.

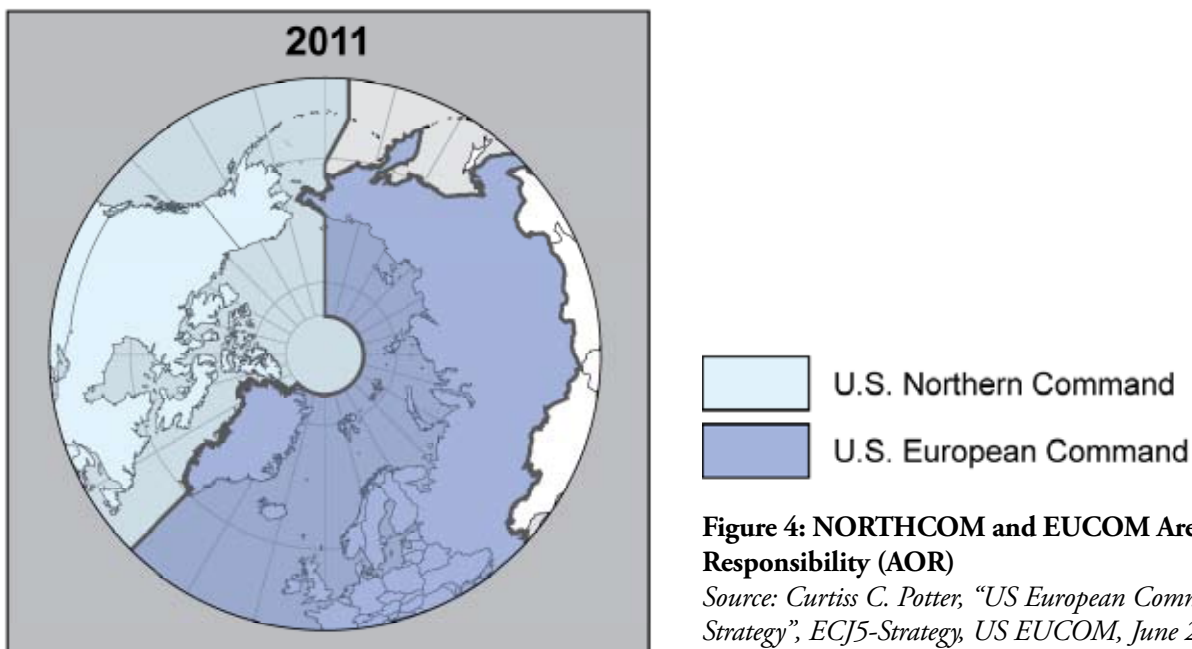


Figure 4: NORTHCOM and EUCOM Areas of Responsibility (AOR)

Source: Curtiss C. Potter, "US European Command Arctic Strategy", *ECJ5-Strategy*, US EUCOM, June 2012

⁴⁴ The Code is intended to cover the full range of design, construction, equipment, operational, training, search and rescue and environmental protection matters relevant to ships operating in the inhospitable waters surrounding the two poles. See: <http://www.imo.org/mediacentre/hottopics/polar/Pages/default.aspx> (accessed 13 June 2013).



With respect to the European circumpolar Allies implicated in this model, Norway's interest in an enhanced role for the Alliance in the High North is well known and has been mentioned previously. Judging from Iceland's Arctic policy resolution of 28 March 2011,⁴⁵ it would also appear open to this policy proposition. The resolution advocates "promoting cooperation with other States and stakeholders on issues relating to Icelandic interest in the Arctic region." It even goes on to specifically refer to NATO's 2009 Reykjavik conference:

"A statement was released in connection with the NATO Conference on Arctic issues in Iceland in January 2009 where the Alliance expressed its willingness to monitor and gather information and intelligence, as well as to strengthen its capabilities for rescue and pollution prevention at sea. It was reiterated that the purpose was not to promote the militarization of the Arctic but to secure the stability that has been maintained since the Cold War in successful cooperation with Russia and even other nations outside the alliance, such as Finland and Sweden."

Using its 2011-2020 Arctic strategy⁴⁶ as a guide, Denmark too would seem amenable to a NATO engagement framework of this kind. The section on "close cooperation with our international partners" specifically mentions the Atlantic Alliance: "Many international agreements and cooperation fora are relevant to the Arctic, whose interests require active safeguarding by the Kingdom [of Denmark]. For example, [...] in security and defence matters in NATO among others."

3. High North contact country

Although a strong case can be made for NATO to develop a High North policy framework now given the pace of developments over the last four years, should consensus

remain elusive, inaction need not and should not prevail. At the very least, the Allies should put in place a mechanism whereby the 28 member states are regularly informed about regional developments having safety, security and defence implications. This could take the form of the designation of a NATO contact country on a permanent or rotating basis, drawn from the five Allies with circumpolar geography (Canada, Denmark [Greenland], Iceland, Norway, the United States). Routine updates would be provided to the North Atlantic Council (building on the May visit to Norway of NATO Permanent Representatives) and relevant committees and bodies. This would serve to ensure that when Allies do collectively sense the time is ripe to craft a coherent NATO policy framework for the High North, or when the next crisis emerges there, they possess the knowledge needed to consensually respond with conviction and clarity of purpose.

* * *

As the past four years underscore, the significant changes in the Arctic are no longer the preserve or exclusive concern of the northern circumpolar states. The implications of the ongoing changes are global in scope and inevitably attract global attention. This fact, coupled with the Washington Treaty's (even conceivably prophetic) reach into the region, means that all 28 NATO member states are affected and need to be aware of what is going on there, why, and with whom. The safety, security and defence implications of a warming Arctic are real and cannot be ignored. Three options for renewed NATO engagement in the region have been presented. Whatever Allies decide as regards their collective level of ambition, however, one truth will remain: "Time waits for no one" and, in a rapidly changing High North, those words could not ring more true.

⁴⁵ *A Parliamentary Resolution on Iceland's Arctic Policy*, Approved by Althingi at the 139th legislative session March 28, 2011.

⁴⁶ *Kingdom of Denmark Strategy for the Arctic 2011-2020: Denmark, Greenland and the Faroe Islands*, Governments of Denmark, Greenland and Faroes, 2011.