

Benjamin Schaller

## Defusing the Discourse on “Arctic War”: The Merits of Military Transparency and Confidence- and Security-Building Measures in the Arctic Region

*If someone were to invade the Canadian Arctic, my first task would be to rescue them.*<sup>1</sup>

In recent years, the Arctic region<sup>2</sup> has received increasing political, scientific, and public attention. Geological surveys predict that there are large amounts of untapped oil and gas still covered under thick layers of ice and snow. For decades, extracting this oil and gas was considered unprofitable. Now, as the Arctic ice retreats and oil reserves diminish, extraction is once again under consideration. Hopes are also rising that lucrative shipping routes will open up, considerably shortening transit times between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. The serious challenges these economic prospects pose to the sensitive Arctic ecosystem continue to dominate the Arctic security discourse. As the Arctic states try to secure their share of the spoils and to exercise their regional ambitions, there are those who have begun to consider the possibility of an imminent arms race and the risk of military confrontation in the region. The debate on security in the Arctic is further fuelled by rising tensions between Russia and the West as a consequence of the crisis in and around Ukraine. However, this rather dark prognosis is challenged by many scholars and policy makers – particularly from the region itself – who point to contradictory evidence on the ground (e.g. well-established regional co-operation, the peaceful settlement of territorial disputes in the past, and modest levels of military expansion).<sup>3</sup>

While sharing the view that military confrontation in the High North is unlikely, I will nonetheless make the case for a regional set of Arctic Confidence- and Security-Building Measures (CSBMs), not because of but despite rising tensions between Russia and the West. The main goal of this contribution is to show how a set of regional CSBMs could help to end speculation about military confrontation in the High North while simultaneously deepening regional co-operation. To this end, I will first argue that military confrontation in the High North is unlikely, before discussing how a regional

---

1 Walter Natynczyk, Former Canadian Chief of the Defence Staff, 2009.

2 For reasons of simplicity, the Arctic will in this article be defined as the entire region above the Arctic Circle and the “Arctic states” as all nations with national territories in the region, namely Norway, Canada, the USA, Russia, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, and Iceland.

3 For a comprehensive analysis of the discourse of Arctic geopolitics, cf. Jason Dittmer/Sami Moisio/Alan Ingram/Klaus Dodds, Have you heard the one about the disappearing ice? Recasting Arctic geopolitics, in: *Political Geography* 4/2011, pp. 202-14.

CSBM regime might help to defuse the discourse about the risk of “Arctic War”. I will conclude by presenting some practical ideas for a possible Arctic CSBM regime, drawing partly on the existing arms control and CSBM framework of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

### *The Improbability of “Arctic War”*

Advocates of an interest-driven arms race over the North Pole often point to the growing economic potential of the region, overlapping territorial claims, and an increasing “militarization” of the Arctic region.<sup>4</sup> However, there are good reasons to more carefully examine the underlying assumptions about power and interests on which such analyses are based.

### *Overstating the Economic Factor*

I would like to begin with the most commonly used argument for the risk of military confrontation in the Arctic: the region’s enormous economic potential and the conflicting interests of major Arctic stakeholders. In 2008, a US Geological Survey report estimated that the Arctic probably contains the largest untapped oil and gas reserves in the world.<sup>5</sup> In addition, the increasing accessibility of the Northwest Passage and the Northern Sea Route are of major economic interest, as they considerably reduce the transit times between the Atlantic and the Pacific while avoiding unsecure waters such as those around the Horn of Africa.<sup>6</sup> Controlling both the natural resources and these shipping routes is considered a matter of great significance by the five Arctic littoral states of Norway, Denmark, Canada, Russia, and the United States. Their recent submissions under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)<sup>7</sup> for the extension of their continental shelves (and thus the right to exploit the resources in the seabed) are seen by some as provocative, and overlaps among proposed areas of interest are believed to contain imminent potential for conflict.<sup>8</sup> However, a few major points should be considered.

First, the submissions to UNCLOS are in full accordance with international law and can hardly be described as provocative. They consist solely in the filing of scientific data with the Commission on the Limits of the Con-

---

4 Cf. Rob Huebert, *The Newly Emerging Arctic Security Environment*, Canadian Defence & Foreign Affairs Institute, Calgary 2010; Scott G. Borgerson, Arctic Meltdown. The Economic and Security Implications of Global Warming, in: *Foreign Affairs* 2/2008, pp. 63-77.

