

UDC [355.02+327](98)(045)

DOI: 10.17238/issn2221-2698.2018.31.80

The Arctic defense postures in the context of the Russia-West confrontation*

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Abstract. In 2015–2017, in most Arctic countries, a planned review of defense policy was carried out. It coincided with the Ukrainian crisis, the aggravation of relations between Russia and the West and the active phase of the implementation of a large-scale program of military construction in the Russian Arctic. An analysis of the decisions made during this period allows us to judge to what extent the confrontation between Russia and the West has affected the military and political situation in the region and how it can affect it in the foreseeable future. For this purpose, the documents of the strategic military-political planning of the Arctic countries adopted in recent years are compared with their earlier plans for military construction in the Arctic. The analysis allows to conclude with a high degree of certainty that in the short term the military and political situation in the region will remain stable and predictable. The Arctic countries have not reconsidered their previous calm assessments of military threats and modest military development programs in the region. The main attention of the Arctic states-members of NATO is concentrated on the Arctic not that much as it is for the development of the military-political situation in the Baltic and in the North Atlantic. However, the longer the current crisis in the relations between Russia and the West goes on, the more likely that in the medium and long-term perspective, the military and political situation in the Arctic will change for the worse.

Keywords: *Arctic, Russia, Arctic states, security, military-political landscape, defense posture.*

Introduction

In 2015–2017, in most Arctic countries, a review of defense and security policy was made and the issues of military construction in the Arctic were also discussed. The review was done both in a planned manner (in Canada — due to the change of the Government after the elections 2015; in Denmark — due to the expiration of the inter-party agreement on defense policy in 2017), and in connection with changes in the military and political situation (Norway). In the United States, the Arctic strategies of the Ministry of Defense and the Navy (Navy) issued in 2013 and 2014 have not yet been revised. In December 2016, the Ministry of Defense submitted a report to Congress assessing the needs for safeguarding national security interests in the Arctic, but the current US administration will make decisions on adjusting the country's policy in the region.

Over time, the review of the defense policy of the Arctic countries coincided with the aggravation of relations between Russia and the West against the backdrop of the Ukrainian crisis and the discussion about the threat of the Arctic militarization in the West [1, Regehr E., p. 1], a new phase of which unfolded against the backdrop of the Russian military construction program

* For citation:

Zagorski A.V. The Arctic defense postures in the context of the Russia-West confrontation. *Arktika i Sever* [Arctic and North], 2018, no. 31, pp. 65–78. DOI: 10.17238/issn2221-2698.2018.31.80

— the largest in the region, according to Minister of Defense S. Shoigu¹. The analysis of the last Arctic defense policy review results allows us to draw conclusions about the extent of the current aggravation of Russia's relations with the West, its effect on the military and political situation in the region and how it may affect it in the foreseeable future.

The author first looks at the general political context against which the review of the defense policy of the Arctic countries took place, as well as its change under the influence of the current crisis. The strategic planning documents 2015-2017 on the Arctic Ocean (AO) issued by the coastal countries (Canada, Denmark, Norway and the USA) are going to be consistently analyzed. The decisions taken in this period are compared with the coastal countries' earlier plans for the military construction in the region. In conclusion, the results of the analysis are summarized, conclusions are drawn regarding the impact of the crisis in Russia-West relations on the military and political situation in the Arctic in the short and medium term.

The article deals only with plans for non-strategic (conventional) military construction in the Arctic. The military and strategic activities of Russia and the US in the region are a part of a broader equation of strategic stability and mutual nuclear deterrence. The strategic systems deployed by them in the Arctic have nothing to do with the hypothetical scenarios of a limited armed conflict in the region. They are covered by the current Russian-American treaty on measures to further reduce and limit strategic offensive weapons or are considered in it and are the subject of independent analysis [2, Arbatov A.G., Dvorkin V.Z.; 3, Arbatov A.G., Dvorkin V.Z.; 4, Zagorski A.V., p. 9; 5, Depledge D., pp. 61-62].

Political context

At the end of the last decade, most coastal countries approved programs for the modernization of their non-strategic forces. In Canada, Denmark and Norway, the Arctic direction got special attention. Their plans for military construction did not come from the possibility of an interstate conflict in the region, but from the need to resolve non-military security tasks such as border security, ensuring the safety of shipping, prompt response to emergencies, search and rescue operations, etc. [6, Le Mière Ch., Mazo J., pp. 94, 110-116; 7, Byers M., pp. 269-279].

