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The Hot Struggle Over the Cold Waters: The Strategic Position of the Arctic Region During and After the Cold War

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**The Hot Struggle Over the Cold Waters:
The Strategic Position of the Arctic Region
During and After the Cold War**

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Thesis submitted

to the Eberly College of Arts and Sciences

at West Virginia University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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ABSTRACT

The Hot Struggle Over the Cold Waters: The Strategic Position of the Arctic Region During and After the Cold War

Magdalena Nowak

The Arctic became a hot spot on the global map and discussion over the cold waters became an important issue in international relations. During the Cold War, as it is today, the Arctic was a separate area of rivalry between the superpowers. Despite the fact that today's debate is based on different issues, including sovereignty over the region, potential access to natural resources and the status of international waters, there is still a strong military component to the competing interests, as there was during the Cold War.

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INTRODUCTION

On August 2 2007, the Russian polar expedition Arctic-2007 placed a titanium Russian Federation flag below the North Pole as a symbolic proclamation of its right to undersea Arctic areas and the resources lying at the bottom of the Arctic ocean.¹ The Arctic became a hot spot on the global map and discussion over the cold waters became an important issue in international relations. Members of the Russian expedition, Anatoly Sagalevich, Yevgeny Chernyaev and Artur Chilingarov, after returning to Moscow became national heroes. They were greeted with the greatest honors and were awarded the highest state decoration "Hero of the Russian Federation".² Even though the Russian North Pole expedition was a national project, it was not a scientific or pioneering achievement, but its representation in the media had an important political role. Furthermore, shortly thereafter Moscow announced that Russia would protect the proclaimed territories with twelve strategic Tupolev 95 bombers.³ Those practices invoked an older set of behaviors, designed to make a point about Russian national prestige and standing that had become deeply embedded in political, intellectual and military life of the Russian state much earlier in the twentieth Century.

The emphasis which Moscow puts on the Arctic region is reminiscent of Soviet times.⁴ Artur Chilingarov, one of the members of the successful expedition to the North Pole in 2007 told the press: "The Arctic has always been Russian."⁵ It began a vigorous debate about the region, which the media have even pompously announced

¹ Elana Rowe, *Russia and the North* (Toronto: University of Ottawa Press, 2009) 9.

² Kremlin decree *О награждении государственными наградами Российской Федерации*
URL: <http://archive.kremlin.ru/text/docs/2008/01/156144.shtml>

³ Roger Howard, *The Arctic Gold Rush: The New Race for Tomorrow's Natural Resources*. (London: Continuum, 2009) 158.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁵ Adrian Blomfield, "Russian explorer mocks critics - with toy bear", *The Telegraph*, 7 Aug. 2007.

as the New Cold War. However, it is important to understand that the contemporary Russian Arctic policy is the direct heritage of the Soviet Arctic policy. While the geopolitical importance of the Arctic region is at the center of the most important political disputes of the twenty-first century, the significance of its strategic location is not a development of the recent years, but is deeply rooted in history.⁶

The objective of the first part of my thesis is to examine the role of the Arctic region during the Cold War and to oppose the view which puts the Arctic beyond contemporary main historical discourse and neglects its role in historical developments of the twentieth Century. My analysis will be based on a few major questions: Should the Arctic be treated as a separate field of struggle between East and West during Cold War or perhaps just a military training or scientific research ground? Was the Arctic important because of military factors, resources, research, or only as a matter of prestige? Were all the operations in the region therefore just a reflection of other major activities and crises in different parts of the globe? Was there a real possibility that Washington and Moscow would turn the icy depths and frosty lands of the Far North into a nuclear inferno?

In the second part of my work I want to show how the perception of the Arctic has changed since the collapse of the Soviet Union and determine what the contemporary situation in the region looks like in the context of global climate change and emergence of the new global powers. The main question I would like to answer in this part of the thesis is whether the Arctic situation today is a heritage of Cold War politics in the region or whether it should be seen instead as a new, separate, political issue.

⁶ Charles Emmerson, *The Future History of the Arctic*. (New York: PublicAffairs, 2010) 31.

An explanation of the main events and subsequent milestones in the Cold War history of the Arctic is crucial to fully understand the dynamics of this peculiar conflict, which was significant for international relations all over the globe for almost half a century. In describing the development and changes in strategy towards the Arctic during the Cold War, I would like to show how the actions of both sides in the Arctic influenced and drove each other and how they were related to other main events during the Cold War. Thus the goals of this thesis are fourfold. First of all, I examine the roots of strategic thinking about the Arctic of both Cold War protagonists. Secondly, I trace to what extent interests in Arctic were a matter of prestige and dominance in scientific research in this hostile and unknown environment. Third, I analyze actions in the Arctic region along with the other incidents around the globe, where rivalry between two blocs took place, to see how the Arctic fits in the larger history of the Cold War. And finally, I discuss the implications of the different actions in the Arctic region for the rest of the globe.

PART I

Defining the Arctic

The starting point for understanding the problems of the Far North is to understand what exactly is behind the idea of the Arctic. The Arctic can be defined in many different ways, but in the simplest understanding, it is the area around the North Pole. The name was derived from the Greek word *arctos*, which means “bear”. Nevertheless that name should not be associated with a polar bear. *Arctos* was used to describe the areas lying to the north under the constellation of the Great Bear.⁷ The boundaries of the Arctic region have been described in various ways. In geography it refers to the circle bounded by a line on a map marked with the parallel 66° 33' 39" North. In biology, it relates to the northern boundary of natural forests. Climatological and ecological definitions focus on the July isotherm of 50 degrees Fahrenheit. The political scientist will see Arctic borders much further to the south, according to the statements and policies of countries involved in the region. Meanwhile historians have to meet the challenge of incorporating all of those ideas into one coherent narrative, to bring out the essence of its meaning in different historical contexts.

The main obstacle to understanding the region is the fact that there are many myths about the Arctic, which causes misunderstanding, misstatements and undervaluation of this space.⁸ Firstly, the area is considered to be completely isolated and unpopulated. While the Arctic was a land with its own completely independent

⁷ Shelagh D. Grant, *Polar Imperative: A History of Arctic Sovereignty in North America*. (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2010), 5.

⁸ Emerson, *The Future History*, p.xiv.

civilization, it was also one of the key migration corridors over the centuries.⁹ It was one of the most important migration routes to Canada and Greenland, both in periods of cold climate, when human movement on the frozen sea was possible, as much as in the warmer centuries allowing for transport by sea. Hence the Arctic was very important for human civilization and, furthermore, it is crucial for historical analysis of the so-called *longue durée*.¹⁰

Secondly, the Arctic is seen as a pristine corner of virgin land. Indeed, in many places, its habitat has been untouched by humans. However, one of the keys for understanding this region is to analyze the process of industrialization and every attempt to tame nature in this hostile environment. The Arctic is polluted and industrialized in many places, and projects of its exploitation and development date back to the late eighteenth century.¹¹ The first large-scale urbanization projects date from the middle of the sixteenth century.¹² It is true that for centuries, most Europeans viewed the Arctic as a place unfit for year-round settlement, with the exception of the Danish colonization of Greenland in the eighteenth century. However, the situation changed with the subsequent discoveries of new natural resources, first gold and then gas and oil.

The third myth, which needs to be explained, is about the immutability of the Arctic. The High North is often seen as a place without history, a place which is not subject to external influence, a place which does not change over time. And indeed the

⁹ The idea of civilization here refers to the Paleo-Eskimo Dorset culture which existed between 500 BC and 1500 AD, and which most likely became extinct due to lack of adaptation to the new, warmer climate of the Middle Ages. Migration here refers to the Norse colonization (Vikings) in the tenth and later centuries, their settlement in Greenland and northeastern borders of the North America continent. Grant, *Polar Imperative* 32-35, 44-50.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ The Russian-American Company, which operated a monopoly trade from Russian North America (Alaska) from 1799 to 1867 aimed at large-scale commercial exploitation. Emerson, *The Future History*, 34.

¹² Like Abbot Phillip's building program discussed in Solovki. Emerson, *The Future History*, 27.

Arctic was not a place where the great events of history took place. However as the examples above demonstrate, the Arctic has undergone constant change, although until recently, it was much easier to notice this change in the *longue durée* than over a single generation. Climate change over the centuries caused cooler and warmer periods, which had its reflection in human movement in the region.¹³ Since the end of the nineteenth century, which is connected with the end the so-called Little Ice Age and new technological development, the Arctic underwent a huge transformation.¹⁴ It was no longer a blank spot on the map, but part of a collection of interests in a number of regions, which are increasingly more linked to each other politically, militarily and economically.

One of the main specialists on the contemporary situation of the Arctic region, Charles Emmerson, suggests that the main reason why the Arctic is not present in the mainstream historical narrative is rooted in an old theory about ancient Greece and Rome, which argues that only the right climate is capable of producing culture.¹⁵ The fertile crescent of ancient Mesopotamia, ancient Egypt, and even ancient Greece and Rome themselves, in fact could be used as evidence for that theory, which says that the development of civilization in a climate of extreme cold or extreme heat is not possible. However this view excludes a large part of Russian, Greenlandic, Alaskan and much of Scandinavian culture, which were able to emerge far from the favorable Mediterranean climate. Ellsworth Huntington, a geographer living at the beginning of the last century and known for his radical views of climate determinism, believed that any kind of progress was simply impossible in northern conditions. It just might be conjectured whether he would have changed his mind had he seen Arctic

¹³ Grant, *Polar Imperative*, 8.

¹⁴ The Little Ice Age dates between 1250 and 1850 AD.

¹⁵ Aristotle believed that good life was possible only in the right temperature zone and Ptolemy advanced the idea of climate zones with different levels of suitability for human existence.

development during the Cold War, because struggle for the Arctic as an integral part of Star Wars and the arms race between the United States and the Soviet Union was an enormous driver of change.

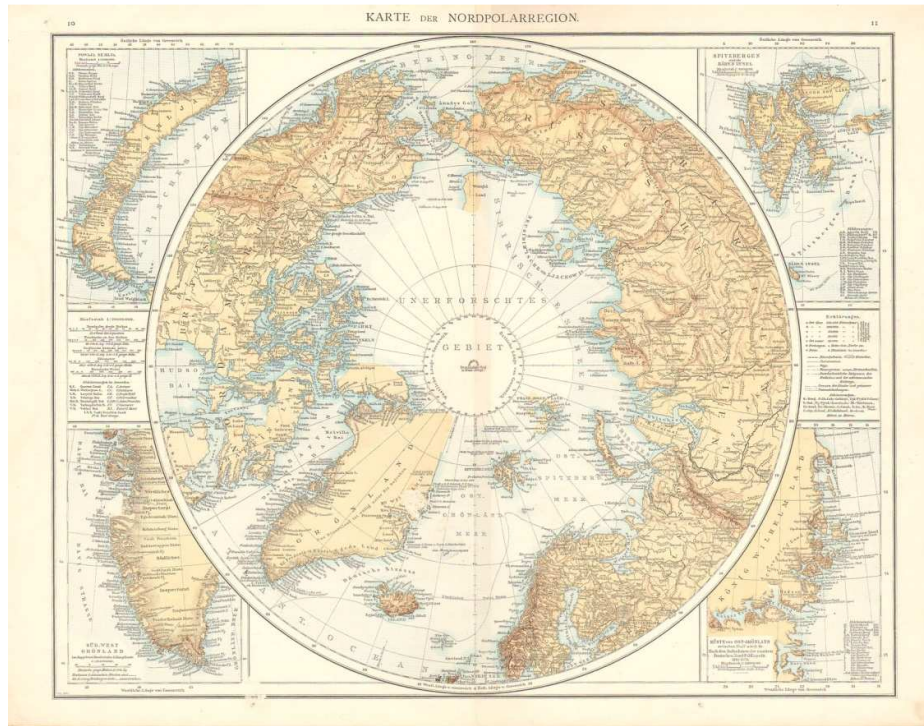


Image 1: Major part of the Northern hemisphere seen from the North Pole perspective

Perhaps due to the influence of these theories of connecting climate with civilization it is often assumed that the events considered as important to note took place only in the right temperature. Nicholas John Spykman, famous for his uncompromising views on geographical determinism, said that “History is made in the temperate latitudes.”¹⁶ In addition, taking into account the directions of the first geographical discoveries, then trade or broader, relations between civilizations and later on in international relations it is not hard to notice that they are all based on an east-west axis.¹⁷ Looking at the globe from a slightly different perspective changes things a lot, as in case of the Arctic region (Image 1). Furthermore, most of maps of the World

¹⁶ Robert D. Kaplan *The Revenge of Geography* (New York: Random House, 2012).

¹⁷ Suzanne M. Holroyd *U.S. and Canadian Cooperative Approaches to Arctic Security*, RAND, 1990.

usually force us to think in east-west terms and even contemporary scholars often neglect the Far North in their research. Robert Kaplan and George Friedman, two influential American political scientists dealing with issues of geopolitics, virtually omit the Arctic in their work. In his book *The Revenge of Geography*, Kaplan mentions the Arctic region only a few times.¹⁸ Meanwhile, Friedman in "The Next 100 Years" argues that the United States after World War II became the dominant force in all the oceans, which in the context of the Arctic during the Cold War is clearly mistaken.¹⁹

¹⁸ Robert D. Kaplan In his book *The Revenge of Geography* mentioned the Arctic only a few times and just as an example of a place without history and strategic importance.

¹⁹ George Friedman, *The Next 100 Years: A Forecast for the 21st Century*, (New York: Anchor 2010), 17.

PART II

The Arctic before and During the Cold War

*The Arctic is no longer a cold spot but the “hot spot” on this planet.*²⁰

Colonel Bernt Balchen

Pioneer Polar Aviator, USAAF, 1954

From Aesthetics to Pragmatism

A place as hostile to mankind as the Arctic strongly affects the human imagination. It is a common location for movies and literature. Mary Shelley’s classic novel about Frankenstein began and ended on the Arctic Ocean, the main character of Jules Verne’s book *The Adventures of Captain Hatteras* is obsessed with the Far North, and even more recently the biographical book and movie “Into the Wild” showed a young man whose biggest dream was a great adventure in the wild north. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Arctic also stimulated the imagination of travelers and explorers. However, the Arctic had to wait for its era of discoveries to the mid-nineteenth century. At the beginning of the twentieth century the North Pole was still one of the least explored and mapped places on earth. It was also one of the last spots which had not been claimed by any “modern state”.

Although to fully understand the contemporary situation of the Arctic region it is important to look not only into the relatively recent history of the twentieth century, but also into the more distant past. Shelagh D. Grant is of the opinion that the present issue of sovereignty in the Arctic is rooted in times of merchants and monarchs between 1500 and 1814.²¹ The Northern Passage has been seen as an important

²⁰ Text of speech given by Col. Bernt Balchen at the Explorer’s Club in New York, 13 February 1954, Balchen Collection, Maxwell ABF, file 186.7053-93, as cited in Carroll V. Glines, *Bernt Balchen, Polar Aviator*, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999), 244-45, 297.

²¹ Grant, *Polar Imperative* p.55

trading route, which could have shortened the distance between the Old and New Worlds. However, for centuries, maneuvers between icebergs in wooden ships were extremely dangerous and only excellent navigators were able to accomplish it.

Fridtjof Nansen and Vilhjalmur Stefansson, two major figures in Arctic exploration, with their discoveries and opinions created the foundation stones of the Cold War and contemporary discourse around the Arctic. Even though they were considered as aesthetes, they were trying to change an image of the Far North shrouded in romanticism and mysticism into a more pragmatic one. Vilhjalmur Stefansson is the key figure in understanding Cold War politics toward the Arctic. Already before the Second World War, he believed that the Arctic one day would become the “Mediterranean of the North”.²² He saw the Arctic as an important route for trade and exchange between different regions.²³ In the same way as the Mediterranean, he perceived the Arctic region as crucial to understanding the development of many modern societies. His interests in the north were very much connected with the fact that he was a son of Icelandic emigrants and his first research projects were carried out in Iceland. Regardless of his motivations, Stefansson had seen the potential of the Far North already at the beginning of the twentieth century, which for some has remained unnoticed even today. He was of the opinion that “it is chiefly our unwillingness to change our minds, which prevents the North from changing into a country to be used and lived in just like the rest of the world.”²⁴

Stefansson, as a Canadian and a U.S. citizen, directed his vision for the development and growth of the Arctic to the governments in Washington and Ottawa. While the

²² Ibid., 214.

²³ Many polar explorers compared the strategic potential of Arctic Ocean to the Mediterranean Sea. William R. Anderson, *The Ice Diaries: The True Story of One of Mankind's Greatest Adventures*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 57.

²⁴ Emerson, *The Future History*, 15.

United States and Canada remained unpersuaded because of economic crisis of the Great Depression, surprisingly Moscow expressed enthusiasm about Stefansson's ideas. In the newly formed Soviet Union, his books about the Arctic gained immense popularity. His ideas turned into a huge national project of the USSR, and even Stalin, convinced by Stefansson's views, expressed the opinion in 1932: "The Arctic and our northern regions contains colossal wealth. We must create a Soviet organization which can, in the shortest period possible include this wealth in the general resources of our economic structure."²⁵

The development of its northern and eastern territories was an important goal of Russian internal policy already in tsarist times, but took more organized form when the country's capital was moved from St. Petersburg to Moscow.²⁶ Explanation of Soviet interest in the Far North can be found in the geography of the country. With the longest Arctic coastline of all circumpolar countries and most of the major river trade routes directed towards the north, one of the main objectives of Soviet development plans was the expansion of the Arctic region. Hence the first and second USSR Five-Year Plan included the opening of the Northern Passage and enabling waterway transport of hinterland goods.²⁷ The importance of the project is shown by Stalin's personal involvement and signature on three of the large Arctic projects.²⁸

However, among the factors contributing to the growing Russian interest in the Arctic, researchers also point to the increased activity of the Norwegians in the area of the Kara Sea and the Barents Sea; transport problems during the Japanese-Russian

²⁵Ibid., 25.