5 Cf. US Geological Survey, *Circum-Arctic Resource Appraisal: Estimates of Undiscovered Oil and Gas North of the Arctic Circle*, USGS Fact Sheet 3049, sine loco 2008.

6 Cf. Borgerson, cited above (Note 4), pp. 68-71.

7 More precisely to the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS).

8 Cf. Huebert, cited above (Note 4), p. 1.

tinental Shelf (CLCS) on the extension of the littoral states' continental shelves. The CLCS assesses the various submissions before making recommendations on how to proceed. While the Commission has no mandate to resolve overlapping claims, the UNCLOS refers to various mechanisms for dispute settlement.<sup>9</sup> The Arctic littoral states have so far always followed a path of peaceful dispute settlement and reaffirmed their commitment to international law "and to the orderly settlement of any possible overlapping claims"<sup>10</sup> at the Arctic Ocean Conference in Ilulissat. With the signing of the border delimitation treaty between Norway and Russia in 2010,<sup>11</sup> only a few overlaps remain, with little actual conflict potential.<sup>12</sup> Considering that resource extraction far out in the Arctic Ocean is highly unlikely, the dispute between Canada, Denmark, and Russia over who owns the North Pole is mainly symbolic, and, in 2015, Russia already indicated its readiness to negotiate its overlapping claims there.<sup>13</sup> Disputes such as the one over Hans Island (a "rock" in the Nares Strait between Canada and Greenland) have even become "running gags", with military forces from Canada and Denmark leaving bottles of Danish schnapps and Canadian whisky on the island along with signs welcoming the other side.<sup>14</sup> Finally, it is often overlooked that the vast majority of predicted resources are located either within Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) or in areas that are claimed by only one Arctic littoral state, of which Russia has by far the largest share.<sup>15</sup> In addition, the harsh Arctic climate makes resource extraction extremely difficult and, due to the lack of the necessary infrastructure, approximately twice as expensive as anywhere else in the world. This is particularly true for extraction offshore, where it is as-

- 
- 9 For a more comprehensive discussion of the work of the CLCS with regard to the Arctic region, see: Klaus Dodds, Flag planting and finger pointing. The Law of the Sea, the Arctic and the political geographies of the outer continental shelf, in: *Political Geography* 2/2010, pp. 63-73.
  - 10 *The Ilulissat Declaration*, Arctic Ocean Conference, Ilulissat, Greenland, 27-29 May 2008, p. 1.
  - 11 Cf. *Treaty between the Kingdom of Norway and the Russian Federation concerning Maritime Delimitation and Cooperation in the Barents Sea and the Arctic Ocean* [2010].
  - 12 An overview of the submissions is maintained by the IBRU: Centre for Borders Research at Durham University, cf. *Map of maritime jurisdiction and boundaries in the Arctic region*, at: <https://www.dur.ac.uk/ibru/resources/arctic>.
  - 13 Atle Staalesen, Russia ready to talk with Denmark over North Pole, *Barents Observer*, 5 August 2015, at: <http://barentsobserver.com/en/arctic/2015/08/russia-ready-talk-denmark-over-north-pole-05-08>.
  - 14 Cf. Dan Levin, Canada and Denmark Fight Over Island With Whisky and Schnapps, in: *The New York Times*, 7 November 2016, at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/08/world/what-in-the-world/canada-denmark-hans-island-whisky-schnapps.html>.
  - 15 Cf. James Henderson/Julia Loe, *The Prospects and Challenges for Arctic Oil Development*, OIES Paper: WPM 54, November 2014, at: <http://www.oxfordenergy.org/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/WPM-56.pdf>, p. 55; Mikkel Runge Olesen, *After Ukraine: Keeping the Arctic stable*, DIIS Policy Brief, 29 September 2014, at: <https://www.diis.dk/en/research/after-ukraine-keeping-the-arctic-stable>; Shamil Midkhatovich Yenikeeff/Timothy Fenton Krysiak, *The Battle for the Next Energy Frontier: The Russian Polar Expedition and the Future of Arctic Hydrocarbons*, OxfordEnergy comment, August 2007, at: <https://www.oxfordenergy.org/publications/the-battle-for-the-next-energy-frontier-the-russian-polar-expedition-and-the-future-of-arctic-hydrocarbons-2>.

