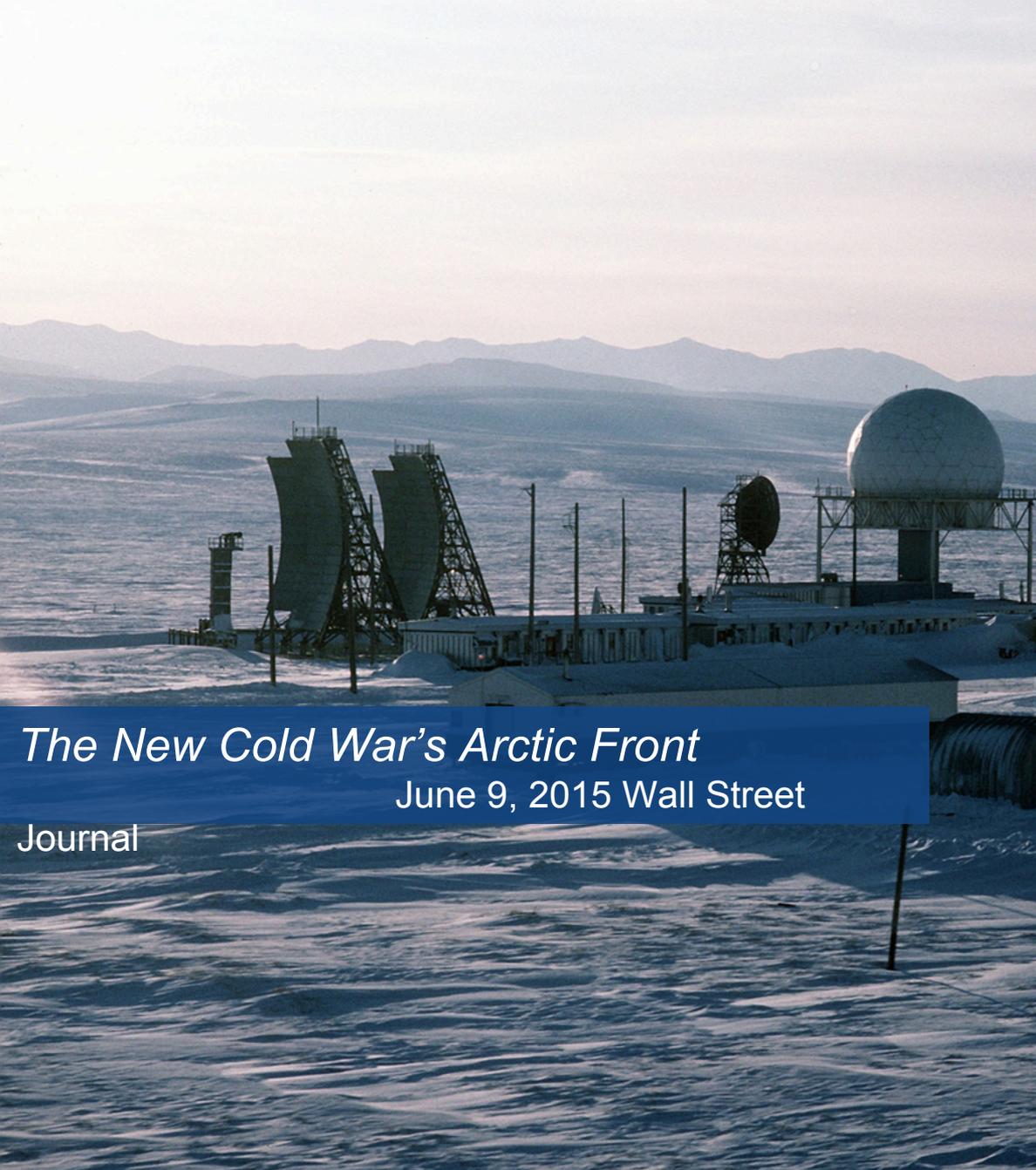

A QUICK START GUIDE TO 21st CENTURY SECURITY IN THE ARCTIC



THE ARCTIC INSTITUTE
CENTER FOR CIRCUMPOLAR SECURITY STUDIES



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As the international community rediscovered the Arctic as a geographic area at the start of the new millennium, researchers, the media, and policymakers alike began launching claims about the trajectory of the region. It was quickly heralded as the world's “*new energy frontier*” and the “*next arena for geopolitical conflict.*”

A wide range of work from academia and media alike have since shown how such predictions do not do the region, and its dynamics, justice.

This is not to contend that the Arctic is deprived of, or sheltered from, conflict per se. Instead, it is an argument for more nuance and accuracy in how we conceptualize this particular aspect of the politics in the Arctic.