Considering the forecasts of the coastal countries' economic activity intensification in the Arctic seas, an understanding has been formed that the saturation of the region with the appropriate forces and assets will increase in the foreseeable future. Although the majority of the tasks listed above are designed primarily to deal with non-military structures – Coast Guard (CG), law enforcement agencies – the armed forces are also responsible for responding to non-military risks: air and surface monitoring, aviation and maritime search and rescue, safety of navigation, rendering assistance to civil authorities in liquidation of oil spills and other emergency situations, etc.

¹ Shoigu soobshchil o samom masshtabnom voennom stroitel'stve v Arktike sredi stran mira. [Shoigu reported on the largest military construction in the Arctic among the countries of the world] Interfax, 26 February 2018 URL: <http://www.interfax.ru/russia/601479> (accessed: 01 March 2018).

Assessing their needs in the marine Arctic (the main criterion for such assessments were the forecasts of intensification of shipping²), coastal countries have opted for a different mix of military and non-military forces and assets. So, in Denmark, which does not have CG³, the corresponding tasks in the Arctic are assigned to the Armed Forces (AF). In Canada, the choice was made in favor of expanding the presence of naval forces in the Arctic waters. In the USA, on the contrary, the presence in the Arctic was entrusted to the CG.

The plans of the coastal countries to build Arctic forces were modest. And it's not just that there are no serious reasons for an armed conflict [8, Dynkin A.A., pp. 407-408]. Severe natural and climatic conditions, remoteness of the region, long distances make it more difficult and expensive to conduct conventional military activities, to build and maintain coastal infrastructure, to ensure the operational stability of the army and the fleet [9, Khramchikhin A.A., p. 327; 10, Bowes M.D., pp. 30-39; 11, Christensen K.D.]. These conditions, according to military departments, are unlikely to be more favorable in the foreseeable future⁴.

All this, like other circumstances, predetermines the low operational capacity of the region and its peripheral nature for the conventional military activities of coastal countries. For this reason, even modest programs for the construction of armed forces in the Arctic often lose their competition to the non-Arctic directions of military construction. These programs were underfunded, and their implementation was repeatedly postponed. While approving plans for military construction, in the coastal countries, they realized that unilateral deployment of even small military forces in the region could provoke an arms race. For this reason, most countries refused to invest significant funds in military infrastructure, and the main emphasis was placed on the development of bilateral and regional cooperation.

Due to special circumstances and the limited opportunities for free access to the World Ocean, the naval strategic nuclear deterrent forces are basing on the Kola Peninsula and as well as the Northern Fleet. Russia is the only country that has permanently deployed substantial combat forces in the Arctic. Denmark, Canada, Norway and the US have more favorable opportunities to enter the World Ocean and, accordingly, there is no need to base their fleet in the north. This largely explains the incomparable scale of military activities in Russia and other countries in the Arctic, the objective superiority of Russia's non-strategic forces stationed there on a permanent basis [4, Zagorski A.V., p. 29; 12, Khramchikhin A.A., p. 98].

² Rapport: Forsvarsministeriets fremtidige opgaveløsning i Arktis. København: Forsvarsministeriet, 2016, p. 15; The United States Navy Arctic Roadmap for 2014 to 2030. Washington: Chief of Naval Operations, 2014, pp. 12-13, 16, 18.

³ The tasks that other countries are carrying out by CG are distributed among different departments in Denmark. Thus, the prevention of marine pollution from ships and ensuring the safety of navigation in the exclusive economic zone of the country are referred to the jurisdiction of the Maritime Administration of Denmark. The maritime unit of the volunteer "militia" solves the tasks of sea patrolling, search and rescue exclusively within the territorial sea of the country. Under agreements with the Faroe Islands and Greenland, the tasks of the CG in their waters are decided by the Danish Armed Forces. For this reason, in the Arctic Forum of CG, the country is represented by its Arctic Command.

⁴ Rapport: Forsvarsministeriets fremtidige opgaveløsning i Arktis, p. 15; Report to Congress on Strategy to Protect United States National Security Interests in the Arctic Region. Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, 2016, p. 12; The United States Navy Arctic Roadmap for 2014 to 2030, pp. 11-13.