sumed that most undiscovered resources lie. Many studies thus conclude not only that it will remain very expensive, but also that it is highly unlikely that the bulk of Arctic resources will be allocated unilaterally.<sup>16</sup> In other words, the Arctic littoral states have the most to lose from a military confrontation, as they are required to co-operate for technical reasons if they want to access the economic benefits of their regional share. International sanctions on oil and gas equipment following the illegal annexation of Crimea have, for example, basically brought Russia's Arctic resource extraction programmes to a complete halt.

### *Practical Constraints on Arctic Warfare*

The harsh Arctic climate not only has severe consequences for the profitability of Arctic resource extraction, but also places practical constraints on the conduct of military operations. With the large Arctic Ocean covered in ice for most of the year, and temperatures that can drop below minus 40 degrees Celsius, the overall military presence in the Arctic is still relatively low in comparison to other regions. Sustaining military infrastructure and even conducting military activities (e.g. exercises) are highly expensive and pose severe challenges to service members and equipment. Consequently, armed forces in the Arctic region are often more a symbol of national sovereignty and prestige than of military power projection. An exemplary illustration is provided by the Danish elite navy unit "Slædepatruljen Sirius" (Sirius Dog Sled Patrol). Studies have shown that the extreme cold and darkness have a considerable impact on the physical and psychological health of the participating soldiers.<sup>17</sup> The unit, consisting of twelve soldiers split up into dogsled teams of two, patrols approximately 16,000 kilometres of coastline in Northern Greenland.<sup>18</sup> Due to the extremely low temperatures, the unit is equipped with the M1917 Enfield, a bolt-action rifle used during the First World War. More modern, gas-operated semi-automatic rifles are far less reliable in the cold environment of Northern Greenland and put the soldiers at greater risk of attack by polar bears. The Arctic also places constraints on the deployment of other conventional military equipment such as battle tanks and heavy artillery, which require a far more elaborate military infrastructure in low tem-

---

16 Cf. Henderson/Loe, cited above (Note 15); *Opportunities and Challenges for Arctic Oil and Gas Development*, Eurasia Group report for The Wilson Center, Washington, D.C., at: [https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Arctic%20Report\\_F2.pdf](https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Arctic%20Report_F2.pdf); Olesen, cited above (Note 15); Yenikeeff/Krysiek, cited above (Note 15).

17 Cf. Anders Kjærgaard/Gloria R. Leon/Birgit A. Fink, Personal Challenges, Communication Processes, and Team Effectiveness in Military Special Patrol Teams Operating in a Polar Environment, in: *Environment and Behavior* 6/2015, pp. 644-666.

18 Cf. Forsvarskommando, "Jeg kan overleve overalt" ["I Can Survive Anywhere"], 2016, at: <http://www2.forsvaret.dk/uddannelsessite/uddannelser/specialstyrker/Pages/siriusartikel.aspx>.

peratures (e.g. for preheating engines or maintenance) than currently exists in the region.<sup>19</sup>

Military capabilities in the Arctic and national modernization plans in the region also seem to be overstated. Despite warnings of “militarization” or an “arms race” in the Arctic, two consecutive studies by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) from 2012 and 2016 draw a less alarming picture. They both conclude that the military presence in the region continues to be small in scale and far below Cold War levels. Arctic military modernization and procurement plans – which tend to be particularly costly – often proceed slowly or are even completely called off. Most changes that do take place have little to do with offensive military postures and the safeguarding of territorial claims; instead, they are connected with protecting and policing territorial waters and existing state borders and supporting Search and Rescue (SAR) operations.<sup>20</sup> Looking, for example, at the sparsely populated northern parts of Russia and Canada, it is not surprising that these tasks are undertaken, or at least supported, by specifically trained and equipped military personnel. As the former Chief of the Canadian Defence Staff, General Walter Natynczyk, once put it: “If someone were to invade the Canadian Arctic, my first task would be to rescue them.”<sup>21</sup>

To sum up, there are good reasons to believe that military conflict is highly unlikely to break out in the Arctic. In fact, the harsh Arctic climate and rudimentary infrastructure have always fostered particularly close cooperation in the sparsely populated High North, and the Arctic littoral states in particular have much more to lose than to gain from military confrontation if they intend to make the Arctic economically useable. In addition, the level of military presence in the Arctic is often exaggerated, and many practical constraints are usually overlooked.