Photo: US Air Force

The New Cold War's Arctic Front
June 9, 2015 Wall Street
Journal



The Arctic Council

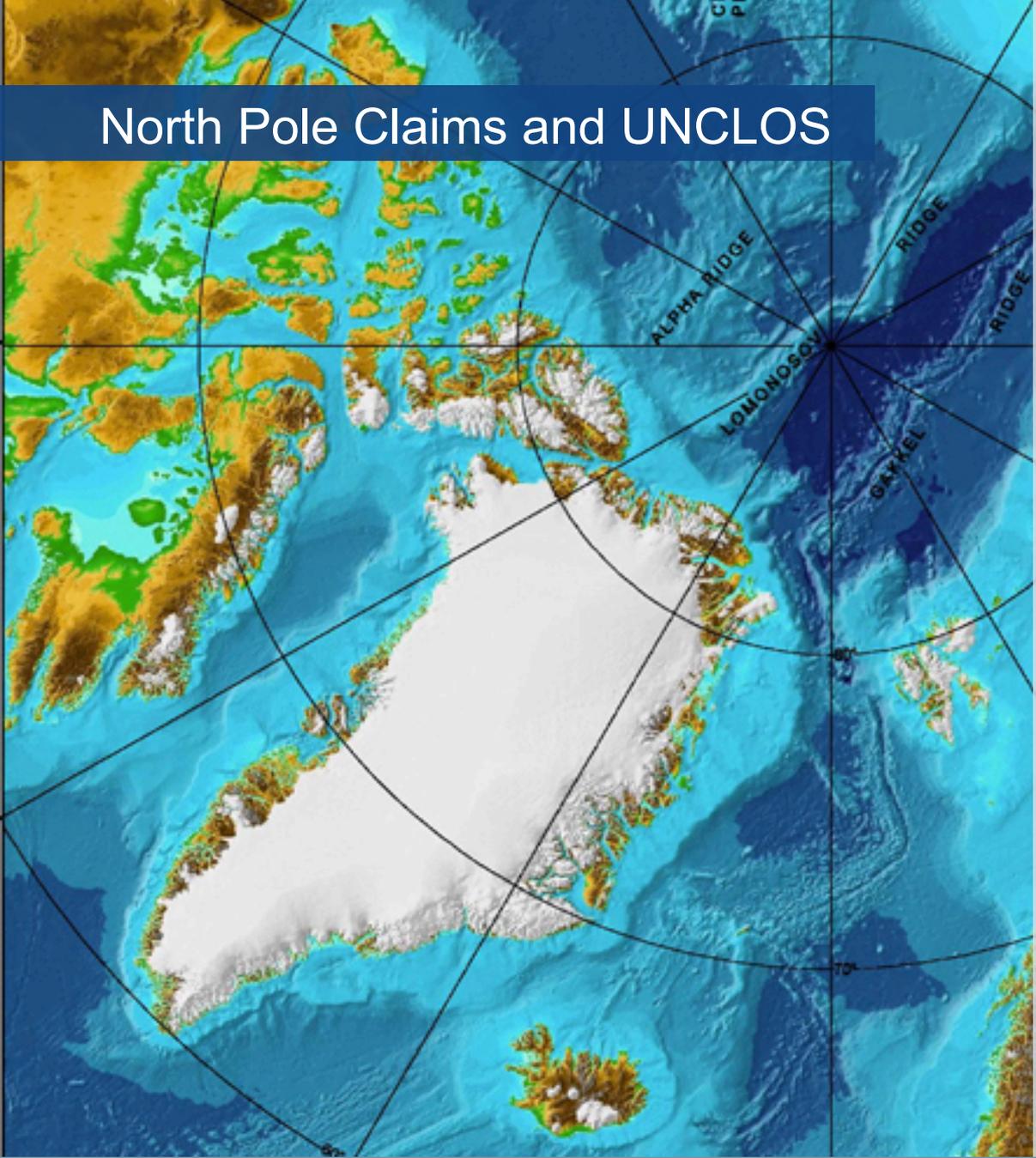
When the Arctic Council was founded in 1996, the Ottawa Declaration stated that it “should not deal with matters related to military security.” It also ensured that the Council is consensus-based.

Many have attributed the success of the Arctic Council to this clause, removing it from some of the more contentious issues that have arisen in the Arctic. The Ukraine crisis in 2014, for example, threatened to disrupt Arctic cooperation. Instead, while cooperation faltered everywhere else, it continued at the Council.

Moreover, the Arctic Council is already dealing with issues of “soft” security—exemplified by the SAR-agreement from 2013. There are, additionally, voices that argue for introducing security issues to the Council citing the lack of other relevant foras where such topics can be discussed in an Arctic context. This looks unlikely to become realized in the near future, however.

Photo: US Department of State

North Pole Claims and UNCLOS



Upon ratification of the United Nations Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), a country has a ten year period to make claims to an extended continental shelf, which, if validated, gives it exclusive rights to resources on or below the seabed of that extended shelf area.

In order to claim an extended shelf, a country must collect and analyze data that describe the depth, shape, and geophysical characteristics of the seabed. These data are then submitted to the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS), which eventually (after years) gives its recommendations.

Currently, Russia, Denmark (on behalf of Greenland), and Canada are claiming parts of the seabed—including the North Pole. All parties have stated their intention to settle potential disputes through cooperation.