²⁶ After the Communist Revolution of 1917.

²⁷ The big Siberian rivers: Ob, Yenisei and Lena.

²⁸ The White Sea Canal, the development of Arctic aviation, and the Northern Sea Route; David Fairhall, *Cold Front: Conflict Ahead in Arctic Waters*. (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2010), 87.

war and the theory of a different outcome of the war with the possibility of a rapid crossing of the Arctic ocean; and the loss of land after 1918 in favor of Poland, Finland and the Baltic States, hence pushing the country's center of gravity away from Europe. All those subsequent discomfitures could be compensated by northern expansion. Hence in 1926 the Central Executive Committee of the USSR enthusiastically adopted V.L. Lakhtine's idea of claiming all the discovered and undiscovered lands located between Russia's northern coast, between the meridian 32° 04' 35" East and 168° 49' 30" West, and the North Pole.²⁹ According to Lakhtine, this was the best and the most peaceful way to divide the Arctic region in accordance to the international law. Ironically, the same Soviet scholar strongly advocated that the North Pole itself should be a point which belonged to no one.

In the memory of Russians and the people of Central and Eastern Europe, the Arctic is known primarily for the atrocities associated with forced deportations to Siberia, which were experienced even by Stalin, and with the system of Gulag labor camps. Even though labor camps in the far Siberian north are primarily remembered for their function as political prisons, it has to be emphasized that despite of all of their horror, in the eyes of Moscow they had a double meaning. They made an important contribution to the industrialization of the Soviet Union and the Arctic region, and thus to Russian conquest of their own land. Charles Emmerson remarks that for Moscow the Russian Arctic has been all of the following: "a place of retreat, a place of veneration, a source of national identity, a strategic bastion, a prison, a labor camp".³⁰

²⁹V.L. Lakhtine "Rights over Arctic, *American Journal of International Law*" 24, 4. (October 1930), 703-717.

³⁰Emmerson, *The Future History*, 26.



Image 2: A British wartime poster about the Arctic convoys

The intensity of Soviet activities in the Arctic region did not diminish during World War II, but only intensified. However, due to the ongoing global conflict, many of the major events in the region passed unnoticed. The Far North became an important place of cooperation between the Soviets and their subsequent allies. Initially, during the era of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, they led the German ship HSK-7 Komet through the North Passage and provided the Germans a base for their submarines in Murmansk.³¹ Then, after the German attack on the Soviet Union in 1941, the Arctic became an important point of supply from the Allies, through the so-called Arctic convoys (Image 2). In the meantime, to maintain supremacy in the region, the Soviets continued their conquest of the Far North and made the first successful landing of aircraft at the most distant mainland point of the Arctic.

³¹ HSK-7 Komet entering the Pacific Ocean in 1940 caused huge damages to the Royal Navy.

However, defense activities in the North during the Second World War were just a prognostication of what was to come after the outbreak of the Cold War.

Recognition of the Arctic's Geostrategic Importance

Even though the United States and Canada contained many who were convinced of the strategic importance of the Far North and its significance was recognized relatively early by some politicians and thinkers, they did not situate the Arctic in their policy as early as the Soviet Union.³² In the nineteenth century expansion to the north was crucial for the future history of Canada and the United States. It is hard to imagine the Cold War fate of the Arctic without the strong involvement of Ottawa and Washington.

After the purchase of Russian America by Washington, and after gaining control over the northern territories from the United Kingdom by Ottawa, the U.S. and Canada became Arctic countries. These two key transfers of territory were crucial in the future relations of these countries with the Soviet Union, and they would be sources of the most important geopolitical changes for the future history of the mid-twentieth century. Due to financial constraints and the distance from the capital, to the tsarist government the sale of Russian America was the most reasonable decision at the time. However it is now considered a “geopolitical disaster”.³³ Meanwhile, from a contemporary perspective, for the United States, it was a milestone in their history.

Even though, at the beginning, the purchase of Alaska was widely criticized, its importance was proved during the Second World War, when it helped to build a

³² General William “Billy” Mitchell, already in the 1920s, supported the idea of Arctic exploration with military ships and the establishment of military bases on Greenland and Iceland. Emerson, *The Future History*, 104.

³³ Emerson, *The Future History*, 61.

offensive position on the Pacific Ocean, was a vital source of natural resources, and opened up access to the Arctic Ocean.³⁴ It is also important to note that, until the Cold War, Alaska had not been one of the American states. It officially became the forty-ninth state on 1 January 1959, after passage of the Alaska Statehood Act. However, American and Canadian interest in the Far North during the Second World War increased due to their occupation of the Iceland and Greenland, and joint building of the first military infrastructure in the Arctic.³⁵ That became an important foundation for their future cooperation and at the time brought the attention of Canadian and U.S. decision-makers to the Far North.

The end of the Second World War brought enormous changes in the international arena. Among them, probably the most important was the new global balance of power. After 1945, the United States and the Soviet Union became the dominant military powers in the world and the shortest distance between the two protagonists led through the High North. As a result of the new political situation, in a very short period of time the relationship between East and West grew into a multi-dimensional conflict, whereby the Arctic was transformed from a field of cooperation into a demarcation zone only two years after the war. Over forty years of hostility between the two blocs dominated and defined international politics and military strategies all over the world, including a space with as complicated an international status as the Arctic Ocean and its surrounding lands.

As soon as Washington started to notice the first signs of tensions with the Soviet Union, American decision-makers began to see the importance of the Arctic in the new light of the changing balance of power. Historians have been arguing for

³⁴ Grant, *Polar Imperative*, 271.

³⁵ Emerson, *The Future History*, 109.

decades where the actual origins of the Cold War can be traced. The traditional school of interpretation points to the expansionist nature of the Soviet regime, and Soviet ambitions to become a global power and spread communism. Revisionist historians of the Cold War emphasize American paranoia about Moscow's policy.³⁶ There is no proof that the Soviet Union's interest of the Arctic region before the Second World War was directly connected with a geopolitical interest in the region and an early stage of rivalry with the West, but what is certain is that Joseph Stalin was convinced of the military significance of the Arctic region.³⁷ The main major difficulty in the interpretation of the Soviet Union's different decisions, in the context of the Stalin's policy towards Arctic, according to Geoffrey Roberts is the distinction between geostrategic policy goals and ideological goals.³⁸

Regardless of the Soviet motives to involve the Arctic region in their policy, American interest in the region was the direct result of the early stage of the Cold War realities and a reaction to the Soviet policy. At the beginning of 1940s the veteran polar aviators, explorers and scientists, including the earlier mentioned Vilhjalmur Stefansson, the same person who inspired Moscow to direct its policy towards the north, were called to assist the U.S. authorities in the creation of a specific strategy for the Arctic region, which was recognized as an important geostrategic place and the potential scene of military operations.³⁹ (Image 3). Later on Stefansson concluded that had "U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt or Canadian Prime Minister Mackenzie King been exiled to the Arctic, as Stalin had been,

³⁶ Melvyn P. Leffler, "National Security and US Foreign Policy" in: Melvyn P. Leffler and David S. Painter, *Origins of the Cold War: An International History*, 2nd ed. (Place of publication: Publisher, Year), 15.

³⁷ Anderson, *The Ice Diaries*, 60.

³⁸ Geoffrey Roberts "Stalin and Soviet Foreign Policy", in Leffler and Painter, *Origins of the Cold War*, 54.

³⁹ Grant, *Polar Imperative*, 254.

perhaps the United States and Canada would have undergone what he described as northward surge of development”.⁴⁰ However, the threat of the attack from the north during the Cold War was the major reason for increased American interest in the Far North and in the formation of the long-term strategical plans for the Arctic region.



Image 3: Vilhjalmur Stefansson

The Arctic During the Outbreak of the Cold War

From 1946 to 1991, the United States and the Soviet Union confronted each other in the Cold War, which despite its name started without any declaration of war. Instead, it was marked by fierce and tense military and ideological rivalry, which put international peace at stake and involved most of the world. Sooner or later every corner of the world became involved in the Cold War struggle. Some of them almost become flashpoints of another global conflict, among which the most commonly recognized are the Korean War and the Cuban Missile Crisis. However, U.S. Air Force General Hap Arnold said already in 1950 that “If there is a Third World War the strategic center of it will be the North Pole.”⁴¹. Thus it might be said that the Far

⁴⁰ Emerson, *The Future History*, 51.

⁴¹ Grant, *Polar Imperative* p. 286

North become much more important during the Cold War than it had ever been before.

It is clear that at the beginning of the last century, the Arctic's strategic military importance was largely underestimated. Most geopolitical thinkers focused their attention on Eurasia as the geographic center of world politics, while the Arctic remained a marginal issue.⁴² The first to focus his interests on the significance of the strategic position of the Arctic was George T. Renner, when in the 1940s, based on a map with the North Pole at the center, he estimated the opportunities and threats associated with this new perspective.⁴³ However, the increase of the Arctic's importance is inextricably linked with the development of technology which allowed greater exploration of the region. Shortly after the outbreak of the Cold War, in the rhetoric of the United States, the High North began to be identified as a "mighty" and "important" region.⁴⁴ Hence, the geostrategic role of the Far North was fully revealed during of the Cold War, when it was possible to observe real military and political tensions on the polar waters and islands.

Even though the Cold War never became a real military conflict between the Soviet Union and United States, strategists and military leaders on both sides were in constant readiness for war in many different parts of the world. In the contemporary discourse on the Cold War, the most frequently mentioned arenas of rivalry between the two blocs were the European countries and the proxy wars carried out in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Studies of the strategy and military installations established after the Second World War focus on the Central and Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean, while Soviet naval strategists emphasized many times during the

⁴² John Halford Mackinder treated the Arctic region as the impenetrable northern border of Europe and Asia (the "Heartland").

⁴³ George T. Renner, *Human Geography in the Air Age*, (New York: 1942).

⁴⁴ This ascending to the documentary film, *Operation Blue Jay*, 1953.

Cold War the strategic position of the Arctic region.⁴⁵ The Far North, the area at or above Arctic circle, was equally important in the strategic plans of both world powers.

In many ways the struggle for the Arctic could be compared to the other exploration rivalries present in the international arena, like climbing in the Himalayas. Shortly after the Second World War European states tried to prove their supremacy in conquering the most inhospitable conditions, to bring prestige and glory to their countries by ascending peaks of 8000 meters.⁴⁶ The race for the Arctic could be easily placed in the same category, if not for the strong military aspect of those activities. On the other hand, the struggle for the Arctic could also be considered in the category of scientific competition. Still little known regions of the Far North could provide a valuable area of spectacular scientific discoveries, which could bring prestige in the international arena. Again, this is only partially true, because of the strong military connections of those activities. At the same time an example at the opposite end of the globe, Antarctica, shows that for purely scientific reasons it was possible in a relatively short period to regulate the international status of the region.⁴⁷

An excellent example illustrating the ambivalent nature of the scientific projects is the Russian Arctic drifting research station Severny Polus (Russian: North Pole). The first station, SP-1, was built before the Second World War in 1937-1938. The project was put on hold for the duration of the war only to be revived with new force in 1950. By the end of the Cold War, 31 Soviet stations had been established in Arctic waters, and between 1950 and the mid-1980s at least two were in operation at the

⁴⁵ Howard, *The Arctic Gold Rush*, 158.

⁴⁶ Maurice Isserman and Weaver Steward *Fallen Giants: A History of Himalayan Mountaineering from the Age of Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press 2010), 173.

⁴⁷ The legal status of Antarctica, ensuring the use of the region only for peaceful purposes, was settled in 1959 in the Antarctic Treaty, which also can be considered as the first document limiting military operations during the Cold War.

same time.⁴⁸ Even though the project's stated goals were strictly scientific (meteorological measurements and measurements of ice thickness), all the information was gathered for military purposes. The postwar defense strategy of the Soviet Union is strongly connected with its scientific exploration of the Arctic region.

The strategic significance of the weather stations in the northeastern Arctic was obvious also for Washington. Thus, beginning in the early 1940s, the United States focused on expanding their number and building radio stations in the majority on their allies' northern territories.⁴⁹ After the war, it became clear to the United States that in the new global situation, they had to cement their presence in the Arctic. With forces and infrastructure in Greenland, Canada and Iceland, it was a matter of maintaining that presence with the help of adequate treaties. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization established in 1949 guaranteed cooperation with the other countries in the region. Canada, Denmark, Iceland, and Norway, the most important partners for the United States in the Arctic, were its charter members. Thus, as Charles Emmerson remarks, by 1950, the whole Arctic belonged to one of the two sides of the Cold War conflict.

The “War of Nerves” in the Arctic

The politics of the Cold War soon became a vicious circle of mutual fears and lack of trust between West and East. The use of the atomic bomb by the United States at the end of the World War II changed Soviet attitudes towards Washington.⁵⁰ From

⁴⁸ From 2006 Russian Federation returned to the drifting ice stations of the North Pole project and launched new ones.

⁴⁹ Grant, *Polar Imperative* p.255

⁵⁰ Martin J. Sherwin “The Atomic Bomb and the Cold War” in Leffler and Painter, *Origins of the Cold War*.

that point one of two Soviet policy principles was the idea of the “war of nerves”, which arose from the fear that United States would use nuclear weapons against the Soviet Union. Hence Moscow wanted to prove that even though it did not have that powerful weapon in its arsenal, it was not afraid to challenge Washington and act on an equal basis, also in the Arctic.⁵¹ American strategists’ long-term plans towards the region and the rapidity of the technological advances found their response in the Soviet postwar defense strategy, which included both offensive and defensive measures.

Unlike the Soviet Union, which began the development of its far north even before the war, the northern parts of the United States and its allies were very poorly developed. Barely populated and without the basic infrastructure, these territories were vulnerable to attack. Therefore, the early period of the Cold War significantly influenced the economic development of Alaska.⁵² It became clear that Arctic development would be crucial for American security, and some scholars are of the opinion that it became “central to the U.S. military’s post-war security strategy”.⁵³ The military plans originated from the development of a network of weather stations and airfields across the Arctic from Alaska to Greenland. This project of Arctic development became the key component of the research programs sponsored by the U.S. Army. The Cold War military activities had a huge impact on the economic growth of Alaska, which cannot be compared to any other circumpolar country region.

⁵¹ David Holloway “Stalin and the Bomb”, in Leffler and Painter, *Origins of the Cold War*.

⁵² Many scholars also focus on the negative effects of this rapid development: environmental issues and Natives concerns; see: Grant *Polar Imperative*, Anderson, *After the Ice*, and (first name?) Kraska, *Arctic Security in an Age of Climate Change* (Cambridge, 2013)

⁵³ Grant, *Polar Imperative*, 293.

Each country's defense strategy focuses on the protection of their territories. However, in the case of the Arctic, the United States needed specific strategic plans for the region, which required close cooperation with other countries, especially with Iceland, Denmark and Canada, which lay on the shortest route between the two superpowers. In the case of Iceland cooperation was established and regulated very quickly, regardless the popular opposition from ordinary Icelanders. Washington's privileged position on that small island was grounded with the Marshall Plan aid, when Iceland became its largest per capita recipient.⁵⁴ Historians emphasize Iceland's often underestimated and neglected "key role in the defense of Northern America during the war and postwar years".⁵⁵

This small Arctic island for centuries belonged to the Norwegian and later Danish monarchies. After the end of the First World War, Iceland became partly independent. During the Second World War, with the German occupation of Denmark, Iceland fell under Nazi occupation. Just a year later it was taken by British and Canadian forces and then the United States officially took over the responsibility for its defense. It should be emphasized that this happened before Washington officially entered the war. After all those years with foreign forces in the county, the Icelandic government did not want to allow a permanent American military presence on the island.⁵⁶ In 1944 Iceland declared its full independence and started to negotiate an agreement of military cooperation with the U.S. Army. Washington wanted to keep troops in Iceland, since it was a strategic location for monitoring aerial and naval activity in the Atlantic and Arctic Ocean. Iceland without its own military forces to provide for the security of the state, quickly become a North

⁵⁴ Iceland received 43 mln USD.

⁵⁵ Grant, *Polar Imperative*, 289.

⁵⁶ Howard, *The Arctic Gold Rush*, 177.

Atlantic Treaty Organization member. Shortly after the outbreak of the Korean War, at NATO's request, Iceland entered into a bilateral treaty with the U.S., giving Washington control of the country's defense. While Reykjavik now had guaranteed security in the turbulent realities of the Cold War, Washington gained air and naval bases in the immediate vicinity of the Arctic region.⁵⁷

Cooperation in the Arctic region

The situation was much more complicated in case of Canada and the negotiations over almost every joint project with the United States required long and complicated discussions which often ended in serious public rebukes, as in 1952 when Washington expressed its anxiety that the Canadian government did not have “the sense of urgency of the U.S. and appears not as seriously concerned by the Russian threat”.⁵⁸ The Government in Ottawa and Canadian popular opinion were deeply concerned about the American infringement of their sovereignty. Talks about cooperation in the High North began right after the war and caused intense debate over the nature of relations between the United States and Canada. The negotiations leading to a final arrangement were widely criticized by Canadians.⁵⁹ However, their negative attitude about cooperation in the Arctic did not find its reflection in government opinion and thus in the agreements signed with Washington.⁶⁰ Without any other means to defend themselves, Canada and Denmark, shortly after these first agreements, also joined NATO.

⁵⁷ <http://www.iceland.is/>

⁵⁸ Grant, *Polar Imperative*, 318.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 301.

⁶⁰ Controversy between Canada and United States over Arctic cooperation has been discussed and evaluated by many different scholars. The main contributions belong to David Bercuson, Elizabeth Elliot-Meisel, Shelagh D. Grant, and Adam Lajeunesse.

