

Arctic Policy: Learning from Current Arctic Strategies



Photo Credit: USCG Petty Officer 2nd Class Richard Wells
Photo background: U.S. Coast Guard Petty Officer 2nd Class Richard Wells pulls himself out from the Arctic Ocean during ice rescue training in order to qualify as a member of an ice rescue team. More details at:
<https://www.dvidshub.net/image/4805680/coast-guard-cutter-healy-conducts-arctic-patrol-support-office-naval-research>



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Introduction

State operations in the Arctic have existed for decades, however, only within the last 10-15 years has there been a significant increase in year-round commercial and military activity. The environment's rapidly receding ice and rising temperatures have led to navigation, free of icebreakers, using the Northwest and Northeast passages. These passages are now usable for continually longer periods while also subject to rapidly changing and unpredictable conditions. Additionally, the Arctic is home to an estimated 30% of the world's undiscovered natural gas, one trillion dollars worth of earth minerals, and a one billion dollar fishing industry in Alaska alone (USCG Arctic Strategic Outlook, 3). In addition to the wealth of resources, the geopolitics and outstanding legal questions of the region pose a unique challenge for states that operate there. Arctic policy is dependent upon the leadership in these nations and that leadership will shift over time. For example, in January of 2021 President Biden signed an executive order placing a moratorium on the Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Leasing Program, as established under the previous administration, in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (Executive Order, Sec. 4). It is stated in the President's executive order that during the moratorium "The Secretary shall review the program and, as appropriate and consistent with applicable law, conduct a new, comprehensive analysis of the potential environmental impacts of the oil and gas program"(Executive Order, Sec. 4). Changing policies can create different challenges for those operating in the region.

This report analyzes the similarities and differences of the military-oriented Arctic strategies for four Arctic states in order to understand common priorities and strengthen future US agencies' documents related to the region. During the research, we have identified overlapping goals and challenges for Arctic operations including the utilization of partnerships, closing communications gaps, closing operational gaps such as environmental forecasting and modeling and troop readiness, exercising the right of sovereignty, and investment in and maintenance of infrastructure.

This paper will compare the following strategy documents from the United States, Canada, Russia, and Denmark.

United States

- Department of Defense Arctic Strategy (2019) (DoD Strategy)
- US Coast Guard Arctic Strategic Outlook (2019) (USCG Strategy)
- US Navy Strategic Outlook for the Arctic (2019) (Navy Strategy)
- Department of the Navy: A Strategic Blueprint for the Arctic (2021) (Updated Navy Strategy)
- The Department of the Air Force Arctic Strategy (2020) (USAF Strategy)

Canada

- Arctic and Northern Policy Framework: Safety, security, and defence chapter (2019)
- Strong, Secure, Engaged (Canada's Defence Policy) (2017)

Denmark

- The Ministry of Defence's Future Task Solution in the Arctic (2016)
- Kingdom of Denmark Strategy for the Arctic 2011–2020 (2010)

Russia

- The Foundations of Russian Federation Policy in the Arctic until 2020 and Beyond (2008)

- The Strategy for the Development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation and National Security up to 2020 (2013)

Note: This report analyzes two Russian documents from 2008 and 2013. A more recent Arctic strategy (*Basic Principles of Russian Federation State Policy in the Arctic to 2035*) was released in March 2020 but an English translation was not available at the time of this report.

As public documents, strategies serve to communicate priorities and directions internally and externally. Often, they are high-level descriptions of priorities and intentions without significant implementation details. This research focused on the content of strategies along with companion documents when available such as implementation plans and addenda. The report does not assume that lack of detail in a strategy equals lack of execution on the ground. Rather, the analysis focuses on a comparison of the strengths in the strategies of the four countries, understanding that implementation details may not be contained in external (i.e., public) documents. While beyond the scope of this analysis, additional intelligence documents likely reveal details and future plans.