Photo: US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration



NATO is in the Arctic by virtue of its five Arctic member states. It also conducts regular exercises in these states to practice operating in Arctic conditions.

Some NATO-countries, like Iceland and Norway, have been seeking a more active Arctic engagement from the alliance. At the Strasbourg-Kehl NATO summit in 2009; however, the possibility of a more explicit mention of the Arctic in NATO's future policy guidelines was firmly rebuffed by Canada. Canada argued that it did not see a role for NATO in dealing with the "softer" security challenges in the Arctic.

Since then, any NATO policy explicitly dealing with the Arctic has been at a standstill. After increased tension between Russia and the West in 2014, the alliance's northern role was again raised as debates over potential NATO membership arose in both Finland and Sweden.

Photo: US Air Force Master Sgt. Jerry Morrison



Canada

Canada's vast Arctic territories are important from a strategic point of view and often play an important symbolic role in government rhetoric.

Beyond that; however, recent Canadian governments have not prioritized Arctic military investment as the threat from the north has been minimal. Canada also jointly monitor the maritime domain and airspace through its bilateral alliance with the US under NORAD.

Commentators tend to argue that the most immediate concern for the Canadian Arctic is the social situation and poor economic development—not its defence capabilities.

Yet, in the Arctic, these two tend to go hand in hand, as the military performs a whole range of tasks crucial to Arctic inhabitants and provides valuable infrastructure development.

Photo: US Mission Canada



United States

Alaska has a strategic role in US defence policy, bordering the Russian region of Chukotka across the Bering Strait. Both missile defence and traditional forces are located in the northern state. The US Army, Navy, and Air Force are unified under the Alaskan Command (ALCOM), near Anchorage.

Compared to Canada, the US military is more heavily present in the Arctic region, although all assets are in areas south of the Arctic Circle.

The US Coast Guard also holds high importance, although the US has yet to invest in considerable Arctic capabilities and infrastructure. It remains to be seen what path the US will take in the Arctic in terms of both naval and/or coast guard capabilities.

Photo: Joe Painter



Greenland

Greenland is largely protected by the Danish Armed Forces. In addition, the US Air Force operates the Thule Air Base in the North-East of the island.

Crucial to the Danish military presence is the Sirius Sled Patrol, which acts as a sovereignty enforcer and surveillance unit. Yet, Greenland has not held an integral role in Danish defence policy in modern times.

For the Royal Danish Navy, the two new (2008) offshore patrol vessels in the Knud Rasmussen-class was a welcomed prioritisation of Arctic capabilities, in addition to the establishment of an Arctic Command in Nuuk, Denmark; however, has been late to the Arctic game and capabilities are struggling to keep up with demand.

Photo: NASA World Wind



Norway

The High North (Nordområdene) constitutes the primary security concern for any government in Oslo, given the land border with Russia in the county of Finnmark (196 km), and the maritime border stretching towards the Svalbard Archipelago.

Through a two-track relationship with Russia, Norway aims to both cultivate a friendly neighbouring relationship *and* to showcase defence and sovereignty enforcing capabilities along its northern border. On the one hand, Norway actively welcomes NATO exercises and allied engagement in the north. On the other, Norway maintains exercises with Russia, dealing with everything from coast guard issues to terrorism.

This is; however, not generally framed as an Arctic security issue. Instead it is placed in the wider context of Norwegian national security and defence, related to Norway's relationship with Russia and as its role as a northern member of NATO.

Photo: NASA World Wind



Russia

Russian activity and rhetoric with regards to the Arctic may seem contradictory. Russia signals a desire to keep Arctic cooperation unharmed, while simultaneously expanding their military posturing in the Arctic for both symbolic *and* strategic purposes.

Much of this military activity is not linked to Arctic developments per se, but comes as a consequence of Russia being an Arctic country which is re-asserting itself as a regional and global actor, with essential military bases located in the Arctic. These bases are imperative to Russia's access to the North Atlantic, and its status as a nuclear power through its strategic submarines.

Yet, Russia's increased emphasis on the Arctic from a strategic and national security perspective should not be underestimated. Investments in six bases along the Northern Sea Route, with emphasis on the base on Franz Josef Land, are crucial to this effort. So is the modernization of the Russian nuclear submarine fleet and their conventional forces.

Photo: Commons: RIA Novosti



What is the future of Arctic Security?

The Arctic's importance in the national security and defence policies of Arctic states varies quite considerably.

The dividing line falls between the European Arctic and the North American Arctic, in tandem with variations in climatic conditions. Whereas the North Norwegian and the North-West Russian coastline is ice-free during winter, the ice—while melting—is an ever constant factor in the Alaskan, Canadian, and Greenlandic Arctics.

Discussions concerning defence and security in the Arctic will presumably not fade, as the region's importance in security questions continue to grow for both the Arctic states and the global community at large.

As we progress, understanding the nuances and variations across the region should therefore be paramount.

Photo: P J Hansen