The United States after the end of the war increased its military involvement in the Arctic region, mainly through a projection of airpower. Due to the limited financial and military capacity of the two countries, the presence of Americans over the territory of Canada and Denmark was inevitable.⁶¹ Also from the American point of view, even though the primary goal was to protect its own territory, cooperation in the Arctic region with other countries was crucial. Despite the fact that from the very beginning it was absolutely clear that the bilateral agreements had purely strategic and military purposes in favor of United States, the post-war rhetoric usually emphasized the joint and the civilian nature of the projects.⁶² The chosen line of rhetoric had two main purposes. The first aimed to appease the Canadian public, which was widely against the militarization of the Canadian Arctic and cooperation with United States. The second purpose was rooted in the early Cold War realities. It has to be remembered that this was still before the official outbreak of the Cold War; thus Ottawa and Washington wanted to avoid on adverse reaction from the Soviets.⁶³ Nonetheless, it was obvious already at that time, as Shelagh D. Grant remarks, that “for the U.S. military planners, the prospect of leaving the Arctic unprotected until hostilities appeared inevitable was unthinkable, particularly in light of the events leading to World War II still fresh in memory. (...) Arctic equipment must be developed and tested, and men trained in the techniques of polar warfare.”⁶⁴

After a long negotiation process, on 28 January 1947 both Canada and the U.S. approved the Joint Arctic Weather Station program (JAWS). It provided for the construction of nine stations, the largest and the most significant of which was the Eureka station (Image 4). Even though the whole project was under civilian cover

⁶¹ Grant, *Polar Imperative*, 286.

⁶² Emerson, *The Future History*, 110.

⁶³ Grant, *Polar Imperative*, 301.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 300.

and both sides denied for a long time the creation of a northern “Maginot Line,” clearly the network of the weather stations and airfields across the Arctic was central to U.S. postwar military security strategy.⁶⁵ The weather stations were a foundation for a defense system. Thus, at the same time Washington and Ottawa signed the Joint Statement on Defense, which became a framework for the North American Air Defense Command (NORAD) – the common defense center of Canada and the U.S. established twelve years later.⁶⁶



Image 4: Contemporary Eureka Weather Station

In the beginning, the presence of the U.S. Army on Canadian territory was very controversial and Ottawa was concerned about the increasing numbers of the American personnel stationed in the Canadian North.⁶⁷ The JAWS cooperation between Canada and United States, however, initiated numerous of different scientific activities in the region, which finally led to an increasing military presence, including joint military exercises. Numerous U.S. and Canadian military studies and

⁶⁵ Andrew Richter, *Avoiding Armageddon: Canadian Military Strategy and Nuclear Weapons, 1950-63*. (Vancouver: UBC, 2002).

⁶⁶ Joint statement by the Governments of Canada and of the United States of America regarding defense cooperation between the two countries, made in Ottawa and Washington on February 12, 1947; Source?.

⁶⁷ Grant, *Polar Imperative*, 304.

expeditions were carried out during those years.⁶⁸ For example, in the late 1940s Colonel Bernt Balchen, the Norwegian-born polar aviator, one of the specialists working on U.S. strategy of the Arctic region after the war, was recalled to active service to conduct Army training in the most difficult climate conditions (Image 5). The new experiment was based on the 1937 Soviet project Severny Polus, the idea of aircraft landing on ice and creating drifting research stations. Balchen coordinated the activities of the 10th Air Rescue Squadron headquartered in Alaska from 1948 to 1951 and personally carried out numerous American exercises in the Arctic. The Canadian Army also conducted military exercises at the same time, but in comparison to the American exercises, which seemed to be massive in terms of the scale and measures, the Canadians focused just on equipment testing and survival techniques.⁶⁹



Image 5: Colonel Bernt Balchen

The scientific race between East and West intensified at the beginning of the 1950s, when the United States focused their effort to keep pace with Soviet research in the

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 307.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 308.

Arctic region. Subsequent U.S. research and military projects in the Arctic caused general discontent of the Canadian public. A new problem over territorial waters arose, due to the American use of the Canadian seashore, even though Ottawa never expressed its official disapproval of those actions.⁷⁰ Furthermore, in order to convince the public of the merits, seriousness and benefits of cooperation in the region, in the mid-1950s the U.S. released a documentary movie discussing the successful cooperation between the Canada and United States, based on the example of the “MSTS Arctic Operation 1955.”⁷¹ Even though the movie was originally produced as a technical film report of the Military Sea Transportation Service, it is obvious that it had a strong propaganda purpose.⁷² However, according to narrator of the short film, it was the story of cooperation and co-ordination at all levels, both military and civilian.

The operation was the first stage of the long-negotiated project of the Distant Early Warning (DEW) Radar System, which was one of the largest joint military projects of Canada and the United States, and contributed significantly to the creation of NORAD (Image 6). DEW was built in order to detect the approach of enemy aircraft over the polar region and started operating in 1957, even though negotiations over the radar project started already in 1952. Time and resources used to accomplish the project proved that an attack over the North Pole was considered a real threat to the security of North America. And indeed Washington had reasons to be concerned, since by 1956 the Soviet Union had sent not dozens, but hundreds of aircraft to conduct landings and carry on exploration in the Arctic region.⁷³ The construction of the stations was financed by the United States, while Canada obliged to provide

⁷⁰ Ibid., 309.

⁷¹ U.S. Military's Secret Arctic Expeditionary Mission 1955 - Vintage Documentary Video, 2013.

⁷² In 1970 the Military Sea Transportation Service was renamed to Military Sealift Command.

⁷³ Anderson, *The Ice Diaries*, 61.

manpower. However, even though the stations were managed jointly by personnel of both countries, all of them were leased by the United States until the end of the Cold War. The first part of the project, as shown in the movie, had as its aim to deliver material from Seattle to the sites where the radar was to be established in three out of four areas between Point Barrow and Sheppard Bay, which is less than a half of the whole line. The whole system of the DEW line consisted of sixty-three radar stations extending from Alaska to Baffin Island. It was one of the most important technological developments which showed that even in extremely difficult and harsh conditions, it was possible to build and maintain complicated radar equipment. Also the DEW line not only fulfilled its strategic purpose, but moreover had a political role. Carrying out complicated logistical convoys in the Arctic waters at that time also proved the Navy's capabilities to operate in all oceans and on many different types of shore.



Image 6: Distant Early Warning line (black dots)

The United States Strategic Plans for the Arctic

As for Denmark, the situation was quite different. The Danes saw from the very beginning vast opportunities to improve their security in cooperation with the United States, since their defense capabilities after the war were extremely weak. Therefore, immediately after the Second World War, the government in Copenhagen itself began to seek a means of cooperation in the new realities. Washington gained the right to operate existing defense infrastructure and build new military bases under the American and Danish flag.

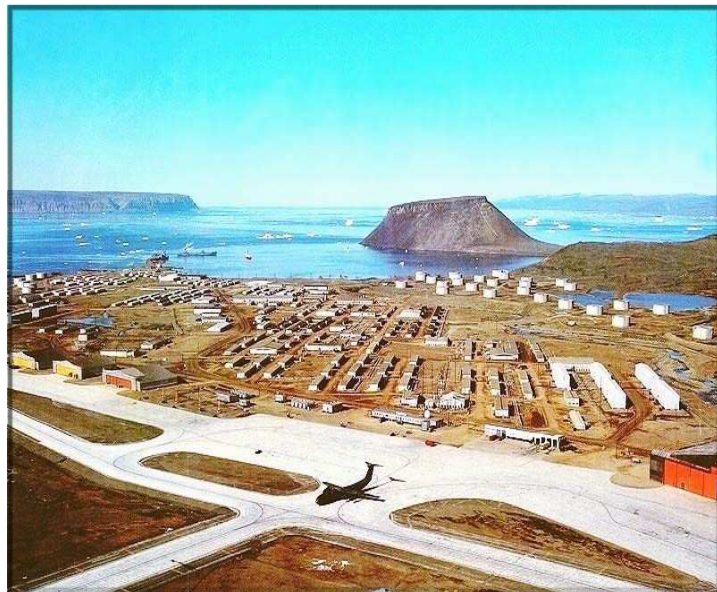
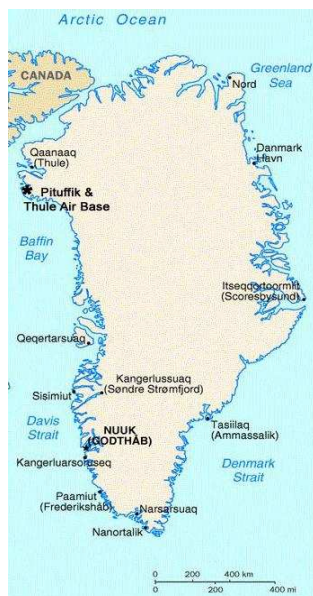


Image 7: Map of Greenland

Image 8: Thule Air Base

Transformation of the American-Danish cooperation in the military sector is well illustrated by the history of the Thule Air Base (Images 7 and 8). The history of Thule and its district, their importance on the Greenland map and the complexities of the Danish and American relations in the context of that region date back to the late nineteenth century. Robert Peary, American explorer of the Arctic, for years regarded as the first man to reach the North Pole, created in the district a research station and base camp for his polar expeditions. In 1910, the Danish polar explorer

Knud Rasmussen founded a missionary and trade point, “The Cape York District,” which also served as a formal intention of Danish colonization of the area. It is worth mentioning that Rasmussen was also the first who noticed that the flatness of the land in the area had the great potential for building an airport. However, up until 1917 the United States also expressed territorial claims to the area, but abandoned them after obtaining rights from Denmark to the Virgin Islands. Denmark gained control of the area twenty years later, on the eve of the Second World War, when the Thule district was formally established.⁷⁴

The base was used extensively as an important strategic point during the Second World War, but its story casts a shadow on Danish diplomacy at that time. In 1941, a year after Denmark was invaded by Nazi Germany, Danish Ambassador to the United States, Henrik Kauffmann, independently of the government in Copenhagen, signed an initiative “I Kongens Navn” (English: “In the Name of the King”). It was an agreement with the United States and designed to protect Greenland against German aggression. The "Agreement Relating to the Defense of Greenland," because that was its full name, allowed the Americans to establish military bases in Greenland.⁷⁵ It was received with great enthusiasm by the inhabitants of the island, but the government in Denmark accused Ambassador Kauffmann of high treason.⁷⁶

Immediately after the liberation of Denmark Kauffmann was rehabilitated and his decision to sign the agreement was considered to be right. However, the new post-war government wanted to regain control over the bases, even though they had lost their importance, before international opinion recognized new Cold War realities. In the context of the JAWS program of the United States and Canada, Denmark decided

⁷⁴ Rolf Gilberg, *Thule*, Arctic Institute of North America URL: <http://pubs.aina.ucalgary.ca/arctic/Arctic29-2-83.pdf>

⁷⁵ Department of State Bulletin, vol. IV, p. 443 URL: <http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/paw/206.html>

⁷⁶ Bo Lidegaard, *A Short History of Denmark in the 20th Century*, (Gyndendal, 2009), 155.

to convert the existing infrastructure to a weather station. A joint weather station operated in the years 1946-1951, until a new agreement between Washington and Copenhagen was signed. On 27 April 1951 the Danish government ratified Kauffmann's agreement, providing the foundation for full-scale cooperation between Copenhagen and Washington in the military field. This development was also connected with the fact that two years earlier Denmark had become a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, which made strategic cooperation inevitable. The new terms of cooperation allowed the United States to construct military bases. Hence, the Thule research station was immediately transformed into an air base, the largest in the entire Arctic.⁷⁷ It is important to note, that this ambitious plan of straightening the strategic position of Thule was planned by Colonel Bernt Balchen, the same person who conducted the first U.S. military exercises in the Arctic. He also directed the construction of Thule Air Base in 1952.⁷⁸

The base in Thule had a perfect geostrategic position to become one of the most important points in American strategy. Only 900 miles from the North Pole, the airbase created for the long-range bombers covered a large part of the Arctic territories. Its construction was hidden under the secret code *Operation Blue Jay* and took two years, from 1951 to 1953. This relatively long construction period was due to the short Arctic summer season, limiting time available to work to only four months a year. Nonetheless, most of the work was done in the first season in only 104 days. Just the first season of work absorbed enormous resources: 120 ships with about 300,000 tons of cargo, 5 personnel ships with about 12,000 people and today it would cost about 225 million dollars.⁷⁹ At the time it was considered the largest

⁷⁷ Grant, *Polar Imperative*, 313.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 314.

⁷⁹ In 1951 it cost 25 million dollars; *Operation Blue Jay 1953* (2012).

military project of the United States since the end of the Second World War and one of the greatest scientific and technological achievements in a hostile environment.⁸⁰ According to the American propaganda materials from that time “Blue Jay will be kept ready for action as long as the threat that made us [the United States] to build it exists (...) but perhaps the thought of this colossal airbase has caused them to fault their plans for aggression”.⁸¹ The scale and significance of the base in Thule is perfectly illustrated by its comparison to the geopolitical importance of the Panama Canal. The Thule Air Base was used as an example of the American efforts for “development and security.”⁸²

Nuclear Threat in the Icy Depths and Frosty Lands

To fully understand the Arctic during the Cold War it is crucial to put its discourse in the context of nuclear weapons. Until 1949, the United States was the only country that had nuclear warheads, but the intensity with which the Soviet Union began to work on nuclear power after the American attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki led to a situation in which the world was actually faced with the possibility of global nuclear war.⁸³ According to some scholars, the chances that a future war between East and West would be conducted on a conventional basis on European soil were relatively small. Due to technology development, strategic efforts focused on the development of the shortest delivery route between the two countries, the Arctic.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ *Operation Blue Jay 1953* (2012).

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ David Holloway, “Stalin and the Bomb.”

⁸⁴ Emerson, *The Future History of the Arctic*, 112.



Image 9: Novaya Zemlya

In 1953, the Soviet Union made another step forward in the nuclear technology, conducting the first successful hydrogen bomb test which triggered not only a chemical, but also a political chain reaction. Even though, at that time all Soviet nuclear tests were carried out in Semipalatinsk in the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic, on 15 February 1954 Washington, in response to the Soviet tests, decided to build the earlier mentioned line of radar stations, which together functioned as the Distant Early Warning (DEW) radar system.⁸⁵ Shortly after this decision, on 7 September 1954, the Soviets established a new nuclear testing ground. The new site was located in the Arctic, on the island Novaya Zemlya, where the first atomic charge was detonated a year later (Image 9). The United States completed the DEW line by 1957, which together with the Thule air base, was supposed to guarantee safety in case of Soviet attack from the north with the use of bombers.⁸⁶ Interestingly, those events did not correspond to any of the significant crises of the

⁸⁵ Ibid., 112.

⁸⁶ It was also the year, as mentioned earlier, when the Canada-U.S. North America Air Defense Command was established

Cold War. All those activities with nuclear danger in the background, took place right after the Korean War and before the Suez Crisis. Therefore, it can be assumed that the Arctic strategies of the superpowers went on a path independent of Cold War politics.

The urgent need for innovation, which fueled technological development during the Cold War, initiated one of the most peculiar projects in the American military history of the Cold War. The secret project *Iceworm* was tremendous in its scale and in the innovativeness of its idea to build a network of mobile nuclear missile launch sites under the Greenland ice sheet (Image 10). According to historian Richard Vaughan, project *Iceworm* was inspired by Bernat Balchen's vision of Greenland as "a gigantic aircraft carrier."⁸⁷ The aim of the project was to place medium-range missiles as close to the Soviet Union as possible, so their range could reach Moscow, but remain invisible for the enemy. The project was initiated in 1958, a year after the Paris NATO summit took place and when the United States within NATO presented a strategic plan on deployment of nuclear weapons in allied countries. The Scandinavian countries, including Denmark, in fear of becoming a nuclear battlefield decided to become a nuclear-free zone, which prohibited the stockpiling of nuclear weapons on their soil in peacetime.⁸⁸ Thus the *Iceworm* project would have been a violation of international agreement among the alliance members, hence the blueprints of the project were kept secret from the Danish government until the end of the Cold War. Plans of the project were presented in a U.S. Army report *Strategic Value of the Greenland Icecap*. Even though the U.S. Department of Defense officially introduced Camp Century as a research project, it aimed to build a network

⁸⁷Richard Vaughan, *A History: Northwest Greenland* (University of Maine Press, 1991), 145.

⁸⁸ Jonathan Soborg Agger and Lasse Wolsgard, "A Policy of the Utmost Flexibility: Danish Nuclear Weapons Policy 1956-1960," URL: http://www.historisktidsskrift.dk/summary/101_109.html

of tunnels, within an area of about 52,000 square miles, located an average of 28 feet below the surface of the ice, where Americans planned to deploy up to 600 nuclear missiles at distances 4 miles from each other. It has to be remembered that *Iceworm* coincided with the U.S. deployment of nuclear missiles in Italy and Turkey, which led to the Cuban missile crisis. Thus one can only speculate that if those plans had come to light then, the outcome of the Cold War crisis in 1962, which threatened the security of the whole world, could have been much different. However, back then *Iceworm* was hidden under a big cover project, widely known to the public as Camp Century.