The Importance of Arctic Partnerships

Amicable cooperation with Arctic states and other Arctic stakeholders is a priority for each of the countries analyzed. Given the harsh environment of the Arctic, partnerships are a critical part of operating there. Partnerships are a core piece of these countries' Arctic operations and are used as a tool to better equip and prepare for situations that may arise in the region. With most operations in the Arctic, from training exercises to improving communications, effectiveness is maximized when partnerships are functional and utilized to their full extent. Because each of the Arctic states is facing similar environmental conditions, and therefore similar challenges, collaboration can more efficiently overcome a shared problem.

A well-developed example of a multilateral partnership among the eight Arctic Council countries is the Arctic Coast Guard Forum (ACGF). The ACGF is a partnership driven by common operational needs which sees collaboration in areas such as icebreaking, emergency response, and search and rescue (SAR). At its creation, the need for an operations-focused partnership overrode existing tensions among some Arctic states. Five years after its creation, the ACGF has matured into an operator-run partnership which prioritizes the Coast Guard roles in the region (Pincus, 2020).

A second notable example of a partnership is the International Cooperative Engagement Program for Polar Research Memorandum of Understanding (ICE-PPR MOU). This memorandum entered into effect on November 27, 2020. The MOU uses the ICE-PPR as a vehicle for the collaboration. The ICE-PPR partnership includes participation from:

- United States of America Department of Defense (USA DoD)
- The Department of National Defence of Canada (CAN DND)
- The Ministry of Defence of the Kingdom of Denmark (DEN MOD)
- The Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Finland (FIN MOD)
- The New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF)
- The Ministry of Defence of the Kingdom of Norway (NOR MOD)
- The Government of the Kingdom of Sweden (SWE)

This collaboration between partners is set to last twenty-five years. Under the ICE-PPR MOU, representatives from each participating nation will assess their shared goals in the polar region. Four working groups will specifically focus on “Environmental, Human Performance, Platforms, and Situational Awareness” in the region. Overall, the new long-term MOU will help expand partnerships in the region while simultaneously enabling collaboration on shared issues, and their respective solutions.

Each state prioritizes partnerships to varying degrees. Canada and the US have the strongest emphasis on partnerships, including both domestic and international partners. International partnerships enable joint training exercises and working together toward common objectives with both NORAD and NATO states. Denmark, also a member of NATO, prioritizes domestic and international partners, many of which are focused on domestic relationships in terms of SAR and surveillance missions. In contrast, Russia emphasizes domestic partners in its strategies including national organizations and public-private partnerships. Overall, the partnership focus of the US agencies is robust in comparison to the other states analyzed.

Communications

The Arctic region poses a unique challenge for those who wish to operate there. The region's high latitude and extreme environment mean that the transmission of radio signals is difficult. The harsh environment and challenge of implementing and maintaining infrastructure have proven difficult for all parties involved. Some of the states and Arctic stakeholders in the region have used the strength of collaboration to help overcome this gap.

Canada and the US have the most detailed goals to close the communications gap in the region. Canada states in its *Strong, Secure, Engaged (Canada's Defence Policy)(2017)* that there are plans to use a system of systems approach to communications in the Arctic with investment largely from the Royal Canadian Air Force. Similarly, the USAF document has promising plans to produce an Arctic communications roadmap and collaborate with other states toward this end. Similar to Canada, within the Russian documents, there is a goal for the period of 2011-2015 for effective communications along the Northern Sea Route, however, there is a shortage of specifics for execution. Denmark has prioritized establishing communication links through satellite communication modules and has identified the necessary funding. This remains an area in need of attention and effective partnerships.

Closing other operational gaps

States that operate in the Arctic region must be prepared to handle the harsh environment with extreme weather and a desolate landscape. Additionally, due to the rapidly changing environment, an effective environmental forecasting/modeling system is necessary to maintain operational readiness.

While all of the countries analyzed have an emphasis on maintaining SAR readiness, some include specific measures for training in the region. Canada's strategies discuss the utilization of annual training exercises such as NANOOK, to train the Canadian military to better operate in the Arctic region. Additionally, it trains people from a variety of indigenous communities, local communities/resources, and federal agencies. The US documents include similar content with training exercises, such as the Navy's ICEX and utilization of cold-weather/harsh environment training facilities. Training exercises and other operational readiness preparations are often done in partnership with other states and Arctic stakeholders. Russia notes

maintaining troops conditioned for the environment while Denmark has goals for increasing troop readiness.