### *Defusing the Discourse*

To say that the Arctic is a region of low tension is not to deny that it faces considerable challenges. The region has always been of major geostrategic importance. As tensions between NATO and Russia increase, it might thus be useful to consider steps to prevent dangerous misperceptions and avoid unintended military escalation in the High North. To this end, let us first look more closely at the geopolitical importance of the Arctic, before trying to

19 Cf. Marcus M. Keupp, Five Nations Jockey for Military Influence in Arctic, in: *National Defense*, 1 March 2016, at: <http://www.nationaldefensemagazine.org/articles/2016/2/29/2016march-five-nations-jockey-for-military-influence-in-arctic>.

20 Cf. Siemon T. Wezeman, *Military Capabilities in the Arctic*, SIPRI Background Paper, March 2012, pp. 13-14; and Siemon T. Wezeman, *Military Capabilities in the Arctic: A New Cold War in the High North?* SIPRI Background Paper, October 2016, p. 22, available at: <https://www.sipri.org/about/bios/siemon-t-wezeman>.

21 Quoted in: Keupp, cited above (Note 19).

draw lessons from the OSCE and discussing how a more comprehensive approach to security in the High North could help to defuse the discourse on the risk of military confrontation in the Arctic.

### *The Geostrategic Importance of the High North*

On a typical map of the world,<sup>22</sup> the geostrategic importance of the Arctic is not immediately evident. This changes instantly when one looks at the world “from above” (see Figure 1). Ever since the Cold War, the Arctic – over which the shortest route between Russia/the Soviet Union and the continental United States passes – has played an important role in the nuclear deterrence strategies of both sides. It is, for example, an open secret that most of Russia’s strategic nuclear missiles, air defence systems, and strategic missile submarines are stationed in the Russian Arctic, mainly on the Kola Peninsula. On the other side of the border, Norway’s rugged coastline and adjacency to Russia are crucial for military intelligence and NATO’s control over the Atlantic Ocean.<sup>23</sup> While Russia’s Baltic and Black Sea Fleets need to pass the maritime bottlenecks of the Kattegat, the Bosphorus, and the Strait of Gibraltar, the Northern Fleet, stationed on the Kola Peninsula, is mainly constrained by the Arctic ice cap, which pushes it closer to the Norwegian coast. As the ice melts, the manoeuvrability of the Northern Fleet will increase, and with it its geostrategic importance. While geostrategic importance does not automatically lead to military confrontation, it can still increase the risk of spill-over effects and unintended military escalation.<sup>24</sup> Recent large exercises in the Arctic, including several “snap exercises”,<sup>25</sup> held in quick succession and close geographical proximity, are not the result of competing regional interests but rather the consequence of a more tense European security environment.<sup>26</sup> This shows that some of the biggest challenges to Arctic security may come from the outside. The question that remains is how to tackle them.

22 For instance, a Mercator projection centred on the equator.

23 Cf. Kristian Åtland, Russia’s Armed Forces and the Arctic. All Quiet on the Northern Front? In: *Contemporary Security Policy* 2/2011, pp. 267-285, here: pp. 269-271; Ronald E. Doel/Robert Marc Friedman/Julia Lajus/Sverker Sörlin/Urban Wråkberg, Strategic Arctic science. National interests in building natural knowledge – interwar era through the Cold War, in: *Journal of Historical Geography*, April 2014, pp. 60-80, here: pp. 67-74.

24 Cf. Wezeman, 2016, cited above (Note 20), p. 23.

25 Snap exercises are conducted without prior announcement to the troops involved or through formalized international communication channels. This increases the risk of mis-interpretation and unintended escalation.