Image 10: Camp Century's plan

The cover project launched in 1958 and described as a nuclear power Arctic research center built to test various construction techniques under Arctic conditions, was completed in 1960. Camp Century was a small military outpost built in 1959, about 150 miles from the Thule Air Base and about 800 miles from the North Pole. It was an amazing project with the use of new construction techniques. Trenches dug into the ice were covered with steel arches. Inside its tunnels were built housing facilities, laboratories, auxiliary facilities, and the whole was built up with bricks of ice. The

camp was equipped with a nuclear power plant due to the small efficiency of a diesel engine at low temperatures. Problems started only three years after opening the outpost. At the time, existing knowledge of the glaciers was insufficient. Engineers did not anticipate that ice conditions were unstable to the extent that they. The ice was subjected to such enormous stresses that it turned out that the city under the ice collapsed much faster than was originally expected. In 1964 the nuclear power plant was removed due to the ceiling's collapse and just a year later, the outpost was completely closed due to the unstable ice conditions. In 1966 project *Iceworm* was cancelled. Interestingly, as Shelagh D. Grant remarks, even to this day Canadians and Danes are not aware of the enormity of the actions taken by the United States on their territory during the Cold War.⁸⁹

The Silent War in the shadow of Star Wars

Activities in the Arctic were not only independent chapters of Cold War history, but they were also part of the aftermath of the whole Cold War rivalry between East and West. The late fifties brought an unexpected change in the strategic distribution of global forces. Until 4 October 1957, the United States either militarily dominated over the Soviet Union, or they were on the same level. However, the tables were turned when Moscow launched into orbit the first artificial satellite, *Sputnik 1*. Space projects played a huge role in the annals of Cold War propaganda, but it has to be remembered that their primary role was to gain military advantage.

The end of the Second World War and the Allies defeat of the Third Reich were also the beginning of a quiet war to take over German technology, including one of the most innovative achievements of German engineers - the first ballistic missile

⁸⁹ Grant, *Polar Imperative*, 286.

Vergeltungswaffe-2, commonly known as the V-2.⁹⁰ Immediately after the war, both the United States and the Soviet Union launched rocket research programs based on German designs. In the new realities of the Cold War, it turned out that the key was not only have ballistic missiles built on the model of the V-2, but in particular extending their range so they were able to reach the enemy.

While Washington began its program of developing intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) immediately after the war, the Russians in the first instance had to develop a nuclear weapon and only then could they focus on the development of missiles able to reach targets in Europe. Moscow began its ICBM program after improving its nuclear technology and conducting a test of the first thermonuclear bomb RDS-6s in 1953.⁹¹ The newly created thermonuclear warhead needed a rocket powerful enough to carry it. In addition to their military role, intercontinental ballistic missiles could also be used in science. A long distance ballistic missile was able to launch an artificial satellite into space. At the same time the launching of artificial satellites into space was a message to the other side of the conflict that the enemy had effective intercontinental ballistic missiles. Thus, in 1955 the United States announced that within the next two years, as a climax to the celebration of the International Geophysical Year, it would build a rocket capable to putting an artificial object in orbit around Earth. The race for supremacy in space had begun and to the end of the Cold War, it was assumed that the space race began two years later, but today NASA had confirmed that it commenced in 1955.⁹² Moscow immediately

⁹⁰ Records of the Office of the Secretary of Defense (Record Group 330), National Archives
URL: <http://www.archives.gov/iwg/declassified-records/rg-330-defense-secretary/>

⁹¹ Encyclopedia Astronautica R-7 URL: <http://www.astronautix.com/lvs/r7.htm>

⁹² *Korolev, Sputnik, and The International Geophysical Year*, NASA,
URL: <http://www.hq.nasa.gov/office/pao/History/sputnik/siddiqi.html>

put great emphasis on the development of its space program, which aimed to overtake the Americans and prove Soviet technological advantage.

When in 1957, Moscow successfully sent into space the first artificial satellite, the headlines of Russian newspapers announced the glorious victory of Soviet science, and the Americans reacted in a fit of political panic. According to John Piña Craven it “vividly demonstrated that we [the United States] were far more vulnerable to an attack by the Soviet Union than we had realized.”⁹³ *Sputnik* proved, as one of the American generals remarked in his diaries, “the space race was on, and the United States appeared to be stuck at the starting blocks,” but more importantly, it showed that Moscow had the technology for an attack with inter-continental ballistic missiles for which the United States were not prepared.⁹⁴ Of course, this success was brilliantly exploited and inflated to unimaginable proportions in Moscow’s propaganda, which made Washington even more concerned.

The United States reacted swiftly. Even though the U.S. was not capable of constructing immediately an American equivalent of ballistic missiles, it decided to change the direction of development. On 10 October 1957, the National Security Council of the United States gathered in the White House to discuss possible solutions. At that meeting, Undersecretary of State Christian Herter remarked that it was necessary to assure U.S. allies that “we had not been surpassed scientifically or military by the Soviets.”⁹⁵ However, the response did not materialize immediately. Meanwhile Moscow began preparations to launch *Sputnik 2*, and the pressure in Washington continued to grow. Only one month later, the Soviets launched their second satellite and this time they took a living creature to space. Today we know

⁹³ John P Craven, *The Silent War: The Cold War Battle beneath the Sea* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 39.

⁹⁴ Anderson, *The Ice Diaries*, 146.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 148.

that Soviet propaganda tried to convince the public that the project was successful, but in fact Laika died almost immediately after the launch. However, back then the United States was shocked by the specter of the Moscow's technological domination. On December 6, 1957 Washington decided to launch its own satellite, and the news of the Vanguard rocket project was transmitted over the whole country. Unfortunately, the run of misfortune continued for the United States and the Vanguard TV3 exploded only two seconds after liftoff. Commentators announced a severe propaganda defeat for the United States.⁹⁶

To change this situation the United States decided to prove their superiority in different pioneering fields. In the fifties, there were fewer and fewer places on Earth where it was possible to make pioneering exploration achievements. The bottom of the Arctic Ocean remained one of the most inaccessible and unexplored places on Earth until the building of the first nuclear-powered submarine. Despite the development of technology and the space race, the Arctic ice cover remained an impenetrable barrier to any ship that wanted to reach the North Pole.

The idea of reaching the farthest North point by waterway came up already in the thirties. However, for reasons of various technical limitations at the time it was totally impossible. Nobody could determine the depth of the ice in the shallows of the ocean reaches, and therefore there was a risk that a submarine would be trapped between the ice and the ocean floor.⁹⁷ Another problem was sailing near the magnetic pole, where the standard compasses became useless.⁹⁸ In addition, conventional propulsion submarines required the use of electricity while submerged. Thus to replenish the energy, it was necessary to emerge and launch internal

⁹⁶ Sputnik-2 Panic and Paranoia in 1957, News word coverage

URL: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RBeAZ35G4X0&feature=youtu.be>

⁹⁷ Anderson, *Ice Diaries*, 65-66.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 79.

combustion engines to recharge the battery. Until the invention of the nuclear-powered engine, traveling under the ice, like in a Jules Verne novel, seemed to be the unreal dream of a madman.

When it became clear that the development of submarines was a very important field of military development, the United States made every effort to develop this branch of its armed forces. In January of 1954 the U.S. launched the world's first nuclear-powered ship, which in honor of Jules Verne's vision told in *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea* was christened "Nautilus." The ship was the triumphant embodiment of engineers and visionaries ideas. Its performance exceeded that of any previous ship, was much faster and much harder to detect. If any ship could sail under the Arctic ice, it was just the USS *Nautilus*. The *Nautilus*, the underwater gem of the U.S. Navy, also became a solution for the technological gap between Moscow and Washington. Until 1958 its actions were carried out in the test phase, and it had been in use already four years when it became famous all over the world.⁹⁹

For many years there was a political reason which stopped Washington from increasing U.S. submarine involvement in the Arctic. Already after World War II the U.S. Navy abandoned the idea of military exercises that included submarines in the Arctic in favor of the waters surrounding Antarctica, due to the fact that having such exercises in the Arctic region might have been too provocative for the Russians.¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, when it became clear that Soviet missiles posed a new threat and the Arctic region meanwhile had become a Soviet backyard, the United States was ready to change its opinion, even at the expense of political damage to relations with

⁹⁹ Ibid., 52.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 62.

Moscow. In light of the technical achievements of the Soviet Union, Washington felt compelled to embrace the new pioneering challenges.

The commander of the "Nautilus", William Anderson, was entrusted with a secret mission, which was supposed to be the answer to *Sputnik I*. Anderson was the first man in history, who was charged with taking a submarine under the North Pole ice, flowing from Pacific Ocean to Portland in Great Britain. This mission received the code name - Operation *Sunshine I*. Many U.S. Navy admirals were of the opinion that the mission was too risky and exposed the only U.S. nuclear-powered submarine in the fleet, but Rear Admiral C. W. Wilkins, one of the biggest supporters of Operation *Sunshine I*, said, "I believe it is a venture of great promise, in both the fields of national defense and science."¹⁰¹ In addition, American decision-makers, in the face of the difficult political situation and the enormous pressure of the public, were willing to take the risk. As a precaution, the crew and the commander were obliged to maintain strict confidentiality, and Washington refrained from issuing any public messages in case of the mission's failure.¹⁰²

The first attempt to sail under the ice was not completed successfully. The icebound, shallow pool of the Chukchi Sea effectively blocked access to the deep waters of the Arctic Sea. The commander of the ship decided not to risk the jewel of the U.S. Navy and abandoned the first attempt. Operation *Sunshine I* had failed and the *Nautilus* turned back to Pearl Harbor. However, only six weeks later, on July 23 Anderson decided to make another attempt and Operation *Sunshine II* began. This time, the captain changed the route and decided to proceed across the Beaufort Sea. This decision turned out to be excellent, and on August 3, 1958, exactly at 23.15, the USS

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 86.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 76.

Nautilus safely reached the North Pole. Nine days later, on Aug. 12, the ship achieved its ultimate goal and came to the English port of Portland.¹⁰³ (Image 11).

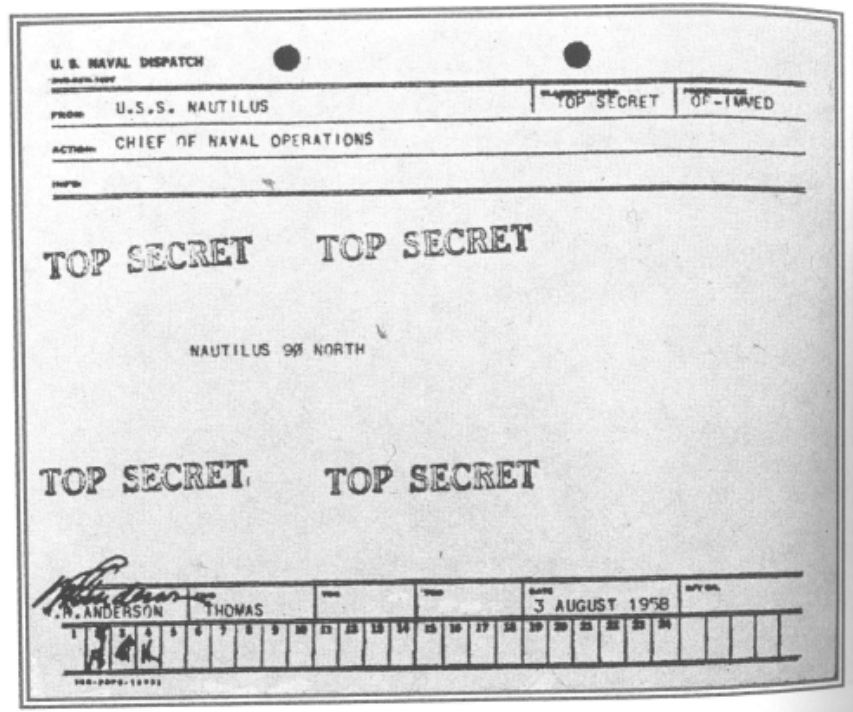


Image 11: Copy of the original radio dispatch with the historic message

To announce this spectacular success as quickly as possible, near Iceland a helicopter picked up William Anderson and transported him to Reykjavik, from where an airplane took him to Washington so that he could personally submit a report to President Eisenhower, who announced the mission's success. After the quickly organized press conference, the captain returned to the rest of the crew in England, so that all together they could reach the base of the Royal Navy in Portland. The success was widely publicized in the media, and after returning to the United States the crew was welcomed with a big parade.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Ibid., 282.

¹⁰⁴ Anderson, *The Ice Diaries*, 297-321.

It was a major American triumph, which helped Washington to rebuild U.S. national prestige. The success of Operation *Sunshine* showed the United States' contribution to the exploration of the most inhospitable conditions, but also that America was back in the technology race in an outstanding way with a military component.¹⁰⁵ The Presidential Unit Citation contained the following words: "The skill, professional competence and courage of the officers and crew of *Nautilus* were in keeping with the highest traditions of the Armed Forces of the United States and the pioneering spirit which has always characterized our country."¹⁰⁶ It was clearly a military message for Moscow, because possession of a fleet of nuclear-armed submarines capable of passage through the Arctic Ocean filled the security gap created by Russian ICBMs. It carried another signal for the ideological opponent from the East - the United States had found a new and fast way which could be used if necessary to attack the Soviet Union. Hence the launch of *Sputnik 1* had opened a new chapter in the history of the Arctic, which might be called the era of the "silent war", because from that moment U.S. submarines could operate undetected in the Arctic, in short missile distance from the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁷

To use effectively the military capabilities of the underwater fleet it was necessary to know the thickness of the Arctic ice and the shape of the ocean floor. Hence in the early 1960s the United States sent a number of secret and very dangerous military research missions to deepen American knowledge of this area. In the 1960s with the technological advantage and a circle of allies, United States gained unconditional superiority over the Far North, but the Cold War was not over and the Soviet Union

¹⁰⁵ The documentary movie about Operation Sunshine from 1959 shows Arctic exploration as an entirely American achievement.

¹⁰⁶ Anderson, *The Ice Diaries*, 304.

¹⁰⁷ „Silent War“ is a term used by John P. Creaven to describe the Cold War tensions around the submarine traffic.

could not afford to leave the Arctic in the hands of “Western imperialists.” The development of submarine forces served to increase research capacity in the Arctic region. Ice observations, navigational testing and sea floor mapping were the practical contributions in building a new technological balance between East and West.

The advent of ballistic missile technology resulted in the need for constructing a radar system that would be able to detect ICBMs. Because of that, already in 1959, in the immediate vicinity of the military airbase at Thule, the first Ballistic Missile Early Warning System (BMEWS) was installed. To ensure full protection of the Arctic region identical radar systems were installed at the Clear Air Force Station in Alaska and the Royal Air Force Fylingdales station in England.

Development of ballistic missiles opened yet another branch of the armaments sector development, the construction of guided missile ships capable of carrying and launching missiles. The first ships capable of launching a ballistic missile were the American aircraft carriers. Thus the first successful launch of a ballistic missile from a mobile platform was made by the Americans. The idea of creating a submarine which would be able to launch such a missile had been designed already by the Third Reich, but for years neither the Soviet Union nor the United States appreciated the strategic potential of this type of weaponry and did not show any interest in this concept. The Russians had not decided to develop a maritime ballistic missile system until 1954, but when they finally did they constructed the world's first submarine that carried ballistic missiles. On September 16, 1955, a submarine in the White Sea became the first in history of to launch the projectile, on the water's surface, from a submarine. The United States, concerned about this situation, in 1956 started the Polaris program, which aimed to develop ballistic missiles capable of being launched

from a submerged submarine. After four years of intensive work, on July 20, 1960 at 12:39 the nuclear-powered submarine USS *George Washington* for the first time in history successfully executed a Submarine-launched Ballistic Missile (SLBM).¹⁰⁸ The increasingly tense atmosphere between the superpowers and the upcoming Cuban missile crisis were reflected in the situation in the Arctic. The technological race visibly metamorphosed into a global demonstration of military forces. Thus shortly thereafter the Soviet Union once again surpassed the United States and conducted at Nowaya Zemlya the first test of an armed SLBM on October 20, 1961. Nuclear-powered submarines, capable of launching nuclear missiles, were now prepared to attack from undetected locations.

Moscow, quickly marked its presence in the region even more. Only ten days later, on October 30, 1961, also at Novaya Zemlya, the Soviets conducted a successful test of the most powerful nuclear weapon ever detonated, the Tsar Bomb. This hydrogen bomb was about 4000 times more powerful than the Little Boy dropped on Hiroshima during the Second World War. It was designed at the special request of Nikita Khrushchev to show what the Soviet Union was capable of.¹⁰⁹ Furthermore, with heightened Cold War tensions between Moscow and Washington, the importance of the Thule Air Base also grew. In 1961, the base was enlarged with the United States Air Force Ballistic Missile Early Warning System (BMEWS), the reach of which extended to Soviet territories (Image 12). As a part of the “mutually assured destruction” (MAD) strategic doctrine, most of the military projects in the

¹⁰⁸ Norman Polmar, *Cold War Submarines, The Design and Construction of U.S. and Soviet Submarines*, (K. J. More. Potomac Books, Inc, 2003), 115-126.

¹⁰⁹ Big Ivan, The Tsar Bomba (“King of Bombs”), Nuclear Weapon Archive, URL: <http://www.nuclearweaponarchive.org/Russia/TsarBomba.html>

Arctic were not kept secret and furthermore were widely announced in propaganda as the Arctic become their most vital arena.¹¹⁰

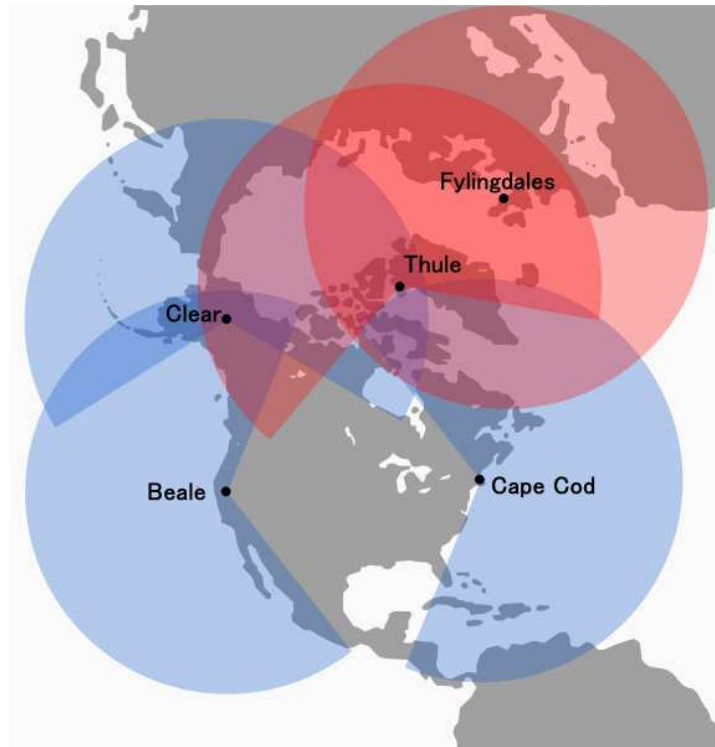


Image 12: Coverage of BMEWS is shown in red, complementing the coverage provided by the PAVE PAWS system in blue.