Being able to forecast and model the Arctic environment is an important tool for those who operate in the region. Under the goal to strengthen domain awareness and surveillance, Canada includes ideas to create updated imagery for environmental reconnaissance. There are also plans to create a system of systems approach utilizing land, air, and space capabilities for surveillance. Denmark's *Kingdom of Denmark Strategy* includes a plan to create a modeling system for the Arctic to focus on inland ice and surrounding waters through their Climate Research Centre in Nuuk. In comparison, the US plan for forecasting and modeling utilizes information from a variety of domestic partners, both federal and civilian. Continued support in both areas of training and development/execution of environmental forecasting is necessary to maintain operational readiness for the US. In both areas, continued partnership with like-minded partners is key.

Exercising the right of sovereignty

The Arctic is an operational setting that is undergoing rapid environmental changes. With increasing military operations and commercial activity in the area, questions about sovereignty and rights to operate in the region continue to rise. States exercise their sovereignty in a number of ways: these might include regular and visible operations within the region, challenging what is allowed under international law, challenging parties who encroach on a nation's sovereignty, and projection of power within the region.

There are open questions of international law relevant to the strategies that are, at times, directly referenced within the documents. The DOD Arctic Strategy states that "Russia and Canada claim the right to regulate Arctic waters in excess of the authority permitted under international law" (DOD Arctic Strategy, 4). Specifically, Russian claims control over the Northern Sea Route, part of the Northeast Passage, and states that foreign vessels must obtain Russian permission and escorts before entering the Route. In addition, Canada claims the waters of the Northwest Passage as inland waters that are wholly under Canadian control and therefore, not an international waterway. The US disputes these claims.

China also is pushing boundaries of international law related to the Arctic. As the DOD report notes, "Despite having no territorial claims in the region, China is seeking a role in Arctic governance" (DOD Strategy, 4). China has self-classified as a "Near Arctic State." This classification is not recognized under international law; rather, it is a creation linked to China's economic interest in the region. These claims represent open questions and potential sources of friction between states.

Canada enforces its sovereignty by maintaining control of its land and air regions and has plans for investment of new patrol boats, land terrain vehicles and other infrastructure to allow the Canadian Armed forces to respond to situations or missions more efficiently. The US also displays sovereignty through the projection of power and regular exercises in the region. In addition, the USAF strategy states that Alaska will soon become home to a large concentration of f-35s. The 2008 Russia strategy discusses the combat readiness of troops and the defense of sovereignty. Denmark's strategies, specifically the *Kingdom of Denmark Strategy*, focus on enforcement of sovereignty through the creation of a Joint Arctic Command.

The US Navy's updated blueprint outlines a series of goals that primarily focus on bolstering their capability in the Arctic region. Two of their three primary objectives are maintaining an enhanced presence in the area and building a more capable arctic naval force

(Updated Navy Strategy, 2021). These two objectives, supported by the third goal to strengthen their partnerships, will enable the US Navy to exercise its right of sovereignty. It is important to note that this updated document prioritizes a US Naval presence that extends far beyond supporting the Coast Guard or under-ice operations.

The overarching theme for these states is operational readiness. To maintain national sovereignty and projection of power, a state's armed forces need to be ready to respond to a variety of threats; this operational readiness includes having and maintaining equipment and infrastructure utilized in the process. Because the Arctic environment is harsh, lack of infrastructure or reliable equipment can leave a state at a disadvantage.

Investment in infrastructure

Infrastructure in the Arctic is both hard to build and maintain due to variables such as rapid cycles of freezing and thawing and the challenges of building on permafrost, especially with possible thawing due to climate change. Before comparing levels of infrastructure, it is necessary to understand that for Arctic states and other stakeholders it is a balance of priorities including funding and human and ship resources in demand in other parts of the world.

All of the states have plans to invest in infrastructure. Canada and Russia show the strongest investment in a diversity of infrastructure. Canada's strategy calls for investment in icebreakers, patrol vessels, Arctic hanger, land terrain vehicles, and new aircraft. By comparison, Denmark and the US do not include investment in a base or Arctic hanger. While Russia doesn't explicitly note structural investment, Russia has built six bases since 2013 (USCG Strategy, 3). Denmark's investments focused heavily on enabling effective SAR missions.