Before the Ukrainian crisis, this superiority and Russian military construction in the region were perceived as fully understandable measures designed to protect the long shoreline, air, surface and underwater areas, operational stability of strategic deterrent forces, and response to natural and man-made disasters. Other points of view were expressed in the Arctic countries, but they were rarely provoked by social and political resonance, such as the installation of the Russian flag at the bottom of the Arctic Ocean near the North Pole in 2007 or the US Geological Survey report on undiscovered hydrocarbon reserves in the Arctic shelf in 2008. Until the beginning of the Ukrainian crisis, home and foreign research indicated the absence of an arms race in the Arctic [13, Zagorski A.V., pp. 106-108]; 14, O. Oznobishchev; 15, Haftendorn H.; 16, Melvin N., Bergh K., p. 1; 6, Le Mière Ch., Mazo J., p. 94; 17, Wezeman S.T.].

The establishment of a balance of military forces in Russia and Western countries in the Arctic was not discussed. Moreover, Russian non-strategic forces and assets exceed the corresponding potential of the other northern countries taken together and were perceived as a potential contribution to the solution of common security tasks in the Arctic. It gave Russia a corresponding contribution to its weight in regional cooperation. Attitudes toward Russian military programs have changed against the backdrop of the Ukrainian crisis. So, Russia got the image of the state with a policy that is difficult to predict, a state prepared for achieving its strategic goals and to ignore the possible political and economic costs of unilateral, incl. forceful, actions [18, Zagorski A.V., p. 45; 19, Kämpylä J., Mikkola H., pp. 12-13].

This change in the general political context influenced the review of the defense policy of the Arctic countries. Although, as a result of the review, the assessment of the Russian military development in the Arctic has not fundamentally changed: it is still seen as not threatening one in the short term⁵. The documents adopted in recent years in the Arctic countries reflect their growing concern about the situation in the region. The analysis of the programs of Russian military construction is increasingly shifting from an assessment of intentions towards assessing the actual capabilities of Russia.

Canada

In 2006-2008 Canada's plans for military construction in the Arctic had been seen as a program of radical modernization of the armed forces and military infrastructure of the country. [20, Konyshchev V.N., Sergunin A.A., p. 288]. Perhaps, this is explained by the rhetoric of the S. Harper's conservative government, which preceded and accompanied the adoption of appropriate decisions [21, Lackenbauer P.W., Dean R., pp. 8-36]. In fact, this program was more than modest against the background of the broader tasks of the Armed Forces of the country and the program of non-military activities in the Arctic (sustainable development of the northern territories, adap-

⁵ Intelligence Risk Assessment 2017. An assessment of developments abroad impacting on Danish security. Copenhagen: Danish Defense Intelligence Service, 2017, pp. 43-44; Norway's Arctic Strategy — between geopolitics and social development. Oslo: Norwegian Ministries, 2017, p. 18; Report on Arctic Policy. US Department of State International Security Advisory Board. 21 September 2016, pp. 24-25

tation to the climate change, scientific research, hydrography and cartography, safety of navigation, prevention of marine pollution and others).

The Canadian program provided of 6-8 guard frigates with ice reinforcements for the country's navy for the construction⁶. The construction of a deep-water port for the logistics of naval vessels, the creation of an army training center in the north, and the increase in the number of Canadian rangers - local volunteers patrolling low-altitude land areas of the Canadian North were also a part of the plan [22, Dean R., Lackenbauer P.W., Lajeunesse A., pp. 46-47; 17, Wezeman S.T., p. 5]. The most disputes in the country were caused by the decision to build guard frigates. The consequence was the reduction of earlier plans to replace the aging CG icebreakers from three to one, while the use of patrol vessels that can patrol in the Arctic waters for not more than three months a year is considered less effective than the use of the CG icebreakers, which are conducted here up to nine months [4, Zagorski A.V., p. 87].

Even under the Harper's government, the plans lagged behind the schedule and experienced chronic underfunding. The procurement program for military equipment was sold in small quantities. The plans themselves were revised downwards. So, for the sake of budgetary economy, the number of guard frigates for the Arctic was reduced to five or six. The first frigate was laid in 2016. Although it was to enter the Navy's combat staff a year earlier. The timing of the program has shifted to 2018-2022. The plans to build a deep-water port in the north have been revised. Now we are not talking about the logistics center for Navy ships, but about the point of refueling, which will be available only during the navigation season. Its construction was moved from 2015 to 2018. The construction of a new icebreaker for the Canadian CG is postponed. Its development was suspended in 2013, and the corresponding funds were used to build "non-Arctic" supply vessels for the country's Navy. Judging by the latest reports, the new icebreaker for the CG of Canada will not appear until 2022-2023. [23, Forget P., p. 20; 1, Regehr E., pp. 6, 27-28; 24, Wezeman S.T., pp. 3, 7].