The Arctic and the Political Struggle

After 1962, the major Cold War problems in Cuba and Vietnam drew Washington and Moscow's attention away from the Arctic. The MAD doctrine assured at the time a tenuous military balance in the region.¹¹¹ However, it also required settlement of this tense situation, especially in the context of events such as the Cuban Missile Crisis. As a result of increasing international complications, already in 1964 the leaders of the United States and the Soviet Union expressed a desire to reduce nuclear arsenals. After 1965 the United States also reduced its military forces in

¹¹⁰ Most of the American Arctic projects were documented and publicized, very often through of short films.

¹¹¹ Mutual Assured Destruction; Col. Alan J. Parrington, USAF, "Mutually Assured Destruction Revisited, Strategic Doctrine in Question," *Airpower Journal* (Winter 1997).

Canada and Greenland. Shelagh D. Grant connects this fact with the failure of Camp Century and deployment of combat units to Vietnam.¹¹² However, in her analysis she totally neglects the Cold War arms control treaties. After the first declaration of intentions in 1964, Washington and Moscow began negotiations over arms control treaties.

Even though the Cold War rivalry seemed to soften and was kept in check in the Arctic, the Soviet Union did not throw in the sponge, and continued its struggle for dominance of the region. When Leonid Brezhnev came to power in 1964, the Admiral of the Fleet of the Soviet Union, Sergey Gorshkov, gained his permission to oversee a massive naval build-up. Gorshkov was a visionary who believed that “all modern great powers are maritime countries.”¹¹³ The period of Leonid Brezhnev’s rule was characterized by intense Soviet military expansion, which was also reflected in the military development of the Soviet Arctic. Thus by the 1970s Soviet submarines, including ballistic missile submarines (SLBN), covered all of the Arctic area and their numbers significantly increased. Moreover, the improvement of the Kola Peninsula’s infrastructure raised the profile of the Soviet Arctic.¹¹⁴ At the same time the United States decided to downsize its forces in Canada and Denmark. The reduction of the American forces in the Arctic region, according to some historians, can be attributed to the failure of Camp Century or, what is more likely, to the deployment of combat units to Vietnam that year. Another factor that could have affected this change was the escalating space race. In the mid-sixties, both powers laid great emphasis on the development of their lunar programs. However, simultaneously with the reduction of the forces in Greenland and the Canadian

¹¹² Grant, *Polar Imperative*, 337.

¹¹³ Emerson, *The Future History*, 115.

¹¹⁴ Suzanne Holroyd, *Canadian and U.S. Defense Planning Toward the Arctic* (RAND Corporation, 1989).

North, the arsenal and military personnel of Alaska had not decreased.¹¹⁵ Washington was still aware of the importance of the Arctic.

In the late sixties the situation in Greenland became complicated for the United States. Although initially, right after the war, the Danes construed the government's decision on cooperation with the United States as an opportunity for mutual benefit, the end of the sixth decade of twentieth century brought a significant crisis in relations between Copenhagen and Washington. On January 26, 1968 the strategic bomber B-52 armed with four hydrogen bombs caught fire and crashed just seven miles from the base at Thule. The fire caused the explosion of one or more nuclear warheads and resulted in the crashing of the aircraft together with the bombs that had not been ruptured by the heat. Right after the accident a special crew was sent in order to identify the crash site, find potential survivors and remove remains and traces of the plane. After over nine months and with the help of 700 people and a mini-submarine, the contaminated material, including snow and ice from the crash site, had been removed.¹¹⁶ As a consequence of the accident the removal of the nuclear warheads from all continuous alert flights was ordered. However, Washington was accused of violating international treaties, according to which the whole territory of Denmark was a nuclear-free zone. The United States rejected the accusation, explaining that it was only a routine mission and that the nuclear warheads were never deployed on the territory of Denmark. Paradoxically, at that moment in history, this statement was true, because after 1965 Washington reduced its nuclear arsenal and removed nuclear weapons from its bases in Greenland. The *Iceworm* project back was still strictly confidential, thus Denmark could not know that United States had a plan of deploying 600 nuclear missiles in Greenland.

¹¹⁵ Grant, *Polar Imperative*, 337.

¹¹⁶ Grant, *Polar Imperative*, 334.

However, this situation did put a strain on bilateral relations between these two countries and caused a large political controversy.¹¹⁷

The late sixties also opened a new chapter in the history of the Arctic that should be taken into account, the era of gas and oil. In the winter of 1968-1969 at Prudhoe Bay on Alaska's North Slope an oil field was discovered. It immediately led to the involvement of the new forces interested in the Arctic region, such as the oil and gas industry.¹¹⁸ The high north had become important not only for political and military reasons, but also because of its natural resources. Along with the emergence in the international arena of new issues of oil and its supply, the issues of environmental protection, rights of indigenous peoples, and above all the question of territorial waters appeared.¹¹⁹ With the discovery of oilfields in Alaska, the new gold rush began and with it a new debate over the High North waters arose.¹²⁰ This debate would become significant to the strategic position of the Arctic region in the twenty-first century.

Events of the 1970s shifted international attention away from the Arctic. The United States was preoccupied with the final, concluding phase of the Vietnam War. In the meantime, a new Arab-Israeli conflict broke out, the result of which was a global oil crisis and crisis in the foreign exchange market. In addition, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan drew international public opinion away from the Arctic. Tensions in many different parts of the world were reflected in the strong need for opening talks aimed at reducing strategic arsenals. Two rounds of bilateral talks, called the

¹¹⁷ Denmark's Thulegate: U.S. Nuclear Operations in Greenland, *Nuclear Information Project: Documenting Nuclear Policy and Operations* URL: <http://www.nukestrat.com/dk/gr.htm>

¹¹⁸ Richard Sale, *The Scramble for the Arctic: Ownership, Exploration and Conflict in the Far North*, (London: Frances Lincoln Limited Publishers, 2009), 171.

¹¹⁹ Grant, *Polar Imperative*, 341.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 348.

Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT), resulted in the signing of two treaties, which significantly relaxed relations between East and West.

However, it did not stop the Soviets from pushing their ambitious plans for strengthening their Northern Fleet at that time.¹²¹ Moscow, encouraged by the success of NS *Lenin*, the first atomic icebreaker produced back in the fifties, commissioned the construction of more *Lenin*-class vessels. In 1975, NS *Arktika*, a mighty nuclear-powered icebreaker, came into service. The Soviet authorities hurried to show the world the opportunities created by the Northern Fleet's new acquisition, hence *Arktika* was sent to the Far North with a special mission. On August 17, 1977 as the world's first surface ship, it reached the North Pole.¹²² (Image 13).



Image 13: Icebreaker Arktika

However, it was not a completely peaceful moment in history for the Arctic region. During this time, the debate over the borders of the territorial waters of Arctic countries exacerbated. Also the issue of sovereignty in the Arctic increasingly created problems between the U.S and its allies. In the context of the tense situation with the United States, in 1973 Canada and Denmark decided to take the crucial first

¹²¹ Norman Polmar, *Guide to the Soviet Navy*, (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute, 1991), 77.

¹²² Emerson, *Future History*, 54.

step in resolving potential conflicts between them. The bilateral agreement carefully defined boundaries between Greenland and the Canadian Arctic islands.¹²³ At the same time it was the first bilateral agreement which defined maritime borders in the Arctic region. Reopening of the Station Nord, the U.S. weather station and airfield closed three years earlier by the Danes in 1975, also occurred as an interesting development at that time. Shelagh D. Grant indicates that this event can be explained in the context of sovereignty. It illustrated perfectly to the international community that Denmark was gradually reasserting authority over Greenland.

The Arctic Mare Sovieticum

In the 1980s, the Arctic again became a vital arena of the international struggle. According to Charles Emmerson, at that point the Arctic became a real *Mare Sovieticum*.¹²⁴ Into the 1980s, under the Brezhnev regime, the USSR worked on intensive naval development and construction. This trend did not change significantly after Brezhnev's death in 1982. And even though Soviet military development seemingly slowed when Mikhail Gorbachev came to power, the number of produced ships did not decrease. At this moment, the Soviet Union possessed the world's largest force of submarines. Up to 40 percent of all the world's submarines were estimated as belonging to Moscow. And even though the exact number was not known to the West at this point, it was calculated that it was about 310 submarines of which about 200 were nuclear-powered and the remaining 110 conventionally powered.¹²⁵ The part of the Soviet Navy responsible for the defense of northwestern waters of USSR, including the longest and the most inhospitable coast of the Arctic

¹²³ Emmerson, *Polar Imperative*, 357.

¹²⁴ Grant, *Future History*, 114.

¹²⁵ Polmar, *Guide to the Soviet Navy*, 92.

region, the Red Banner Northern Fleet, was considered the most important but was also the largest Soviet fleet. About 47 percent of the Soviet Navy's submarines, 27 percent of its surface warships, 25 percent of its naval aircraft and about 20 percent of its naval personnel belonged to the Northern Fleet.¹²⁶ However not only its size, but also its development, made the Far North a truly Soviet territory.¹²⁷ The U.S Director of Naval Intelligence emphasized that "despite the USSR's escalating economic and social problems, the Soviet Navy had a year of growth in 1989 which any navy could be proud."¹²⁸

The United States, which had neglected the military situation in the Arctic since the mid-1960s and focused on a struggling economy and territorial issues with their closest neighbors, had to take a number of modernization measures to re-strengthen its position in the region in 1980s. In 1982 the Thule Airbase was transformed into the Air Force Space Command Base. In practice it meant that the main objective of the base was changed into a more defensive one and focused on missile warning.¹²⁹ Furthermore, in 1985 the United States and Canada signed the North American Air Defense Modernization. The main purpose of the agreement was to upgrade the obsolete DEW line into the North Warning System (NWS) and change the terms of the ownership of these strategic facilities. The new system was equipped with 34 updated short-range radar stations and fifteen modern long-range radar stations, which would guarantee full security of North America. The NWS was designed to be managed by the Canadians on the territory of Canada, which was intended to

¹²⁶ Polmar, *Guide to the Soviet Navy*, 15-16.

¹²⁷ John Kristen Skogan and Arne Olav Brundtland, *Soviet Seapower: Facts, Motivations, Impact and Responses*, (Oslo: Norsk Utenrikspolitisk Institutt, 1989).

¹²⁸ Polmar, *Guide to the Soviet Navy*, 78.

¹²⁹ Air Force Space Command URL: <http://www.afspc.af.mil/heritage/index.asp>

alleviate tensions resulting from the 1970s discussion of Canadian Arctic sovereignty. The DEW line was fully replaced in 1980s and early 1990s.¹³⁰

However, the American strategy for the Arctic focused not only on defensive objectives. Washington also had to remind Moscow about the American presence in the region. Thus they conducted Cruise Missile tests in the Canadian Arctic. Those military exercises provoked another round of public discussion in Ottawa.¹³¹ A tense situation between Canada and United States was very often used to the advantage of Moscow's propaganda. Traffic of American oil tankers in the northern waters of Canada provoked yet another public debate over Ottawa's sovereignty.¹³² This was cleverly used by Moscow as comments rapidly spread in Russian newspapers such as: "the U.S. military has been rapidly encroaching on the sovereignty of that state [Canada]."¹³³ Despite these Russian voices, which were largely a reflection of the Canadian political moods, Ottawa was aware of its position between the two powers. In 1987, seeing the growing movement of Soviet and American ships on the northern waters, the Canadian government declared that it intended to acquire three or more submarines that were nuclear-powered. Two years later that decision would be changed in favor of preventive measures, but at the time it caused further turmoil in the Washington-Ottawa axis.¹³⁴

In October 1987, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev visited Murmansk, the largest city in the Arctic Circle, the most important harbor in the Russian North and home to the Red Banner Northern Fleet. In his very geopolitically-oriented speech, Gorbachev accused the United States of commencing a new arms race and expansionist attempts

¹³⁰ Grant, *Polar Imperative*, 334.

¹³¹ Emerson, *Future History*, 116.

¹³² Two incidents were widely commented on in Canada, the case of SS *Manhattan* in 1968 and the SS *Polar Sea* in 1985.

¹³³ Grant, *Polar Imperative*, 376.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 332.

in the North. He also emphasized the peaceful nature of the Soviet Union's relations with Scandinavian countries. It seems he truly believed that while Moscow was looking for peace in the region, Washington was preparing for war, when he said: "One can feel here the freezing breath of the "Arctic strategy" of the Pentagon. An immense potential of nuclear destruction concentrated aboard submarines and surface ships affects the political climate of the entire world and can be detonated by an accidental political-military conflict in any other region of the world. The militarization of this part of the world is assuming threatening dimensions."¹³⁵ He wanted to see the High North as a peaceful spot on the map, but in the context of Soviet military capabilities in the region, it would be a peace under the vigilant eye of Soviet submarines (Image 14).



Image 14: Mikhail Gorbachev in Murmansk

At that point, Moscow was even ready to sacrifice the strategic significance of the Baltic Sea to gain the Scandinavian countries' approval for its activities in the Arctic. Meanwhile, anxiety of northern European states was growing. Norwegian State

¹³⁵ Mikhail Gorbachev's Speech in Murmansk at the Ceremonial Meeting on the Occasion of the Presentation of the Order of Lenin and the Gold Star to the City of Murmansk, Murmansk, 1 October 1987

Secretary in the Ministry of Defense, John Kristen Skogan said in the early 1980s: “If there was going to be some fighting in Europe, the chances of Norway being left out were nil.”¹³⁶ The change in Soviet geopolitical orientation could have been dictated by awareness of growing anti-communist moods in Central and Eastern Europe, but it was also possible that it was a desperate attempt to maintain power at least in the Arctic region. Gorbachev’s initiative, although very important, did not change the inevitable.¹³⁷ Four years later, the Soviet Union could not bear the economic, social and political challenges to its integrity and disintegrated into successor states, of which the largest, Russia, became the main heir of the Soviet Arctic political legacy.

¹³⁶ Emerson, *Future History*, 115.

¹³⁷ It was the foundation for the first cooperation projects in the Arctic after the Cold War.

PART III

The Arctic after the Cold War

*The history of Arctic discovery shows how
the development of human race has
always been borne along by great illusions.*¹³⁸

Fridtjof Nansesn, 1911

Polar explorer

Past, Present and Future of the Arctic

After the end of the Cold War, tensions between Washington and Moscow greatly eased, and the balance of power in the world completely relied on a unipolar international system, in which the United States became the dominant state in the international order. The Cold War clearly outlined the axis of conflict in the Arctic around the arms race and constant nuclear threat. Thus, the High North during the Cold War was an extremely vital arena of the political competition and, like no other place in the world, reflected the objectives of the Mutual Assured Destruction doctrine. The end of the Cold War brought a sharp decline in the importance of the Far North in the strategic plans of the Arctic countries. Hence, the first decade after the Cold War was primarily a period of dealing with the nuclear past, both in political as well as actual terms.

The last decade of the twentieth century was largely a time of opening new forms of cooperation between East and West. However, many of the flashpoints already known from the times of the Cold War soon returned. In the early 1990s American documents from the Cold War period were declassified. That prompted the

¹³⁸ Emerson, *Future History*, 3.

government in Copenhagen to conduct thorough research on the extent of U.S. military activity in Greenland. Bearing in mind the bomber accident of 1968, Denmark wanted to examine the issues of nuclear weapon deployment in nuclear-free Danish Greenland. The results were reported as an international scandal, named by the media “Thulegate.” Within the next two years a comprehensive report analyzing the American actions in Greenland was published.¹³⁹ The report confirmed that the United States deployed nuclear weapon in Greenland until 1965, but also revealed the details of the unrealized project *Iceworm*. Although the affair could adversely affect relations between allies within NATO, the report’s authors approached the topic very indulgently and diplomatically, explaining that the United States acted in good faith, and it was the Danish government to blame, since it had vaguely defined issues concerning American nuclear weapons deployment in the Danish Arctic in the bilateral agreement back in the 1950s.¹⁴⁰ In the 1990s the Arctic was present in political discourse, but mostly through political reckoning with the past.

Dealing with the Cold War past

In the Arctic the 1990s was a period of melting ice between East and West, both politically as well as in reality. Military issues did not disappear from the discourse; however, they did recede into the background, while environmental issues came to the foreground. The attempt to take environmental issues of the High North to the international level had been initiated by Canada already during the third round of United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea in the early 1970s. At that time Ottawa proposed that the coastal countries of the Arctic region should possess

¹³⁹ Grant, *Polar Imperative*, 336.