26 E.g., in March 2015, Norway conducted its annual military exercise “Joint Viking” in proximity to the Russian border in Finnmark. The exercise, in which some 5,000 troops participated, was Norway’s largest military drill in the area since 1967. Just hours after the exercise concluded, 38,000 Russian troops, more than 3,000 military vehicles, 41 naval vessels, 15 submarines and over 100 military aircraft of the Russian Northern Fleet were put on full combat alert.



Figure 1: Arctic Region (Source: CIA World Fact Book, 2009)

### *Learning from the OSCE? Taking a More Comprehensive Approach to Arctic Security*

Founded in 1996, after the tense military standoff of the Cold War, the Arctic Council has become the most important multilateral forum for Arctic policy-making. Unlike the OSCE – its “brother in spirit” – the Arctic Council not only limits its focus to aspects of economic, environmental, and human security, but even explicitly excludes military security from its agenda. The

main reasoning behind this was that the Arctic states intended to concentrate on unifying issues of common interest and to put aside those issues that bore a risk of disrupting regional co-operation. This “selective” approach to security continues to be one of the most highly debated issues among Arctic scholars and policy makers. While proponents of the current structure argue that it is precisely the exclusion of controversial issues such as military security that has prevented the Council from becoming paralysed, others take the view that the current rifts in the international security environment are too far-reaching to simply be left aside. Following Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea, we can once again observe a rise in military tensions and a significant decrease in the mutual trust that was so carefully built up after the end of the Cold War. This is, unfortunately, also true for Russia’s relations with its Arctic neighbours. Against this backdrop, observers including Heather Conley and Matthew Melino from the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) argue that the Arctic Council “has truly come of age” and is nonetheless at risk of becoming “inert or irrelevant” if it does not adapt to this new geopolitical situation.<sup>27</sup> One possible way forward, they suggest, is a complete redesign of the Arctic Council, based on the model of the OSCE.<sup>28</sup>

The OSCE’s so-called comprehensive approach to security (covering politico-military, economic and environmental, and human security), was able to overcome the military bloc-to-bloc confrontation of the Cold War by increasing mutual transparency and trust while simultaneously establishing a co-operative understanding of European security. Given the Arctic states’ good track record of co-operation on economic, environmental, and human security, as well as the significant interests at stake, it may also be worth exploring co-operative approaches to military security in the High North. As noted above, these would not be a direct reaction to an imminent conflict, but would rather serve to underpin and protect the good levels of regional co-operation that already exist. Since all Arctic states are also OSCE participating States, it seems reasonable to build upon the Organization’s 40 years of expertise in enhancing military transparency and predictability in Europe. The relevant OSCE CSBMs differ from classical approaches to arms control and disarmament in that they seek neither to actively reduce military capabilities nor to restrict deployments or activities, but instead focus on increasing transparency and predictability through regular exchanges of military information, verification measures, and additional forms of military co-operation. In this way, they played a major role in lowering military tensions and reducing the risk of dangerous misunderstandings, helping to establish mutual confidence and trust between the two former rival military blocs.<sup>29</sup>

27 Heather A. Conley/Matthew Melino, *An Arctic Redesign: Recommendations to Rejuvenate the Arctic Council*, Report of the CSIS Europe Program, February 2016, pp. 1-3.

28 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 4.

29 Cf. Zdzisław Lachowski/Adam Daniel Rotfeld, Success or Failure? CSBMs in the Post-Cold War Environment, in: Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg/IFSH (ed.), *OSCE Yearbook 2001*, Baden-Baden 2002, pp. 315-329;



*The Merits of Confidence- and Security-Building Measures in the Arctic Region*

Though the Arctic currently enjoys high levels of co-operation and stability, the potential positive effects of a regional CSBM regime should not be overlooked. Moreover, existing CSBM regimes explicitly encourage the adoption of additional regional measures within their areas of application.<sup>30</sup> Drawing from the experiences of the OSCE, a regional CSBM regime in the Arctic could not only contribute to safeguarding the already high levels of co-operation but even further strengthen them, while also enabling a more co-operative approach to military security. It could increase overall levels of military transparency, establish mutual understanding of the military intentions of the Arctic states, and provide reassurance about the defensive nature of military activities, troop deployments, and modernization plans for the region. This could also send a strong signal of the Arctic states' full commitment to international law and the peaceful settlement of disputes, thereby making an essential contribution to defusing the discourse about military confrontation in the High North.