Although the US has detailed goals for investment, it is noteworthy what is *not* included. The USCG document notes that the closest CG air station is about "820 nautical miles south of Utqiagvik, AK, which is nearly the same distance as from Boston, MA to Miami, FL" (USCG Arctic Strategy Outlook, 11). Even with the disadvantage of distance, the US shows no evidence of a plan to invest in a closer airbase or a military base in the region. It raises the oft-asked question of whether the lack of US Arctic infrastructure means a strategic disadvantage in comparison to Russia which is heavily invested. The complicated answer is yes and no. Existing US infrastructure in the region is adequate for the current level of military and commercial activity in the area; however, a lack of planned infrastructure may damage the US position in 10-30 years in the future. Establishing infrastructure in the Arctic will depend not only on balancing priorities but also understanding the changing environment.

Conclusion

The harsh and rapidly changing Arctic environment lends itself to shared challenges among the Arctic states. Analysis of the military-focused Arctic strategies of the US, Canada, Denmark and Russia showed significant areas of commonality. The common priorities for the Arctic are the utilization of partnerships, exercising the right of sovereignty, closing operational gaps, and investing in equipment and infrastructure in the region. What may not be similar among states is how those obstacles are overcome. States are addressing operational gaps in areas of communications, training for environmental conditions, forecasting and modeling environmental factors, and challenges in building and maintaining infrastructure.

Prioritization of these challenges often coincides with maintaining strategic advantage and maintaining domestic security. Understanding the shared challenges, priorities and status of implementation in other Arctic states and increasing forecasting and communications capabilities

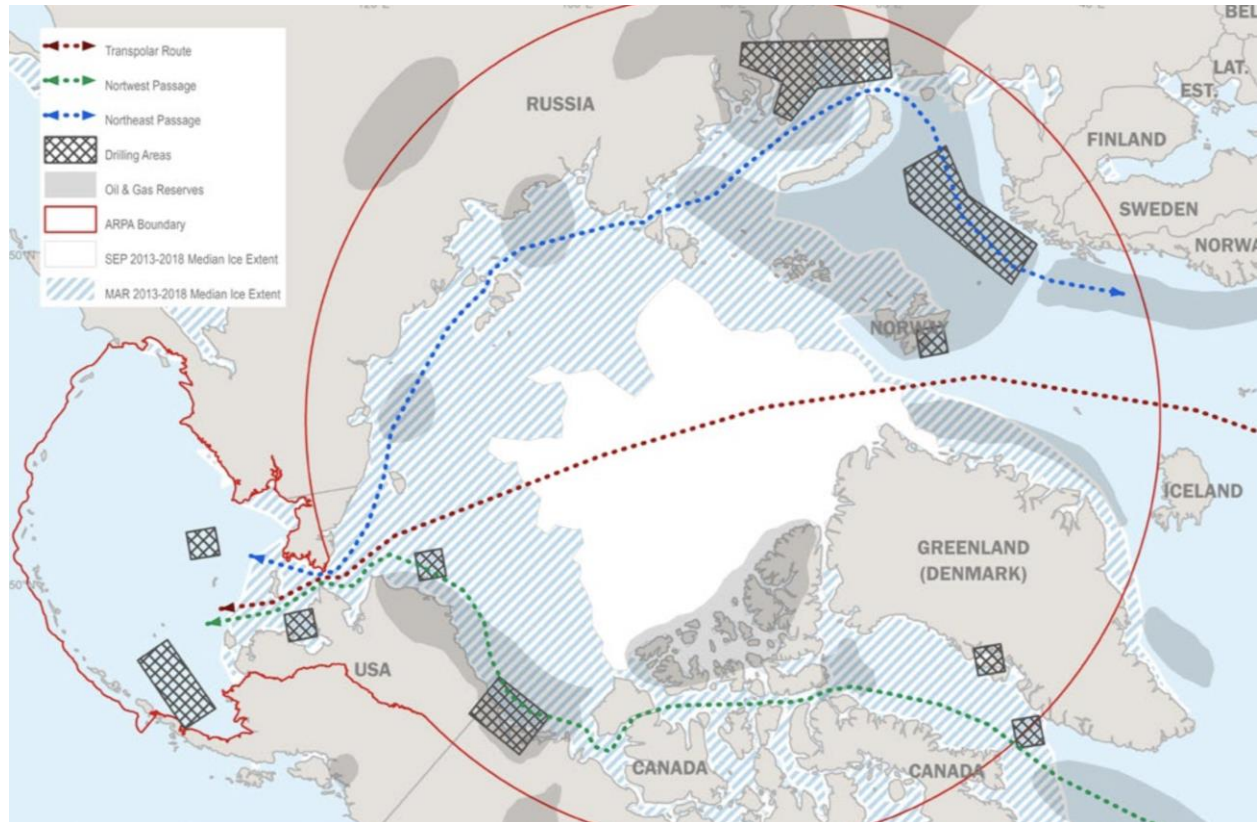
in the region will help the US be prepared for the increased activity and interactions in the Arctic in the future.