¹⁴⁰ *Greenland during the Cold War : Danish and American Security policy 1945-68*, translated by Henry Myers. (Copenhagen: Danish Institute of International Affairs, 1997).

special legal authority allowing them to control pollution in adjacent waters. In 1973, in the context of the looming oil crisis which turned upside down the world's economy, new environmental standards became a luxury that no one could afford.¹⁴¹

In face of serious economic problems which Moscow had to confront in 1990s, the Russian Navy was left underfunded. Once the pride of the Soviet navy, the Northern Fleet was seriously neglected. Lack of resources not only prevented new investments, but even the maintenance of the existing fleet. This situation awakened anxious comments about the danger of radioactive contamination from the neglected nuclear-powered submarines. The threat of nuclear weapons was replaced with a threat of nuclear pollution. At that point, evidence emerged that many of the nuclear reactors were in danger of being abandoned in the Arctic region. Furthermore, in 1996 a Russian-Norwegian environmental organization, the Bellona Foundation, warned about the aging nuclear-powered submarines in the Kola Peninsula.¹⁴² Another topic that raised much controversy was the atomic testing ground at Novaya Zemlya. It was never exactly estimated how big were the environmental damages caused by nuclear tests carried out on the archipelago, but environmentalists have suggested considerable negligence during the nuclear tests.¹⁴³ Already in the mid-nineties, the Russian Minister of Atomic Energy, Viktor Mikhaylov, refuted these accusations, arguing that the former testing ground was “as clean as New York, even cleaner.”¹⁴⁴ Finally, after repeated interventions of the international community, the securitization and safety of Soviet-era nuclear infrastructure in the Arctic was done

¹⁴¹ Grant, *Polar Imperative*, 367.

¹⁴² David Fairhall, *Cold Front: Conflict Ahead in Arctic Waters*, (Washington: Counterpoint, 2011), 103.

¹⁴³ Sale, *The Scramble for the Arctic*, 160.

¹⁴⁴ Emmerson, *Future History*, 119.

largely with the help of European and American participation, becoming one of the first areas of cooperation between East and West in the Arctic region.¹⁴⁵

Nevertheless it is worth remembering that not only the Soviet Union polluted the Arctic region during the Cold War, but also the United States had its inglorious contribution. Speculation over the nuclear warheads of the crashed bomber near Thule Airbase in 1968 continued to stir controversy. Although Washington declared the scene of the crash as completely safe and properly secured, the consequences of this accident could be seen in the health condition of the local people for many years.¹⁴⁶ Similarly, the abandoned DEW Line infrastructure, with its toxic waste and spilled oil, significantly affected the health of surrounding area's indigenous peoples.¹⁴⁷

The issue of environmental protection is an extremely broad topic. Interestingly the issues that were not so complicated from the political and economic point of view found a common communication ground between the two sides of the Cold War. Signed in 1973, the Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears was the first such document, which created ground for cooperation between Canada, Denmark, Norway, the United States and the Soviet Union in the Arctic region. It was the first signal that the perception of the Arctic was beginning to change. Instead of the great, cold wasteland, the Arctic environment was starting to be recognized as exceptionally important. However the environmental issues returned with renewed force with the break-up of the Soviet Union.

Environmental protection has since become the core of cooperation in the High North. In 1991, eight states whose territories bordered the Arctic Circle (Denmark,

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 120.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 121.

¹⁴⁷ Sale, *The Scramble for the Arctic*, 161.

Canada, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden and the United States) signed the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy. It provided a solid foundation for the Arctic Council established five years later, which became an international forum for the collaboration of Arctic countries. However, the idea was not new and was strongly advocated by Canada back in the eighties, but due to the ongoing ideological conflict, it seemed impossible to create that kind of organization.¹⁴⁸

Geopolitics after the Retreating Ice

The change in the perception of the Arctic in 1990s also contributed to the science field. The fear of radioactive pollution resulted in the development of environmental research in the Arctic. Now, submarines could be peacefully used for research purposes. The increase of research in the Far North resulted in the study of the Cold War's environmental effects in the region and the first signs of climate change. One of the scientists of the University of Washington in Seattle who analyzed the submarine data said, "The submarine study that compared the measurements in the 1970s and 1980s with cruises in the 1990s was spectacular – they were the most significant and dramatic results we had."¹⁴⁹ The suspicion that the global climate was gradually warming was correct.¹⁵⁰ The research conducted in the 1990s explains why, a decade later, the Arctic again proved to be a global flashpoint.

NASA has conducted detailed studies of ice cover in the far north since 1979. Satellite images of the Arctic Circle have provided valuable data and allowed scientists to determine the exact annual variations of the polar ice sheet. The ice is

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 140-141.

¹⁴⁹ Alun Anderson, *After the Ice: Life, Death, and Geopolitics in the New Arctic*, (Washington: Smithsonian Books, 2009), 75.

¹⁵⁰ Proof of the growing environmental awareness was the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the so-called Earth Summit, held in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro.

growing during the cold months, hidden in the darkness of the Arctic winter, and shrinks during the polar summer to reach its lowest level in the middle of September. In the years 1979-2012, a steady decline of 13 percent per decade was recorded.¹⁵¹ Apart from satellite measurements, yet another test of the Arctic ice was conducted. Sonar scanning of the ice sheet relative to seabed, made by submarines, indicated a decrease in ice thickness by more than 40 percent compared to the levels recorded in 1980. “Combining the loss in extent as well as in thickness, the total volume of Arctic ice is now a mere third of what it was in the 1980s.”¹⁵²

For the Arctic environment the loss of the ice sheet means a catastrophic change, but climate change in the Far North has also had an enormous impact on global weather. Moreover, an ice-free Arctic will change not only the global environment, but can also affect other areas. Although these issues may be disquieting for environmentalists, they might be excellent news for economists. Global warming and the melting of the polar ice can also bring real benefits. Lack of ice means tangible benefits for transport, through the opening of new shipping routes that allow the shortening of traditional trade routes. An ice-free Arctic Ocean can reduce the distance between East Asia, Europe and North America. That means a real reduction of costs, which is also an opportunity to increase trade.

Churchill, a small Canadian town, situated on Hudson Bay just below the Arctic Circle, is a great example of those changes. The small port played an extremely important role in the Arctic convoy shipments of grain to the Soviet Union during World War II. During the Cold War, because of the tense situation between the

¹⁵¹ Tomasz Iwankowski, “The Arctic Gold Rush: How Global Warming can lead to increased global energy security”, *Conflict and Security*

URL: <http://conflictandsecurity.wordpress.com/2012/11/13/the-arctic-gold-rush-how-global-warming-can-lead-to-increased-global-energy-security/>

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

superpowers, the port had no possibility to fulfill any role. The buildings fell into disrepair, and location's uselessness from a strategic point of view obviated the need for the port's reconstruction and its use for military purposes. In 1997, Pat Broe purchased the port facilities for a nominal sum. He did not anticipate the global warming of the subsequent decade. In that decade, the time during which the bay is covered with ice significantly shortened and raised hope for its navigability to as many as ten months a year. Today Churchill is back again is an important trade point. Moreover, it witnessed one of the most significant events in polar relations between Russia and West in the post-Soviet era. In October 2007 the Russian ship *Kapitan Sviridov* pulled into Churchill's harbor and it was the first time when the port accepted goods shipped directly from Russia. The news quickly spread around the world and delegates from the Russian embassy were invited to announce that "Today represents the first successful shipment on the Arctic bridge"¹⁵³ However, even with examples such as Churchill the primary economic advantage of an ice-free Far North was greater access to natural resources.

The Arctic Black Gold Rush

The end of the Cold War awakened hopes of peace and global prosperity. The twenty-first century has brought a much different reality than the world expected. Its first decade was the beginning of a new era, marked by the changing global balance of power, the emergence of new global powers, and the rise of new threats to international peace. While the perception of the Arctic was changing, it is worth noting that the strategic infrastructure of the Far North had not been removed. Polar countries were still aware of the strategic potential of the Arctic. However, the twenty-first century's strategic imperatives looked different, largely based on energy

¹⁵³ Howard, *The Arctic Gold Rush*, 103-105.

security, which was becoming increasingly difficult to ensure in times of increasing energy expenditures.

In December 2008 Moscow presented a draft of its new security strategy until 2020. The text pointed that (sic) “international policy will focus on the access to the energy sources of the world, including the Middle East, Barents Sea, the Arctic Region, Caspian Sea and Central Asia. The struggle for the hydrocarbon resources can be developed to the military of confrontation as well, which can result with violation of balance on the Russia’s borders with the allies and increasing of nuclear countries.”¹⁵⁴ This statement clearly points out that the natural resources in the new realities became what ideology had been during the Cold War.

Figure 1. World energy consumption, 1990-2040

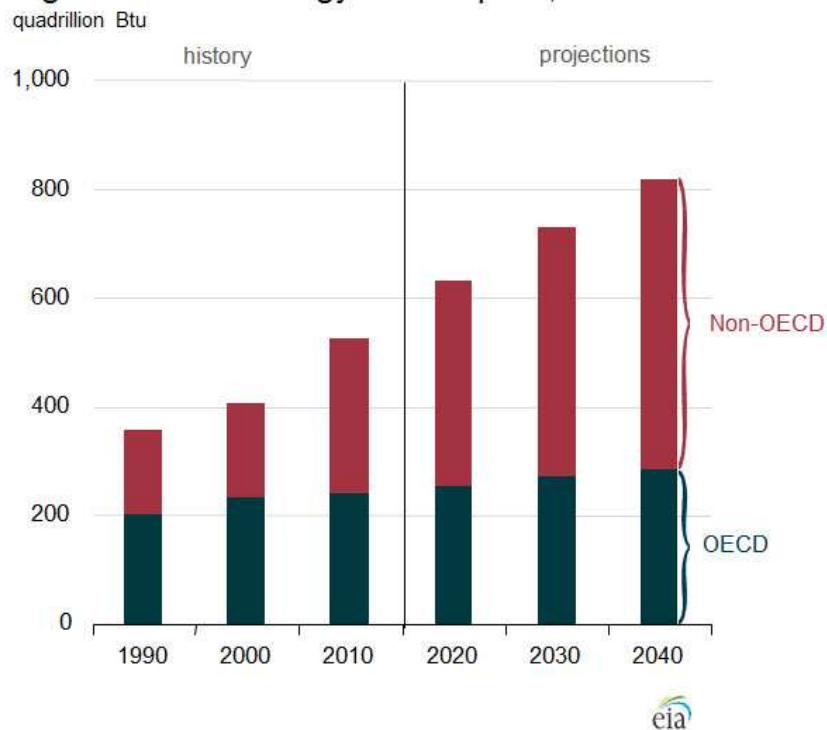


Image 15.

According to the International Energy Outlook 2013 (IEO2013), the report of the U.S. Energy Information Agency anticipates that global energy consumption will

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

increase by 56 percent in the years 2010-2040. Global natural gas consumption is expected to increase by 1.7 percent per year, so that by 2040 world natural gas consumption is anticipated to increase by 64 percent, from 113 trillion cubic feet in 2010 to 185 trillion cubic feet in 2040. Liquid fuels, mostly petroleum-based, remain the largest source of energy. The production of liquid fuels is expected to increase by 28.3 million barrels per day between 2010 and 2040. And although a large part of rising energy consumption is due to economic growth in developing countries, this will have an impact on the entire global economy.¹⁵⁵ (Images 15 and 16).

Figure 2. World energy consumption by fuel type, 1990-2040

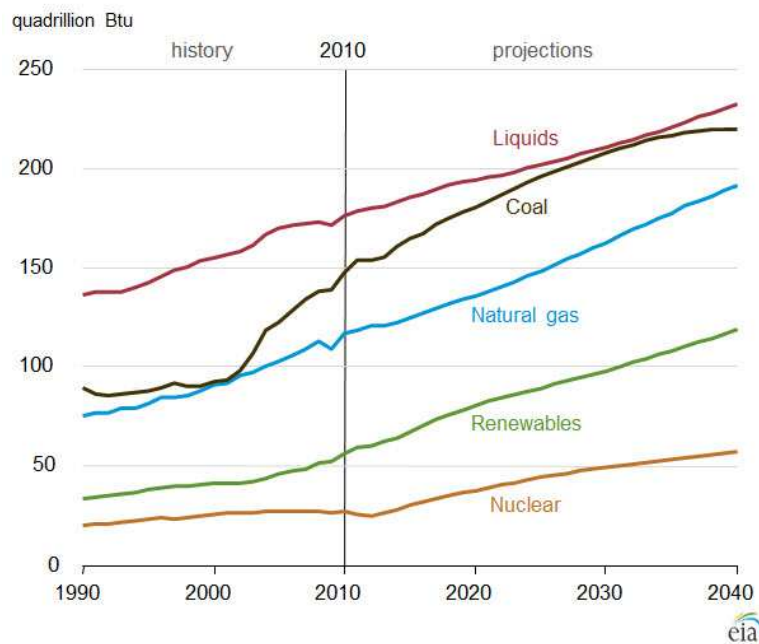


Image 16.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century the price of a barrel of oil began to rise dramatically. In a short period of time it doubled. A debate on the looming oil crisis started along with the rush for new resources. According to Daniel Yergin, chairman of Cambridge Energy Research Associates, this was now “the fifth time that the world is said to be running out of oil. Each time... technology and the opening of the

¹⁵⁵ *International Energy Outlook 2013 (IEO2013)*, U.S. Energy Information Agency report, 2013.

new frontier areas has banished the specter of decline.”¹⁵⁶ Yergin’s statement is key to understanding why the importance of the Arctic has grown so much in the twenty-first century. The Arctic became a solution for the new era’s problems, as Yergin noted. While it is hard to point out the exact moment when the debate over the Arctic started and the Far North returned to the geopolitical map after a period of stagnancy in the 1990s, a correlation between rising oil prices and the intensification of political activities in the Arctic region can be easily detected. The rising global demand for oil and gas and its consequences of rising prices imply that activity in the region is expected to increase.¹⁵⁷

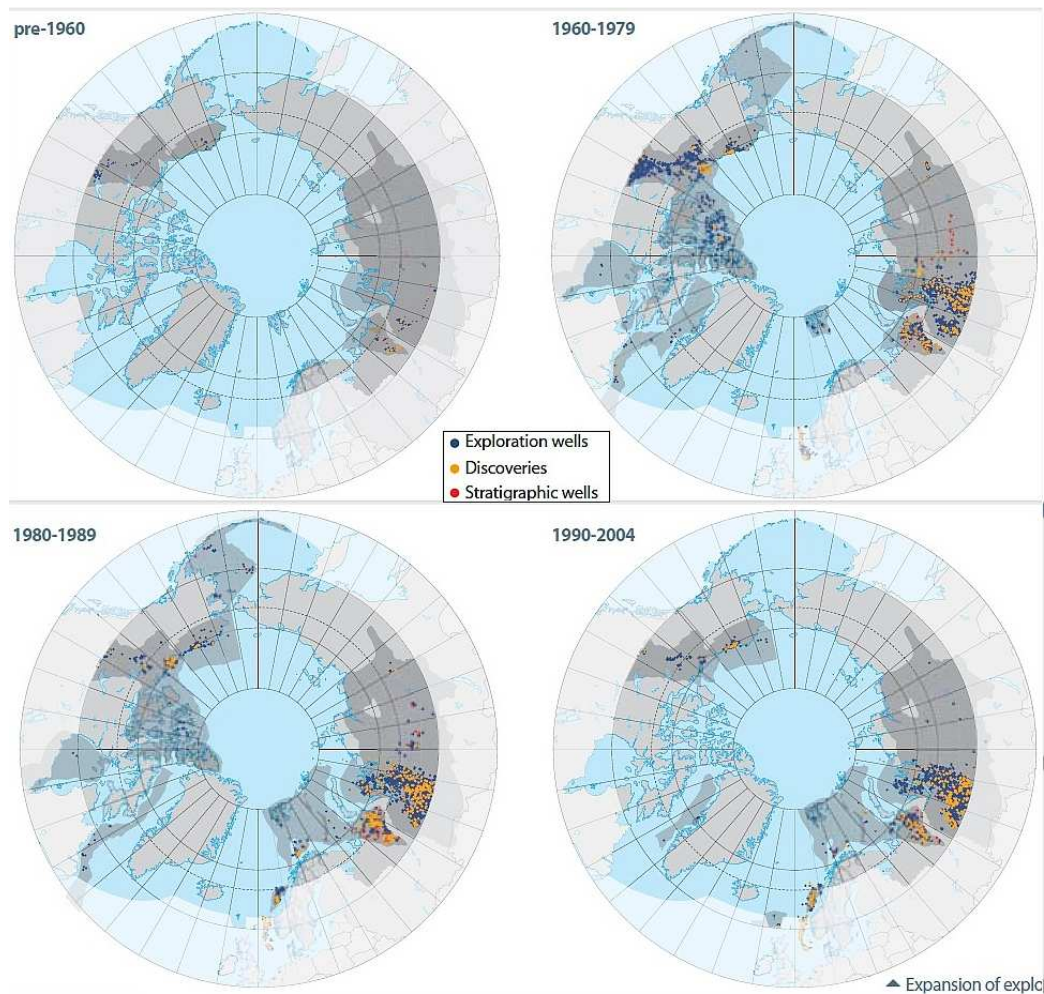


Image 17: Map of subsequent oilfield discoveries

¹⁵⁶ Emerson, *Future History*, 169.

¹⁵⁷ Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (AMAP) *Arctic Oil and Gas*, (2007), 32.

Alaska was the first place to prove the existence of oil reserves in the Arctic region. Discovery of the oilfield in Prudhoe Bay in 1968 was the beginning of a new era in the Far North. Initially estimations were that the field held up to 10 billion barrels of oil, which made Prudhoe Bay the largest field ever discovered in North America and almost three times larger in term of production volume than the second largest oilfield in United States.¹⁵⁸ The black gold rush in Alaska accelerated Canadian and Soviet exploration programs, which quickly became almost as promising as their American equivalent. At approximately the same time, oil was discovered in Yamalo – Nenets Autonomous Okrug and Nenets Autonomous Okrug in Russia and MacKenzie Delta in Canada. And even though in some Arctic areas, oil seeps have been known and used by indigenous people in Alaska, Canada and Russia for centuries, long before Prudhoe’s oilfield discovery, exploration had never been carried out on a large scale.¹⁵⁹ (Image 17).