In 2016, a liberal government led by J. Trudeau began a review of Canada's defense policy. The issue of determining the optimal scale and forms of the presence of the Armed Forces in the North, considering the severe natural and climatic conditions and high cost of military construction, was discussed⁷. The results of the survey were announced in 2017. The final document confirmed the plans for the construction of Arctic forces cut by the previous government. The focus was on upgrading the air attack warning systems, monitoring the air and surface situation in cooperation with the United States, Denmark and Norway, upgrading the radar network of the North American Air and Space Defense Command (NORAD) [25, Regehr E.] and extending the zone of responsibility for the air defense systems of the country⁸.

⁶ The ships of the Canadian Navy do not have ice reinforcements, and the possibilities of their application in the Arctic latitudes are extremely limited.

⁷ Defense Policy Review. Public Consultation Document 2016. [Ottawa]: National Defense — Canadian Armed Forces, 2016, p. 10.

⁸ Strong, secure, engaged. Canada's defense policy. Ottawa: National Defense, 2017, pp. 79–80; 90, 102–113.

The current government of Canada decided to purchase fifteen patrol ships for the country's Navy. However, they are not intended for use in the Arctic. Like the entire Canadian fleet, they will be based in the south of the country and will not have ice reinforcements.

The former government of the country also approved a program for replacing old F-18 fighters (with a reduction in their total number). The choice in favor of the fifth generation F-35 fighter was questioned even before a new cabinet, which finally abandoned this option and leans in favor of a more "budgetary" F-18/E. The range of fighters based in the south of the country allows them to occasionally patrol the airspace of the northern Canada under the condition of refueling in the air. Their main task is to intercept Russian strategic bombers that have resumed their flights in the Arctic in the past ten years. For the purposes of this study, it is important to note that no decisions were taken (and discussed) that go beyond the long-planned modernization of the multipurpose fighter fleet.

Although the Canadian defense policy review documents have theses about reviving the rivalry of the great powers and returning to the containment policy, but the corresponding passages do not belong to the Arctic region. The main concern of the new government is the need to protect NATO's maritime communications in the North Atlantic⁹. This makes the Arctic region even more peripheral for Ottawa from a military point of view. Despite the fact that the need to respond to Russian military construction in the Arctic is becoming more acute in the political debate and especially in the Senate, the new Canadian military doctrine, the tasks of the Armed Forces in the region are formulated not in the context of hypothetical military threats, but in terms of the need to assist civilian authorities in responding to non-military security risks [26, Regehr E.].

Denmark

The arctic field of military activities in Denmark hardly deserves the attention that the media gave it some time ago. An inter-party agreement on Denmark's defense for 2010-2014: it was envisaged that the commands for Greenland and the Faroe Islands would be combined into a common command structure¹⁰. As a result, in 2012 in Nuuk (Greenland), a compact united Arctic command was created, whose tasks include coordinating the activities of the country's armed forces in the zone of its responsibility. If necessary, it can be transferred to the forces and means from the armed forces of Denmark. In Greenland itself, there are no substantial military forces stationed on a permanent basis, except for a small "sleigh patrol" and a detachment of scuba divers.

The Arctic activities of the Armed Forces of Denmark are limited to patrolling the waters and airspace of Greenland and the Faroe Islands. Their tasks include monitoring the situation, aviation and marine search and rescue, elimination of the consequences of marine pollution, fish protection activities, assistance in eliminating the consequences of emergencies. Patrolling the waters of Greenland and the Faroe Islands on a rotational basis is carried out by one patrol frigate

⁹ Ibid., pp. 50; 79–80.

¹⁰ Danish Defense Agreement 2010–2014. Copenhagen: [Danish Ministry of Defense], 2009. p. 12.

of the Tethys class built in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Modernization of the country's arctic forces essentially reduced to replacing the ones built for Greenland in the 1970s: three "Agdlek" class warships with new ships of the "Knud Rasmussen" class¹¹ [24, Wezeman S.T., p. 9] and seven "Lynx" naval aviation helicopters with nine "Sikhok" helicopters¹². Air patrols in the maritime zone of Denmark, incl. the Baltic Sea, are carried out by three CL-604 airliners "Challenger" [17, Wezeman S.T., p. 6].