To conclude, while the Arctic has so far represented a region of high stability and co-operation, it does not, despite its apparent remoteness, exist in isolation from the rest of the world. To protect the already high level of regional co-operation, it might thus be worthwhile to consider proactive steps to increase military stability and predictability and to reduce the risk of unintended military escalation. Inspiration for this endeavour could be drawn from the 40 years of experience of the OSCE, more particularly from its CSBM regimes.

*Possible Elements of an Arctic Regime of Confidence- and Security-Building Measures*

In the previous sections, we concluded that unpredictability, lack of transparency, dangerous misperceptions, and unintended military escalation pose far greater challenges to military security in the High North than do accelerating arms races and that a regional CSBM regime could help to mitigate these risks by increasing military transparency and predictability in the region. This can of course only be achieved if a regional CSBM regime in the Arctic is carefully tailored to the specific needs and requirements of the region and not merely a duplication or extension of existing instruments. In this last section,

---

Frank Evers/Martin Kahl/Wolfgang Zellner, *The Culture of Dialogue: The OSCE Acquis 30 Years after Helsinki*, CORE – Centre for OSCE Research/Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg (IFSH), Hamburg 2005, p. 5.

30 Cf. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, *Vienna Document 2011 on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures*, FSC.DOC/1/11, Vienna, 30 November 2011, available at: <http://www.osce.org/fsc/86597>, p. 44.

I will present some food for thought on what elements a possible Arctic CSBM regime could contain, building, inter alia, upon the existing arms control and CSBM framework of the OSCE. As the goal is to increase transparency and predictability and to foster co-operation, the emphasis will be on the politically binding Vienna Document 2011 (VD11)<sup>31</sup> and the legally binding Treaty on Open Skies (OS). I would like to stress at this point that these proposals solely reflect my personal view about what might (at least theoretically) be possible. The exact details would of course be up for negotiation and debate.

### *Area of Application*

The area of application should at least include all sovereign land and sea territories above the Arctic Circle and, to be functional, should also include EEZs and the international waters of the Arctic Ocean.

For instance, the VD11 zone of application is defined as covering “the whole of Europe as well as the adjoining sea area and air space”.<sup>32</sup> Thus, only the European Arctic territories of Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia west of the Urals, as well as the Arctic Ocean (only concerning military activities), are included. However, as naval forces are barely covered by the document, there is little information exchanged and/or to be verified regarding the Arctic Ocean. Up to the present time, the only treaty that stretches far enough to cover the entire region is the OS Treaty, which defines its zone of application as “the land, including islands, and internal and territorial waters, over which a State Party exercises sovereignty”.<sup>33</sup> However, even though the EEZs and international waters of the Arctic Ocean are not explicitly excluded, there is again no relevant military information exchanged that could be verified by the co-operative observation flights of the OS Treaty. Let us therefore turn to the area of information exchanges.

---

31 The Vienna Document is regularly reviewed (at least every five years). All changes that find consensus among the 57 OSCE participating States become effective immediately (if not stated otherwise). Since no agreement was reached in 2016, the Vienna Document from November 2011 remains the operative version.

32 Ibid., p. 49. “In this context, the notion of adjoining sea area is understood to refer also to ocean areas adjoining Europe” (ibid.).

33 *Treaty on Open Skies*, 24 March 1992, available at: <http://www.osce.org/library/14127>, p. 2.

| Region        | Vienna Document | Treaty on Open Skies |
|---------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| Europe        | 100 per cent    | ca. 94 per cent      |
| Arctic Region | ca. 2 per cent* | ca. 36 per cent      |

\* only the sovereign territories of Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, and Sweden within Europe