Arctic Map 1

From US Coast Guard Strategic Outlook 2019

Available at:

https://www.uscg.mil/Portals/0/Images/arctic/Arctic_Strategy_Book_APR_2019.pdf



Arctic Map 2

From US Department of State, 2019

Available at: <https://www.state.gov/key-topics-office-of-ocean-and-polar-affairs/arctic/>



AGREEMENT ON ENHANCING INTERNATIONAL ARCTIC SCIENTIFIC COOPERATION

NON-BINDING ILLUSTRATIVE MAP

This non-binding illustrative map shows the approximate extent of the Identified Geographic Areas described in Annex 1 of the Agreement on Enhancing International Arctic Scientific Cooperation. It is intended for illustrative purposes only and does not form part of the Agreement.

- Approximate Extent of Identified Geographic Areas
- 62°N
- - - Arctic Circle
- Additional areas covered voluntarily by Canada

Continental shelf areas are not depicted.

U.S. Department of State, OES/OPA, April 12, 2019

Appendix: Sources

United States

- Department of Defense Arctic Strategy (2019)
 - Available at: <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jun/06/2002141657/-1/-1/1/2019-DOD-ARCTIC-STRATEGY.PDF>
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- US Navy Strategic Outlook for the Arctic (2019)
 - Available at: https://www.navy.mil/strategic/Navy_Strategic_Outlook_Arctic_Jan2019.pdf
- Department of the Navy: A Strategic Blueprint for the Arctic (2021)
 - Available at: <https://media.defense.gov/2021/Jan/05/2002560338/-1/-1/0/ARCTIC%20BLUEPRINT%202021%20FINAL.PDF/ARCTIC%20BLUEPRINT%202021%20FINAL.PDF>
- The Department of the Air Force Arctic Strategy (2020)
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- The Foundations of Russian Federation Policy in the Arctic until 2020 and Beyond (2008)
 - Available at: http://koarc.org/theme/northpn_ko/03/pdf/rusia_eng.pdf
- The Strategy for the Development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation and National Security up to 2020 (2013)
 - Available at: (unofficial translation) <http://www.research.kobe-u.ac.jp/gsics-pcrc/sympo/20160728/documents/Keynote/Russian%20Arctic%20strategy%202013.pdf>

Other

Executive Order on Protecting Public Health and the Environment and Restoring Science to Tackle the Climate Crisis, 20 January 2021

- Available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/20/executive-order-protecting-public-health-and-environment-and-restoring-science-to-tackle-climate-crisis/>

Media release concerning ICE-PPR MOU, “7 Nations Deepen Science and Technology Cooperation To Preserve Safe, Stable and Secure Polar Regions”, 8 December 2020

- Available at: <https://www.onr.navy.mil/en/Science-Technology/ONR-Global/Press-Releases/2020/ICE-PPR-MOU>

Pincus, Rebecca. Telephone interview. 15 July 2020.

International Cooperative Engagement Program for Polar Research (ICE-PPR)

- Available at: <https://www.onr.navy.mil/Science-Technology/ONR-Global/ICE-PPR>