In the inter-party agreement on defense 2010-2014, the formation of heterogeneous Arctic response forces was also envisaged¹³. But it did not mean the formation of new units and their deployment in the north, but the training of servicemen of regular units for possible use in the Arctic, if necessary, increasing the forces and assets of the unified Arctic command [24, Wezeman S.T., p. 8].

Inter-party agreement 2013-2017 is an analysis of the long-term tasks and needs of the Armed Forces of the country in the Arctic. The corresponding report of the Ministry of Defense was presented in June 2016 in the conditions of aggravation of relations between Russia and the West. The main conclusion of the report, based on forecasts of the development of shipping in the waters of Greenland and the Faroe Islands, was that the existing forces and means, as well as measures for their modernization, scheduled in 2012, were sufficient to solve the tasks of the Armed Forces in the Arctic in the forthcoming period¹⁴.

The report offered a slight increase in spending on strengthening monitoring of the operational situation from space and from the air, development of communication systems and control of the forces and weapons of the Armed Forces. The only measure envisaging a partial strengthening of the naval presence of Denmark in the Arctic region is the periodic deployment of the waters of Greenland by one of the three ice-free fortifications of the "Iver Hutfeldt" frigates¹⁵ in summer. In December 2016, these proposals were approved in a special inter-party agreement on the tasks of defense in the Arctic¹⁶.

Preparation of a broader interparty agreement for 2018-2023 took more time. This agreement was completed in January 2018.¹⁷ It provides for an increase in defense spending by 20% within six years — from 1.2 to 1.3% of the country's GDP. The additional funds are mainly intended to ensure Denmark's participation in the rotation of NATO forces deployed since 2017 in the Baltic countries and Poland; the formation of a battalion of light infantry as a contribution of the country to the joint high-level operational group created in the alliance in 2015; the formation of a

¹¹ According to their characteristics, these ships are comparable to the newly created Russian border patrol ship "Polar Star", created specifically for use in the Arctic.

¹² Rapport: Forsvarsministeriets fremtidige opgaveløsning i Arktis, p. 15.

¹³ Danish Defense Agreement 2010–2014. p. 12.

¹⁴ Rapport: Forsvarsministeriets fremtidige opgaveløsning i Arktis, p. 15.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 17–18.

¹⁶ Agreement on the future missions of the Danish Ministry of Defense (MoD) in the Arctic, 8 December 2016. Copenhagen: Danish Foreign Ministry, 2016. URL: <http://www.fmn.dk/eng/allabout/Documents/Agreement-on-the-future-missions-and-tasks-in-the-Arctic.pdf> (accessed: 21 March 2018).

¹⁷ Defense Agreement 2018–2023. Copenhagen: Danish Ministry of Defense, 2018.

new brigade to participate in the larger defensive operations of NATO. Priority directions of military construction are the equipping of frigates with anti-submarine defense equipment, the modernization of air defense facilities, and, in the future, the creation of a defense system for the territory of Denmark from short-range ballistic missiles. The old plans to replace F-16 multipurpose fighters with modern F-35s are confirmed. All this should ensure the participation of the Danish Armed Forces in the activities of NATO, not only in the Baltic. The strengthening of anti-submarine defense is the country's contribution to the revival of the antisubmarine line Greenland-Iceland-Great Britain, designed to ensure the security of trans-Atlantic maritime communications [27, Lorenz W., p. 1].

In 2018, it was also decided to increase funding for the Armed Forces in the Arctic, in addition to what was agreed at the end of 2016. It is expected to attract additional funds to reclaim the territory of former US military facilities in Greenland; purchase of marine pollution prevention equipment; training the population in emergency situations; the expansion of vocational guidance programs targeted at secondary schools in Denmark; cartographic works¹⁸. Recent changes in the construction of the Danish armed forces reflect a new assessment of the changing military and political situation on the eastern flank of NATO (in the Baltic) and in the North Atlantic, but not in the Arctic. Given the limited resources, these changes rather exclude the expansion of the country's military activities in this region.