The potential of the Arctic’s natural resources was noticed and oil companies started to drill in the late 1960s, but the real battle for the Arctic oil started in the twenty-first century. However, a major obstacle was the transportation cost.¹⁶⁰ All the discovered oilfields were far from any potential markets, thus they required advanced infrastructure for effective use. In the 1970s the construction of long pipelines started.¹⁶¹ It was already clear that the future history of resource extraction will be closely connected to the new technologies and infrastructure. Hence, intensive work on technologies which would allow the exploration of new Arctic resources had

¹⁵⁸ *Top 100 Oil and Gas fields of 2009*, U.S. Energy Information Agency report, (2009), 4.

¹⁵⁹ The first oil pipelines in the Arctic region were built already during the Second World War between Canada and Alaska, but they were abandoned until the 1980s.

¹⁶⁰ Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme (AMAP) *Arctic Oil and Gas*, (2007), 14.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, 14.

begun. Production activity grew rapidly once the transportation infrastructure was built (Image 18).

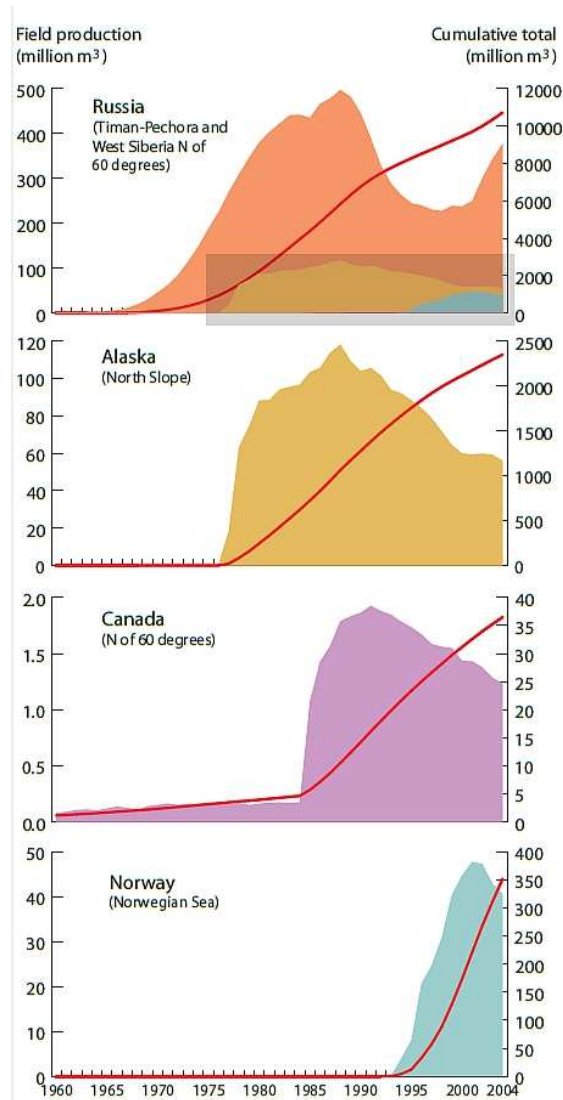


Image 18: Annual and cumulative oil production in Arctic areas, by country.

In 2007 the U.S. Geological Survey described the Far North as “the largest unexplored prospective area for petroleum remaining on Earth.” Indeed, it currently produces 13 percent of the world’s oil and about 30 percent of its gas.¹⁶² Of those amounts, most currently come from the Russian Arctic, about 80% of the oil and 99% of the gas. However, there are still places in the Arctic that remain unexploited

¹⁶² Anderson, *After the Ice*, 181.

and, according to the Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme report, resources in Greenland, Iceland and the Faroe Islands might significantly change existing estimates, but not the prediction that “Oil and gas activities will remain part of the Arctic for many decades to come.”¹⁶³ Furthermore, these activities are expected to increase over the next several years. Global climate change is crucial to understanding the future of the Arctic. Diminishing sea ice and thawing of permafrost open new possibilities for the development of the region. Consequently “the construction of new infrastructure for development and particularly transportation will likely extend into areas currently without such human presence.”¹⁶⁴ However, it has to be remembered that there are many factors which influence and control development activities in the Arctic. Most of the contemporary limitations are not scientific or technological. The ultimate control of the Arctic’s future lies in international relations.

Who owns the Arctic?

One of the main issues in the contemporary discourse over the Far North region is the question of who actually owns the Arctic. During the Cold War most of the Arctic was a military zone, and that question was asked locally in the context of specific territorial claims. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the danger of unleashing a nuclear inferno between East and West in the Arctic Ocean disappeared. However, in the twenty-first century, while the temperature of the Far North waters was increasing, the issue of international rights to those waters became extremely

¹⁶³ AMAP, 17.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 33.

hot. According to Charles Emmerson, “Over time, it is inevitable that climate change too will affect legal regimes in the Arctic.”¹⁶⁵

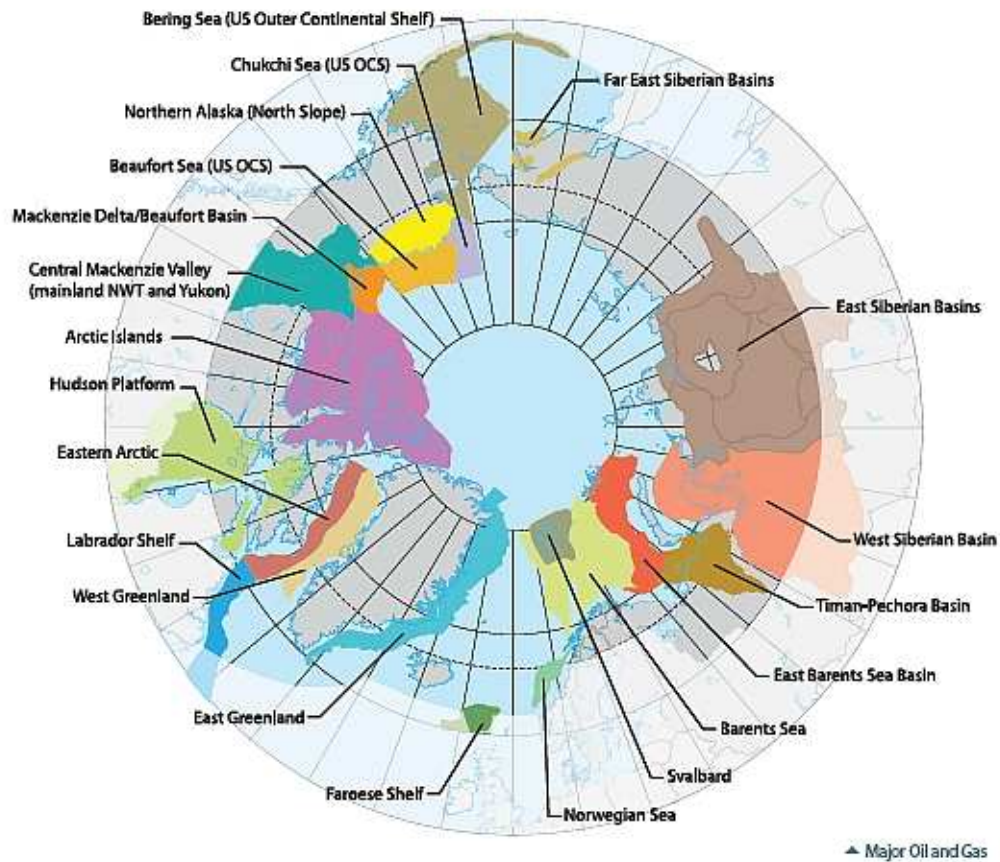


Image 19: Major Oil and Gas Provinces in the Arctic Region

Territorial issues in the Arctic have two aspects, both based on territorial claims and the interpretation of the law of sea. The first one is connected with the acquisition of the rights to the huge amounts of oil and gas, since some parts of the Arctic region are the subject of territorial disputes. In this regard Canada, Denmark, Norway, Russia and the United States, the so-called Arctic Five, claim parts of polar waters as "national waters" or as "internal waters". The second aspect is the issue of maritime transport and the issue of international seaways on the Arctic water, which have risen because of the potential benefits of newly navigable routes and shipping traffic on

¹⁶⁵ Emmerson, *Future History*, 100.

the waters previously considered closed for international trade due to ice cover, concerns over national security, and questions of environmental protection (Image 19).

When in 1930, the League of Nations failed to codify the international maritime law at the Hague conference, the question of national waters functioned on a basis that originated in the days when caravels still sailed the oceans.¹⁶⁶ In effect, many countries have based their claims to territorial waters on unilateral declarations. Hence, for example, President Truman in September 1945 unilaterally extended United States jurisdiction over the continental shelf lying within 200 nautical miles off the U.S. coast, a model which has been followed by different nations in other parts of the world.¹⁶⁷ The problem of territorial waters remained open over the next decade. Thus in 1958 and again in 1960 the United Nation Conference on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) was held in Geneva. The two conferences resulted in four subsequent conventions, which came into force between 1962 and 1966. However, there were still some major questions which had not been solved and caused heated debate between different countries, even those allied in the Cold War struggle. In 1973, in the Venezuelan capital of Caracas negotiations on the UNCLOS III began and lasted for another seven years. The UNCLOS process established specific sea territories concepts which have been used ever since. Its conventions set the limit of various claimed areas, measured from a carefully defined baseline. Even though the concepts were defined very precisely, they were still subject to different

¹⁶⁶ The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea: A historical perspective, Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea;
URL: http://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/convention_historical_perspective.htm
#Historical Perspective

¹⁶⁷ Grant, *Polar Imperative*, 342-343.

interpretations. Furthermore, agreements between nations are not law in a *sensu stricto*, thus their enforcement gave rise to many difficulties.

The legal situation of the Arctic Ocean is particularly difficult for international relations. Even though it is almost completely surrounded by large land masses, its middle part is far from any land and might be considered as “high sea”. However, since the definition of “high sea” requires both the right to, and the ability to navigate, it cannot be applied to Arctic Ocean since it is covered in ice. The issue of permanently or seasonally frozen waters has never been codified in international treaties. Thus the status of the Arctic was frozen for decades in the Law of Sea. Paradoxically, climate change helps to cover Arctic issues with already codified law, but at the same time causes problems, since those laws were not written in the context of the Arctic’s unique waters.¹⁶⁸ Divergent interpretations allow tCanada, Denmark, Norway and Russia to see the Arctic surrounding their shores as territorial or internal waters. Meanwhile, most of the countries of the European Union and the United States for various reasons would like to officially recognize the region as international waters.

How the Local Became Global

During the Cold War the complicated coastline of polar North America caused several territorial issues between the United States and Canada. One of them was the status of the Northwest Passage, the waterway allowing circumnavigation of the North American continent from the north. The U.S. perceived its important role in both civilian and military communication on the Arctic Ocean. They wanted to establish a status of international waters on this strategic corridor. Meanwhile

¹⁶⁸ Sale, *The Scramble for the Arctic*, 142.

Canadians were seriously concerned about the increasing presence of American forces on their territorial waters and they saw the passage as an internal water area, subjected only to Ottawa's control (Image 20).



Image 20: The Northwest Passage

Interestingly the debate over the Northwest Passage was accelerated by the discovery of oil in Alaska's Prudhoe Bay. One year after the discovery, in 1969, the American Humble Oil & Refining Company decided to attempt a transit on the Northwest Passage and conduct the oil tanker *Manhattan* through the Arctic ice. It was an effort to prove that it was a navigable route.¹⁶⁹ The American tanker, with special modifications which partly turned it into icebreaker, sailed from Prudhoe Bay to the East Coast of United States. For the first time in history, a large cargo vessel was used in the polar waters for a commercial objective. Unfortunately, this pioneering voyage turned into a sour point in relations between United States and Canada and had a dramatic impact on Ottawa's policy toward the Far North. It opened many different questions in the international arena, including debates on the potential profits of the oil companies making extensive use of the passage and international

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 148.

control of its navigation.¹⁷⁰ Hence many of the issues undertaken in the UNCLOS III agenda upon Canadian request were related to the Arctic, for example the status of the Arctic Ocean or the legal definition of the Northwest Passage.¹⁷¹ Interestingly, even though the UNCLOS III was signed during the Cold War, Canada managed to convince the United Nations of its Arctic conception thanks to the support of Norway, Sweden and most of all, the Soviet Union.¹⁷²

The last of the three conferences on the Law of Sea did not change the international situation of the Northwest Passage. Sixteen years later, in 1985 the U.S. Coastguard ice-breaker *Polar Sea* made another transit of the passage. This time there were Canadian coastguard officers on the ship. Thus Ottawa, even despite the social protest, did not issue an official protest, but it did result in a statement about Canadian boundaries, which declared “Canada’s sovereignty in the Arctic is indivisible. It embraces land, sea and ice. It extends without interruption to the seaward-facing coasts of the Arctic islands. These islands are joined, and not divided, by the waters between them. They are bridged for most of the year by ice. From time immemorial Canada’s Inuit people have used and occupied the ice as they have used and occupied the land.”¹⁷³

Recurring debate over the status of this sea route led to another international agreement.¹⁷⁴ In 1988 Washington and Ottawa signed the agreement on Arctic cooperation, which aimed to systematize their common interests in security. However, there was a specific point on the use of ice-breakers in Arctic waters. It allowed for transportation through the passage, hence solving the practical side of the

¹⁷⁰ Fairhall, *Cold Front*, 128.

¹⁷¹ Grant, *Polar Imperative*, 366.

¹⁷² Sale, *Scramble for the Arctic*, 150.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 152.

¹⁷⁴ The full name is the 1988 Agreement between the United States and Canada on Arctic Cooperation

problem, but the dispute over sovereignty has not been resolved.¹⁷⁵ Nonetheless it is certain that “if melting ice permits, maritime transport along the North-West Passage will play an important role.”¹⁷⁶

After the Cold War not only climate changed. In a situation where the world is no longer divided only between two superpowers, and new players have entered the international game, it is clear that the status of Northwest Passage will be of interest for the whole world, not just the United States and Canada. In addition, the aforementioned example of Churchill in Canada shows perfectly how the Northwest Passage became a global issue. The widely announced “Arctic bridge” opened in 2007 was also the first time when two major Arctic Sea routes, the Northwest Passage and the Northern Sea Route (or the Northeast Passage) were connected, enhancing the global network of trade links.¹⁷⁷

To understand the distinction between local and global disputes over the Arctic it is crucial to understand that territorial disputes between the United States and Canada included much more than just a debate over the Northwest Passage. Another unsolved territorial question lies in the Beaufort Sea, where the dispute over a piece of coastline dates back to the days when Alaska belonged to Russian Empire and Canada to the British Empire. Although it seemed that the problem was solved in the fifties of the twentieth century, with the discovery of natural resources in these waters, the issue exploded again.¹⁷⁸ This dispute is a perfect example of a local territorial dispute. While the Northwest Passage is an important subject for many global players, the Beaufort Sea disagreement is just a local territorial dispute.

¹⁷⁵ Sale, *Scramble for the Arctic*, 142.

¹⁷⁶ Fairhall, *Cold Front*, 136.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 139.

¹⁷⁸ Michael Byers, *Who Owns the Arctic? Understanding Sovereignty Disputes in the North*, (Douglas & MCintyre, 2010), 98-99.

Today, the Arctic Ocean is an area where forces of the five main players clash. This so-called Arctic Five, which are five countries with the greatest influence in the Arctic (Canada, Denmark, Norway, Russia and the United States), have all claimed territorial rights in the region. But right behind them there are other forces that also seek a role to play a role in the Arctic, countries which nether historically nor geographically have had much in common with the Far North, such as China, Germany, Italy, Spain or Poland and of course the entire European Union as a separate actor. Along with state actors, transnational companies have entered the Arctic game and they are ready to compete with each other for the best investments. Anglo-Dutch Shell, Russian Rosneft, Norwegian Statoil, American Exxon Mobil and Italian Eni are companies that have invested enormous amounts of money in the region and created strong lobbies which have to be reckoned with.¹⁷⁹

The Russian Ocean

Some of territorial disputes in the Arctic are rooted in contemporary realities very different from those of the Cold War while others are completely new. After the ratification of UNCLOS, each country has been assigned a ten-year period to request an extension of claims to the continental shelf, which provides exclusive right to natural resources lying on the bottom of the sea belonging to the shelf.¹⁸⁰ Norway ratified the convention in 1996, Canada in 2003, Denmark a year later. Russia, it is important to remember, ratified UNCLOS in 1997.¹⁸¹ Each of these countries upon

¹⁷⁹ Iwankowski, *Global Warming can lead to increased global energy security*.

¹⁸⁰ United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea URL:

http://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/closindx.htm

¹⁸¹ *Declarations and statements*, Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea URL:

http://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/convention_declarations.htm#Russian
Federation Upon ratification

ratification of the Convention launched research projects which were designed to establish the basis for claims for extended seabed of the continental shelf.