Table 1: Coverage of Europe and the Arctic by existing CSBM regimes

### Information Exchange

Like the VD11, an Arctic CSBM regime should provide for annual exchanges of military information. This information should include the number and peacetime location of troops and military equipment permanently stationed in the region as well as details of any forces deployed temporarily above the Arctic Circle. The categories of weapon and equipment systems should ideally be extended to include those of particular importance for the Arctic security environment. For example, an Arctic CSBM regime should provide more information about transport aircraft, logistic troops, and naval forces, as they play a key role in modern warfare and are so far not sufficiently covered by existing CSBM regimes. Information could be exchanged not only regarding peacetime locations, but also whenever these forces are operational within the area of application.<sup>34</sup> For example, the Arctic states could notify whenever naval forces enter or leave one of the SAR regions as defined in the Arctic Search and Rescue Agreement (see Figure 2 below).<sup>35</sup> This information would not only increase military transparency but further enhance operating security and facilitate the co-ordination of SAR operations in the region.

In addition, the annual exchanges of military information should also contain information about the Arctic States' defence and force planning, changes in military doctrines, and military expenditures and budgets. This information would enhance the picture of military capabilities in the Arctic and contribute to increased transparency and predictability in the region. The same holds true for the prior announcement of larger military exercises and manoeuvres. Under the current provisions of the VD11, these exercises are announced at least 42 days in advance to all OSCE participating States, whenever their size reaches the thresholds for involved military personnel or certain types of weapons and equipment. As these thresholds date from the

34 As roughly 64 per cent of the region consists of international waters (or EEZs), there would otherwise be a significant blind spot in a potential future Arctic CSBM regime.

35 Cf. *Agreement on Cooperation on Aeronautical and Maritime Search and Rescue in the Arctic* [2011], pp. 10-15.

end of the Cold War, they should be lowered considerably and should include additional military equipment and forces to adapt to the military realities in the Arctic today.

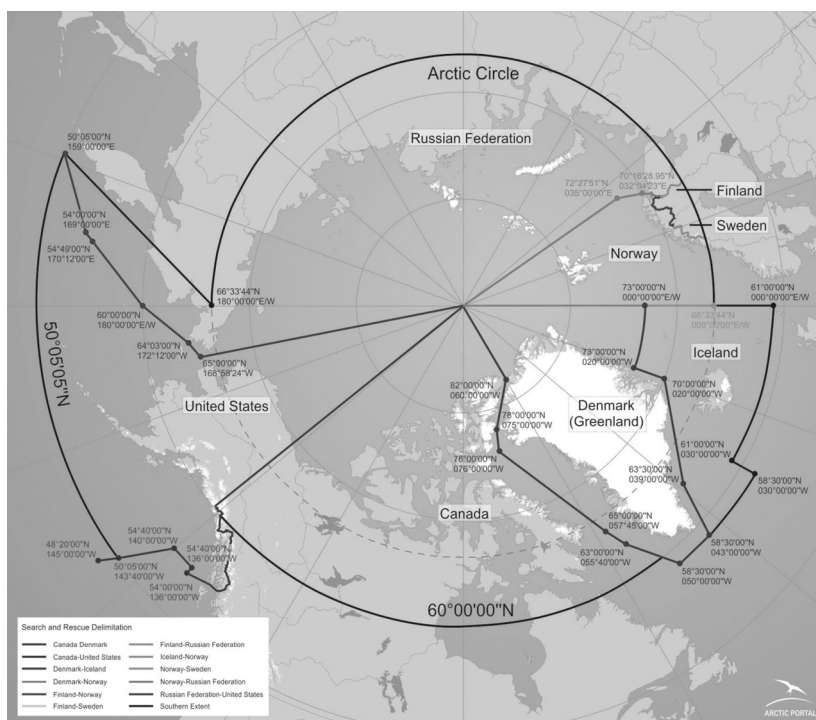


Figure 2: Search and Rescue regions (Source: Arctic Portal, 2011)

### Verification

To validate the information exchanged and to increase the level of transparency and trust, an Arctic CSBM regime should also contain several provisions for verification. While the regime should retain the mechanisms for inspections (verification of suspected activities in defined geographical areas) and evaluation visits (verification of troop formations at their peacetime locations) as outlined in the VD11,<sup>36</sup> several modifications could contribute to a more modern and co-operative verification regime. First, the distinction between evaluation visits and inspection quotas should be dropped entirely, as it is already blurred in practice anyway. Second, the number of verification