Norway

In the last two decades, the Armed Forces of Norway have undergone a planned modernization. The country has modern navy. In 2011, the replacement of old frigates with five new "Fridtjof Nansen" class was completed. True, Norwegian warships do not have ice reinforcements since the main areas of their operational deployment are in the unfrozen waters of the Norwegian and Barents Seas. In 2014, it was decided to replace six Ula-class submarines built in the early 1990s. [14, Oznobishchev S.K., p. 143; 7, Byers M., pp. 250, 273; 6, Le Mière Ch., Mazo J., p. 88; 17, Wezeman S.T., pp. 7-8; 24, Wezeman S.T., pp. 12-13].

After the reorganization of the land forces of Norway in 2009, their basis is the mechanized brigade "North", which includes two mechanized battalions (one located in the north of the country, the other in the south) and a battalion of light infantry. The team performs mainly educational tasks. Only a battalion of light infantry is in a state of combat readiness. In 2011, the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the country recommended reducing the number of mechanized battalions to one, but a year later it was decided to maintain the previous structure of the brigade¹⁹ [24, Wezeman S.T., pp. 12–13].

In 2015, the planned replacement of 60 F-16 fighters with 52 modern F-35s was scheduled for the period until 2024 [7, Byers M., p. 250; 6, Le Mière Ch., Mazo J., p. 88; 17, Wezeman S.T.,

¹⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 10–11.

¹⁹ Hramchihin A.A. Strana boevyh ledokolov. [Country of combat icebreakers] *Voенno-promyshlennyj kur'er* 2016. No 31. URL: <http://vpk-news.ru/articles/31866> (accessed: 05 April 17).

pp. 6-7; 24, Wezeman S.T., p. 11]. The basis of the Air Force, which can be used in the Arctic, are six anti-submarine aircrafts P-3 Orion built in the late 1970s and 12 anti-submarine helicopters. By 2024, it was planned to replace P-3 with satellite submarine detection systems, unmanned aerial vehicles and new anti-submarine aircraft [24, Wezeman S.T., p. 7].

After the Ukrainian crisis, Norway, more sharply than the other Arctic countries, reacted to possible changes in the military-political situation in the Arctic. Norway is the only Arctic country of NATO, which has a land border with Russia, not so long. In Oslo, it was stressed that at present Russia's military activities in the Arctic were not directed against Norway²⁰, but the possibility of the conflict with Russia could be possible in case of escalation in the Baltic²¹.

In this regard, in recent years, various options for the construction of armed forces for the medium and long term have been discussed in Norway. In 2015, some proposals for the development of the Armed Forces of the country were heard. They gave preference to the option of significantly increasing combat power and strengthening the defense in the north of the country. It was proposed, to increase the capabilities of anti-submarine defense, incl. by purchasing modern anti-submarine aircraft; since 2025 to increase the number of submarines; increase the level of combat readiness of the ground forces, concentrate them in the north of the country and form a second brigade; to acquire new helicopters for the army and to increase the opportunities for the use of precision weapons²².

In 2016, after acute discussions, a new long-term plan for the construction of the country's armed forces was approved. The ambitious proposals of the General Staff were not supported. Instead of increasing the submarine fleet, the plan provides for the replacement of six old submarines with four new ones at the end of the next decade. Instead of expanding the fleet of anti-submarine aircraft — replacing the old P-3 "Orion". The plan provides for building up air defense capabilities, investing in early warning systems for attack, and the formation of rangers as part of the ground forces. The issue of a second brigade of ground forces is still not decided. Financing of the approved program should be ensured by saving resources (11 military bases and facilities are planned to be closed)²³ and by increasing the defense budget²⁴.

The long-term plan for the construction of the Norwegian Armed Forces in 2016 does not contain provisions that would not have been envisaged by previous programs for replacing exhausted submarines and anti-submarine aircraft. In some ways, it is even more modest than before. At the same time, the Norwegian government has placed a stake, on the one hand, on building up early warning capabilities, and on the other, on the development of a reinforcement infra-

²⁰ Norway's Arctic Strategy — between geopolitics and social development, p. 18.

²¹ Norwegian Armed Forces in transition. Strategic defense review by the Norwegian Chief of Defense. Abridged version. [Oslo], Norwegian Armed Forces, 2015, p. 5.

²² Norwegian Armed Forces in transition, p. 19.

²³ Capable and Sustainable. Long Term Defense Plan. [Oslo]: Norwegian Ministry of Defense, 2016, p. 12, 15.