In 2001 Russia submitted its first claim to the UNCLOS continental shelf commission. This was one of many signs that Russia was planning to return to the international arena as an important player. The Russian proposal involved the establishment of new outer borders of Russia's continental shelf, which would extend beyond the 200-mile zone approved by UNCLOS. The new Russian territorial request included a huge part within the Russian Arctic, reaching the North Pole. The main argument in favor of such a change was the claim to the eastern part of the Lomonosov ridge, which as an underwater ridge could be considered an extension of the Eurasian continent. A year later, in 2002 the UN commission asked Russia to submit additional evidence to support the claim.¹⁸²

Additional research was conducted in 2007 and 2008 as part of the Russian Program for the International Polar Year (IPY). It is definitely not a coincidence that Moscow planned the polar research to celebrate the IPY. The International Polar Year is a large scientific program which focuses on the Arctic and Antarctic. It is organized by the International Council for Science and the World Meteorological Organization. Although 2007-2008 IPY was the third time when celebrations took place under that name, it was actually the fourth polar year, since the 1957-1958 International Geophysical Year was de facto the International Polar Year in a politically correct version adapted to Cold War realities.¹⁸³ There is no confirmation, but it may be presumed that in the fifties the term *polar* was abandoned due to the complicated

¹⁸² Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) Outer limits of the continental shelf beyond 200 nautical miles from the baselines: Submissions to the Commission: Submission by the Russian Federation; Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea; URL: http://www.un.org/depts/los/clcs_new/submissions_files/submission_rus.htm

¹⁸³ Official website of the International Polar Year 2007-2008 URL: <http://www.ipy.org/>

situation of the two polar regions. At the time the situation in the Antarctic was still not regulated by the Antarctic treaty, which was signed in 1959 and officially entered into force 1961.¹⁸⁴ Meanwhile the extremely tense military situation in the Arctic, which was described earlier, made scientific research impossible (Image 21. and 22.).



Image 21. and 22.: Official logo of IPY and IGY

Exactly fifty years after sending into space the first artificial satellite, Sputnik-1, as a celebration of the International Geophysical Year, Russia had decided once again to recall the strategic importance of the Arctic region. On July 10, 2007 *Akademik Fyodorov*, a Russian diesel-electric scientific research vessel was launched from St. Petersburg. *Akademik Fyodorov* started the Arktika 2007 expedition equipped with two MIR Deep Submergence Vehicles and guided with the nuclear icebreaker *Rossiya*. The expedition aimed to conduct the first ever crew descent on the ocean floor at the North Pole. Of course, it was within the framework of research related to the 2001 Russian territorial claims. In less than a month from the beginning of the expedition, on August 2, 2007, MIR-1 reached a depth of nearly 14,000 feet below the surface of the ice, reaching the bottom of the North Pole. The expedition left at the bottom of pole the titanium Russian flag. It happened exactly ten years after the

¹⁸⁴ Adrian Howkins, *Melting Empires? Climate Change and Politics in Antarctica since the International Geophysical Year*, *Osiris*, Vol. 26, No. 1, Klima (2011) p.180-197

ratification of UNCLOS, when Moscow again symbolically announced to the world its claim to the North Pole.¹⁸⁵ (Image 22).



Image 22: Titanium Russian Flag on the Bottom of the North Pole

This was reminiscent of Cold War events in many dimensions. The expedition officially corrected depth measurements of the seabed under the North Pole made by the USS *Nautilus* in 1958, which were considered as the first reliable measurements ever made.¹⁸⁶ The crew taking part in the expedition after its return was greeted with the greatest honors by the highest national officials, just as had the American crew of Operation *Sunshine*. A year later, coincidentally on the fiftieth anniversary of the success of *Nautilus*, the *Arktika 2007* crew was awarded the highest national award.¹⁸⁷ Above all, it was a message that Moscow intended to fight for its dominant role in the Arctic Ocean, just like during the Cold War.

The international response appeared immediately, Canadian Foreign Minister Peter MacKay concluded, “You can’t go around the world these days dropping a flag

¹⁸⁵ *Russia plants flag under N Pole*, BBC News URL: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6927395.stm>

¹⁸⁶ Anderson, *The Ice Diaries*, 284.

¹⁸⁷ Kremlin decree *О награждении государственными наградами Российской Федерации* URL: <http://archive.kremlin.ru/text/docs/2008/01/156144.shtml>

somewhere. This isn't the 14th or 15th century.”¹⁸⁸ U.S. State Department spokesman Tom Casey said that he was “not sure whether they've put a metal flag, a rubber flag or a bedsheet on the ocean floor,” and “either way, it doesn't have any legal standing or effect on this claim.”¹⁸⁹ The Foreign Minister of Russia, Sergey Lavrov, quickly responded, “I was amazed by my Canadian counterpart's statement that we are planting flags around. We're not throwing flags around. We just do what other discoverers did. The purpose of the expedition is not to stake whatever rights of Russia, but to prove that our shelf extends to the North Pole.”¹⁹⁰ The irreverent response of Canadians, found its justification six years later, when in December 2013, Ottawa submitted to the UN an official request to make a proclamation about the North Pole. The Foreign Minister John Baird explained that “We are determined to ensure that all Canadians benefit from the tremendous resources that are to be found in Canada's far north.”¹⁹¹

In 2008 the new president of the Russian Federation, Dimitry Medvedev, announced that he viewed the Arctic as a “region of strategic importance”, which was turning into the Russian “resource base for the twenty-first century.” It was clear that Russia was eager to continue its expansion up north.¹⁹² The Russians are trying to emphasize their presence in the Far North in any number of possible ways. In 2012, they announced that they wanted to rename the Arctic Ocean to the Russian Ocean. The controversial idea to change the name was proposed by the University of Lomonosov professor Nikolai Pawliuk. He argued that the pioneering, exploratory and scientific contribution of the Russians in exploring the Arctic were grounds for

¹⁸⁸ Emerson, *Future History*, 82.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 82.

¹⁹⁰ Alexander Gabuev, “Cold War Goes North,” *Kommersant* (Aug. 4, 2007).

¹⁹¹ *Canada makes North Pole claim*, Fox News, December 11, 2013 URL:

<http://www.foxnews.com/science/2013/12/11/canada-makes-north-pole-claim/>

¹⁹² Fairhall, *Cold Front*, 158.

the name change. In addition, many other geographical names are aligned with a specific country, as in the case of the Indian Ocean and the Sea of Japan. It can also be explained with Charles Emmerson's words, which refer to the Soviet era, but are surprisingly relevant to the present day: "Outside the Soviet Union, as inside the Soviet Union, development of the Arctic was presented largely as a positive and even heroic accomplishment, rather than as a shameful and ultimately destructive episode in Arctic history."¹⁹³ This naming proposal not only re-awakens discussion about Russian involvement in the Arctic region, but also perfectly reflects the entire Russian policy towards the High North.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ Emmerson, *Future History*, 50.

¹⁹⁴ „Ocean „Arktyczny” czyli „Rosyjski”?”, Kresy24.pl, Wschodnia Gazeta Codzienna
URL: <http://kresy24.pl/12412/ocean-arktyczny-czyli-rosyjski/>

The New Cold War

It might have been expected that in the twenty-first century international realities would have changed so dramatically that the military dimension of the Arctic activity would no longer exist. Many elements from the Cold War appeared again, however, albeit in different form. Another military era was approaching in the history of the Arctic. According to Rob Huebert, member of the Canadian Defense and Foreign Affairs Institute and a professor of Political Science at the University of Calgary, “All of the Arctic states have begun rebuilding their military forces and capabilities in order to operate in the region. Personnel are undertaking Arctic training exercises; submarines that can operate in ice are being developed or enhanced; icebreakers are being built; and so forth.”¹⁹⁵

Since 2001, many of the military operations in the Arctic region officially have been motivated by the undermined international security order after the attacks on the World Trade Center. The changed security landscape in the early twenty-first century meant that the threat might come from non-state actors, rather than from other nation-states. Increased accessibility to and activity in the region led to many anxious opinions about the potential use of northern sea routes for smuggling weapons, drugs, and even terrorist attacks.¹⁹⁶ However, it is more likely that the warning systems built during the Cold War remained on twenty-four-hour alert for a different reason.¹⁹⁷ Strengthening natural security forces in the Arctic region remains an important objective for the circumpolar countries, because even though the twenty-

¹⁹⁵ J. Michael Cole, “Militarization of the Arctic Heats Up, Russia Takes the Lead”, *The Diplomat*, December 06, 2013 URL: <http://thediplomat.com/2013/12/militarization-of-the-arctic-heats-up-russia-takes-the-lead/>

¹⁹⁶ Byers, *Who Owns the Arctic?*, 16-17.

¹⁹⁷ Grant, *Polar Imperative* p.334

first century is a peaceful time for the Arctic, military force continues to back claims to sovereignty in the region.¹⁹⁸

At the beginning of the new century the Russian Navy was at its weakest point in history. On 12 August 2000 during the summer maneuvers of the Northern Fleet in the Barents Sea, the nuclear-powered submarine *Kursk* sank, with a crew of 118 men. *Kursk* was one of the first submarines produced in the post-Soviet era. Just a year before the accident, *Kursk* was considered a jewel of the Russian fleet and its crew was one of the most honored in Russia. The ship sank in largely unknown circumstances, probably as a result of failure of one of its torpedoes.¹⁹⁹ The tragic fate of *Kursk* reverberated in international relations. It was announced as a severe embarrassment of the Russian Navy and a symbolic climax of the steep decline of Russian military capability in the Arctic. “Everything about the sinking of the *Kursk* – from the initial disinformation spread by Russian admiralty, to the slow response from Moscow, to failure to accept offers of foreign assistance that might have saved lives – reeked of mismanagement.”²⁰⁰

However since 1999, an upward trend started in Russia’s military spending. It rose significantly in 2012, with a real increase of 16 percent.²⁰¹ This trend was also reflected in the Arctic. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute “Military interest in the region does exist. Canada, Denmark and Norway are moving forces into their respective Arctic regions and acquiring weapons and equipment for specific Arctic use. Russia has also started to expand

¹⁹⁸ Ekaterina Klimenko, “Interdependence, not sovereignty, is the key to the development of Russia’s Arctic region”, SIPRI, Oct. 13 2013

URL: http://www.sipri.org/media/newsletter/essay/klimenko_oct13

¹⁹⁹ Mariusz Kowalczyk, “Kurs(k) do zagłady”, *Wprost*, No. 35 (2004).

²⁰⁰ Emerson, *Future History*, 118.

²⁰¹ SIPRI Yearbook 2013, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute

its Arctic military capabilities, while the USA's Arctic security concerns still play only a minor role in its overall defence policy."²⁰²

Along with the significant *Arktika 2007* expedition, Moscow started to send political and military signals to other powers, most obviously to the United States, to respect Russia's national interest in the Arctic region. In August 2007, Russians conducted large-scale military exercises over the Arctic. Twelve giant Tupolev 95 strategic bombers, the same aircraft which dropped the Tsar Bomba over the Novaya Zemlya, flew over the vicinity of the Bering Strait as a demonstration of Russian military power.²⁰³ It was clearly a reflection of deeply rooted Russian fears, expressed two years earlier in the Russian newspaper Pravda: "It has recently transpired that the US administration plans to launch an extensive invasion in the Arctic region (...) the USA particularly plans to build airbases in Alaska while US oil giants intend to develop the Arctic shelf (...) it is obvious that the development of the USA's new objective in the Arctic region will be conducted within the scope of the nation's ambition to dominate the world. This intention is officially registered in the US National Security Strategy. The document entitles Washington to possess all necessary resources to influence the situation in all key regions of the globe. The Arctic has become one of such regions."²⁰⁴ Thus, not surprisingly the exercises held in 2007 were only a prelude to what Russia demonstrated in the following years.

Starting in 2012, over the next three years Russia plans to spend more than 21 billion rubles for construction and modernization of its Arctic marine infrastructure, including modern seaports. Moscow has also recommended upgrading of the navy in

²⁰² Siemon Wezeman, "Increased military capabilities in the Arctic reflect border demarcations, says SIPRI 26", SIPRI, March 2012, URL: <http://www.sipri.org/media/pressreleases/2012/26-mar-increased-military-capabilities-in-the-arctic-region-reflect-territorial-consolidation>

²⁰³ Andrew E. Kramer, "Russia Resumes Patrols by Nuclear Bombers", *The New York Times*, August 18, 2007 URL: http://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/18/world/europe/17cnd-russia.html?hp&_r=0

²⁰⁴ Howard, *The Arctic Gold Rush*, 158.

the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation, including a new series of ice-class patrol ships, a squadron of ice-breaking warships, and special Arctic troops provided with new equipment.²⁰⁵ In July 2011, Vladimir Putin, then the Russian prime minister, said that "Russia will defend its strategic interests in the Arctic and expand its presence there." Meanwhile Russian Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov announced plans of armaments sector production that aimed to protect the resources of the Arctic Circle in the territories claimed by Russia. The draft budget for all 2013-15 military expenditures includes plans for further growth in nominal terms of slightly more than 40 percent by 2015. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, "the Increases come as Russia implements the ambitious 2011-20 State Armaments Programme and undertakes a wide-ranging reform of its armed forces."²⁰⁶

Each of the polar players have demonstrated with their actions that the Arctic region has for them utmost importance. Many of them have emphasized the strategic position of the Arctic region in their official policy. The Canadian government has made protecting and strengthening Canada's Arctic sovereignty a priority. It is officially included in Canada's defense policy. Ottawa's Arctic policy is specified in the government's Northern Strategy created in 2009. The Danish Defense Agreement essentially highlights the changing geostrategic significance of the Arctic. In addition, a special Arctic strategy was adopted in 2011. Copenhagen also approved a plan for setting up the Arctic Military Command in 2009. Norwegian defense policy is based on the 2007 Soria Moria Declaration on International Policy. According to the Norwegian statement, the northern part of the country has become a priority in

²⁰⁵ J. Michael Cole, "Militarization of the Arctic Heats Up, Russia Takes the Lead", *The Diplomat*, (December 06, 2013) URL: <http://thediplomat.com/2013/12/militarization-of-the-arctic-heats-up-russia-takes-the-lead/>

²⁰⁶ SIPRI Yearbook 2013, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute

national defense. Not all of those countries have equal capabilities to achieve the ambitious goals of their Arctic policies, but they will most definitely try. Meanwhile, the United States is the only country with the required capabilities to play the most important role in the region, but it is the only country out of Arctic Five which did not place Arctic strategy in its highest priorities of its defense plans. In a document outlining security priorities for the 21st century presented in January 2012, the Arctic was not mentioned at all. The American 2009 Arctic Policy plays only a minor role in overall US defense policy. The US National Security Strategy, created by the administration of President Barack Obama in 2010, and the US National Military Strategy from 2011 mention the Far North only a few times.²⁰⁷ Will such a mix of different interests result in the outbreak of a New Cold War, which the media are so eager proclaim?

²⁰⁷ Siemon T. Wezeman "Military Capabilities in the Arctic", *SIPRI Background Paper*, (March 2012)

CONCLUSION

The contemporary strategic position of the Arctic in the twenty-first century seems to suggest extremely strong similarities to the Cold War. However, comparison to the Cold War usually meets with the opinion that the perspective of "an armed conflict in the Arctic is highly unlikely and that the Arctic is one of the most stable regions in the world."²⁰⁸ Nevertheless it might be said, that this is exactly what makes that comparison so accurate. During the Cold War, the situation in the Arctic perfectly reflected all the tensions between the superpowers. Bearing in mind the doctrine of Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD), it was the only area in the world where real military conflict could not break out. On the other hand, there is the opinion that "the possibility of future conflict cannot be completely overruled," although there is a strong conviction that it would "be the result of spill-over from conflicts elsewhere."²⁰⁹ Such a possibility is even more similar to the Cold War realities.

Moreover, the rhetoric and actions of the Russians in the Arctic are a direct legacy of the Soviet era. Russia wants to be seen as the only legitimate claimant to the Arctic. On 2 May 2013 the Russians announced that they were the first to cross the North Pole from Russia to Canada on military amphibious seacraft. Half a year later, before the Winter Olympic Games in 2014, the Olympic torch on its way to Sochi was taken to the most interesting corners of Russia, the highest peak in Europe, Mount Elbrus, and the depths of Lake Baikal. And most interestingly, it was taken to the North Pole by a group of scientists and explorers. The final torchbearer, Artur Chilingarov, was the member of *Arktika 2007* expedition. Furthermore, Moscow used the occasion to

²⁰⁸ *Russia's Strategy for Developing the Arctic Region Until 2020*, 1 Oct. 2013 URL: <http://www.sipri.org/research/security/arctic/arcticevents/russias-strategy-for-developing-the-arctic-region>

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

announce that the ice-breaker which took the torch “set a new record taking just 91 hours and 12 minutes to travel from Murmansk to the planet's most central point.”²¹⁰

The Russian Federation, just like its predecessor, will never lose a chance to prove its point (Image 23).



Image 23: Olympic Torch on the North Pole, Artur Chilingarov in the middle

During the Cold War, as it is today, the Arctic was a separate area of rivalry between the superpowers. Despite the fact that today's debate is based on different issues--sovereignty in the region, potential access to natural resources, and the status of international waters—there is still a strong military component to the competing interests. It might even be said that the contemporary portrait of the Arctic region is dominated with "the capabilities of the Arctic littoral states as significant military build-ups and potential threats to security," but what significantly differentiates the contemporary situation from the history of the Cold War is the issue of the environment, which like never before is vulnerable to irreparable loss and

²¹⁰ "The Sochi 2014 Olympic Torch lights up the North Pole", *Olympic Torch Relay*
URL: <http://torchrelay.sochi2014.com/en/news-the-sochi-2014-olympic-torch-lights-up-the-north-pole>

destruction.²¹¹ And even though “it’s not really climate change that will change who owns what in Arctic,” perhaps who owns it will save the Arctic.²¹²

The fact that the intensification of Arctic rivalries went on its own path in international relations perfectly demonstrates the strategic importance of the Arctic region. When it comes to predicting the future, historians are usually wrong, but the Arctic is a sure bet to be the scene of international competition for years to come.

²¹¹ Siemon T. Wezeman “Military Capabilities in the Arctic”, *SIPRI Background Paper*, (March 2012), 13.

²¹² Emerson, *Future History*, 100.

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