36 Cf. *Vienna Document 2011 on Confidence and Security-Building Measures* [2011], pp. 32-43.

visits a state is required to receive (“passive quota”) should not only be based on the quantity of military units deployed, but also reflect the scale of a state’s military activities in the area of application. Third, to compensate for this, the number of verification missions a state can conduct (“active quota”) should correspond to its passive quota. Fourth, it should be mandatory for each state to conduct a proportion of these verification measures in co-operation with other participating States to further foster confidence-building among the armed forces of the Arctic states. Fifth, all military exercises and manoeuvres exceeding certain thresholds (ideally lower than currently provided for by the VD11), conducted without prior announcement to troops (“snap exercises”), or carried out together with at least two other participating States should be open for observation by other participating States.

These more regular forms of verification could be complemented by co-operative observation flights (ideally involving personnel from as many Arctic states as possible) to collect information about marine traffic in the various regions of the Arctic Ocean. This information could be used to verify naval presences and activities in the region and to supplement information for SAR missions, maritime law enforcement, and border control, as well as for the detection and observation of oil spills<sup>37</sup> and other environmental disasters. The most cost-effective way to set up this kind of aerial observation regime would be to make use of the existing aircraft and infrastructure of the OS regime, which would require little more than the designation of a small number of additional airfields in the northern reaches of the Arctic states.

#### *Risk Reduction, Incident Response, and Military Contacts*

To further reduce the risk of unintended incidents and to establish adequate mechanisms for incident response, the Arctic states could consider maintaining a list of points of contact and establishing, wherever possible, direct lines of communication. Furthermore, they should consider developing a set of common rules for operating in the Arctic that ideally also specify appropriate conduct to preserve the sensitive Arctic ecosystem. These rules could be reviewed and updated in regular meetings, which could also serve as a venue for discussing potentially dangerous incidents similar to those that have occurred in the past.

Furthermore, mirroring the provisions of the VD11, an Arctic CSBM regime should contain various mechanisms to foster direct military-to-military contacts and to build and increase mutual confidence and trust between the states’ armed forces. These mechanisms could include joint military exercises and training, regular visits to military facilities and formations, regular high-level meetings to discuss doctrinal changes with direct effects on the Arctic region, common workshops, visits, and exchanges between the armed

---

37 Cf., in particular, *Agreement on Cooperation on Marine Oil Pollution Preparedness and Response in the Arctic* [2013].

forces, and regular reviews of the implementation and modernization needs of the Arctic CSBM regime. These measures could even incorporate existing forums such as the (currently suspended) meetings of the Arctic Chiefs of Defence Staff, the Arctic Security Forces Roundtable (ASFR), and the recently established Arctic Coast Guard Forum.

### *Conclusion*

While this contribution does not claim to be a full-fledged analysis of military security in the Arctic region, I hope to have shown why alarmism about an accelerating arms race and the increasing risk of military confrontation in the Arctic must be treated with some scepticism. The economic prospects in the region do not seem to justify such a pessimistic outlook, nor is it accounted for by current developments on the ground. In fact, the contrary is true. Military capabilities in the Arctic are often exaggerated, and many practical constraints are often overlooked, as is the fact that the harsh Arctic climate has always led to particularly close co-operation. As stated above, the Arctic states have far more to lose from military confrontation than they have to gain, as they need each other if they intend to benefit from the region's resource wealth.

As tensions between Russia and the West rise, well-established regional co-operation in the Arctic is coming under scrutiny. How should this co-operation be protected from negative spillover effects? I have shown how the broadening of the Arctic security agenda – and particularly an Arctic Confidence- and Security-Building regime – could help to increase military transparency and predictability in the High North and further reinforce the existing good level of regional co-operation. As well as being cost-effective, many of the proposals presented above would also contribute to addressing issues of non-military security in the High North (e.g. SAR, border security, oil spills). A regime of this kind would serve the common interests of major stakeholders, and a potential Arctic CSBM regime could even serve as an example for ongoing efforts to modernize the OSCE's arms control framework. To this end, it is important to broaden our understanding of CSBMs, which should be seen not merely as a reactive tool to counter immediate threats to peace and security, but rather as a proactive way to create and further strengthen the structural conditions for peace and stability among OSCE participating States.