²⁴ Norwegian Government Follows Up Long Term Defense Plan with Significant Budget Increase. Norwegian Government. Press release 6 2016. 11 October. URL: <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/aktuelt/norwegian-government-follows-up-long-term-defense-plan-with-significant-budget-increase/id2514775/> (accessed: 28 March 2018).

structure for the deployment of NATO forces into the country during an alarming period²⁵. In the coming years, the training of operational strengthening skills will be at the heart of the military exercises of the country. At the same time, understanding the risks of mutual misinterpretation of unplanned military activities, Oslo attaches special importance to maintaining communication between the Norwegian General Staff and the Russian Northern Fleet and General Staff, developing cooperation with Russia in the Arctic²⁶.

The USA

In the US, the Arctic is seen as a peripheral region of conventional military activity²⁷. There are no US military bases, no non-strategic forces deployed on a permanent basis. Located in Alaska, in the subarctic latitudes, the US military forces are a part of the Pacific Command. Although, the US multipurpose nuclear submarines regularly patrol in the Arctic waters from bases on the west coast of the country. The Navy has no surface ships with ice reinforcements and icebreakers that could be deployed in the Arctic²⁸.

In 2009, the US Armed Forces were tasked to study the needs of their presence in the marine Arctic, considering the assessment of military threats and the effects of climate change. In the United States in 2013-2014, the Arctic strategies of the Ministry of Defense and the country's navy estimated military threats in the region as relatively low²⁹. In view of this assessment, the Navy studies [10, Bowes M.D.] had shown that it was not advisable to deploy the Navy's surface forces in the region. It would require significant investments in the construction of special ships with ice reinforcements, icebreakers and coastal infrastructure, and would divert resources from more important areas of naval activities. The general conclusion was that the necessary level of presence in the marine Arctic could be provided by the CG forces and it would not require additional deployment of the Navy's forces³⁰.

This is further evidence that the Arctic direction is important for the US only as much as it is important for the solution of the more important tasks for Washington: to maintain strategic stability in relations with Russia, the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the suppression of international terrorist activities; as well as for the tasks of the armed US forces in Northeast Asia and the North Atlantic, but not as an independent direction of non-strategic military activity. Not surprisingly, the US nonstrategic arctic programs were funded under a "residual" principle and

²⁵ Norway's Arctic Strategy – between geopolitics and social development, p. 18.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 18, 21.

²⁷ Report to Congress on Arctic Operations and the Northwest Passage. Washington: Department of Defense, 2011, p. 12.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 15, 17.

²⁹ Arctic Strategy. Washington: U.S. Department of Defense, 2013, pp. 2, 4; The United States Navy Arctic Roadmap for 2014 to 2030, p. 6.

³⁰ Report to Congress on Arctic Operations and the Northwest Passage, pp. 3, 15, 22, 25, 27; The United States Navy Arctic Roadmap for 2014 to 203, p. 4.

that the only result was the decision taken after many years of discussions — to build a new icebreaker for the US CG³¹. It will replace the icebreaker “Healy” that operates in the Arctic today³².

Against the backdrop of the Ukrainian crisis and the discussion of measures to “contain” Russia in the United States, a discussion arose, incl. the Arctic policy issues. A significant role in this discussion belongs to the Congress³³. In 2015 the Congress rejected the proposal of the Ministry of Defense to reduce the number of personnel deployed in Alaska airborne brigade, requiring first to assess the forces and means necessary to protect the US interests in the Arctic, considering the strengthening of Russia's military capabilities in the region [24, Wezeman S.T., p. 19].

In December 2016, the Ministry of Defense submitted a report to the Congress, assessing the need to ensure the interests of national security in the Arctic³⁴. Although the tone of the report changed somewhat, it did not contain any fundamental changes in the assessment of the Armed Forces needs in the region. Despite the need for investment in coastal infrastructure (constructing a deepwater port in the US Arctic has been discussed for a long time) and the possibility of expeditionary naval activities (but not the permanent deployment of naval forces), the report repeatedly repeats the thesis that any decisions on military construction in the Arctic should be made with allowance for the limited resources needed in other areas of naval activities. Discussions about the expansion of the marine presence in the Arctic, as a rule, do not go beyond the establishment of the need to build new icebreakers for the US CG [28, p. 4].

The absence of significant conventional military threats in the Arctic still does not abolish some of the US concerns, primarily caused by the danger of being dragged into a conflict with Russia in case of the conflict between Russia and Norway³⁵. The subject of really serious concern is the possibility of confrontation with Russia in the North Atlantic. This is indicated by the decisions taken on the anti-submarine aircraft, based in Keflavik (Iceland). The US has not used it since 2006. There is also the issue of the modernization of the runway at the base in Tula (Greenland), which remained only the radar of the US missile warning system³⁶. The expediency of these decisions is justified by the resumption of Russian submarine hikes to the North Atlantic.

The report 2016 became a sort of “interim” document. It did not aim to revise the Arctic strategies of the US Department of Defense and the US Navy 2013 and 2014. Any decisions regarding possible changes in strategic planning will be made by the current US administration. In its first documents on military planning, the Arctic region got no attention. So, in the Strategy of National

³¹ 2015 Year in Review. Progress Report on the Implementation of the National Strategy for the Arctic Region Prepared by the Arctic Executive Steering Committee. Washington: White House, 2016, p. 8.

³² In the US CG, there are currently two icebreakers left. The service life of the average icebreaker “Healy” operating in the Arctic is ending in 2030. The heavy icebreaker “Polar Star”, which was completed in 2010-2013, works exclusively in the Antarctic. Its service life ends in 2020.

³³ Grønning A.R. Updated US Arctic defense strategy addresses new security environment. High North News, 10 February 2017. URL: <http://www.highnorthnews.com/updated-us-arctic-defense-strategy-addresses-new-security-environment/> (accessed: 27 March 2018).

³⁴ Report to Congress on Strategy to Protect United States National Security Interests in the Arctic Region.

³⁵ Report on Arctic Policy, p. 25.

³⁶ Report to Congress on Strategy to Protect United States National Security Interests in the Arctic Region, p. 11.

Security of the USA approved in 2017, the Arctic is mentioned only once in the most general context³⁷, and in the National Defense Strategy³⁸ adopted in 2018 (an analogue of the four-year review of defense policy) is not mentioned³⁸.

Conclusion

An analysis of the decisions taken by the Arctic states during the latest review of their defense policy allows us to conclude that in the short term the military-political situation in the Arctic will remain stable and predictable. Earlier calm assessments of military threats in the Arctic and the statement of the low probability of an armed conflict have not changed. Despite the sharpness of the discussion about Russian military construction in the Arctic and calls for action, the Western states do not dramatize the situation in the region. In the decisions 2015-2017, they stated the sufficiency of their available forces and means to respond to predominantly non-military threats to security in the region and did not begin to revise the previously adopted plans for military development.

The decisions taken in recent years in the field of military construction are different. The attention of the Arctic NATO member countries is not much focused on the Arctic as it is for the Baltic region. This is evidenced by the military doctrine of the non-NATO Sweden, updated in 2016, which provides for a permanent military presence on the island of Gotland — a strategic position in the Baltic Sea.

In addition to the alliance plan adopted in 2014-2016 and decisions to ensure the security of its eastern flank, we were also talking about the restoration of the anti-submarine line Greenland-Iceland-Great Britain in the interests of ensuring the security of transatlantic sea communications in case of resumed cruises of Russian submarines to the North Atlantic. This is also evidenced by the ongoing restoration of NATO's North Atlantic Command, disbanded in 2002 [29, Regehr E.].

In the short term, these decisions did not draw much attention to the military construction in the Arctic. The US and other NATO countries demonstratively display military restraint here, but the longer the current crisis in Russia's relations with the West drags on, the more likely the military and political situation in the region may change for the worse. In the Arctic NATO countries, there was a broad opposition to the policy of military restraint in the Arctic. It exists both in the American Congress and in the Canadian Senate [26, Regehr E., p. 2]. Decisions about restraining Russia in the Baltic Sea or reviving the anti-submarine line in the North Atlantic are very reminiscent of the Cold War decisions. As, strictly speaking, the decisions taken several years ago to resume patrolling Russian submarines in the North Atlantic. The fate of the Arctic during the Cold War was unenviable. Even if the arms race does not begin there in the foreseeable future, the region may again be closed to wide international cooperation.

³⁷ National Security Strategy of the United States of America. Washington: The White House, December 2017, p. 40.

³⁸ Summary of the National Defense Strategy. Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge. Washington: Department of Defense, 2018.

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