



Defence Academy
of the United Kingdom

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Russian Series

If spring comes tomorrow...
Russia and the Arctic (2011)
Steven J Main



Key Findings

- 1) Russia has a very long and involved history with the Arctic, stretching over centuries, which can neither be ignored nor put to one side. This historical record is important for a number of reasons, not least because the current political leadership in the Kremlin – both the President (D Medvedev) and the PM (V Putin) – have openly talked about a “generational debt” being owed by the present generation of Russians to those in the past, who spared no effort in exploring and exploiting the wealth of the Arctic for the benefit of the country, as a whole. Similarly, they both see it as incumbent on them that the Arctic will still provide and ensure the future well-being and prosperity for the country in the years ahead and will strive to maintain their country’s hold on the region.
- 2) The potential natural wealth of the Arctic is enormous, not only in the untapped reserves of oil, gas, nickel, platinum, etc., but also the biological wealth of the Arctic’s seas, as well as the huge supply of potential fresh water, trapped frozen in the ice.
- 3) Russia has formulated a national policy for the development of the Arctic, namely the Fundamentals of state policy of the Russian Federation on the Arctic for the period 2010 and beyond and has revamped its national Security Strategy, taking into account the ever-changing security environment in Russia’s Far North. Examining both these documents together they clearly define Russia’s national interests in the Arctic and how Russia proposes to safeguard its interests there in the future. NATO should be careful in relation to its involvement, as a bloc in the Arctic, and the proper interpretation of Russia’s position on the Arctic. There is a very strong indication that Russia has written a new “red line” in the ice of the Arctic.
- 4) Militarily, thanks to the Northern Fleet primarily, Russia is the dominant power in the region and looks set to further augment its military capability in the region throughout the rest of this decade. Rightly, or wrongly, Russia still views with a degree of mistrust the activities of member-states of the Arctic Five (excluding Russia, this group is made up of USA, Canada, Denmark-Greenland and Norway) and non-member states of the Arctic Five, (China, South Korea, India, etc) and, as detailed in this paper, looks set to keep all options open, should the “Arctic fist” be required, rather than the “gloved hand.” As an operational and home base for the country’s fleet of SLBM submarine cruisers, the Arctic also has great significance for the country’s national security. Thus, there would appear to be every likelihood that, *if so required*, Russia will use military force to maintain its position in the region.
- 5) With an eye to the future – particularly in relation to the possibility of an increase in the traffic of freight along the Northern Sea Route (NSR) – Russia will continue to repair, modernise and upgrade its border security infrastructure and satellite reconnaissance.
- 6) With a decrease in ice pack cover – as a result of global warming – as well as an improvement in overall facilities and the possibility of the introduction of competitive market rates for the shipping of freight along the NSR, the latter could become a useful and safe trade artery between Europe, Asia and North America in the future. If so, Britain could also gain financially from the movement of freight along the North rather than along the more traditional – and increasingly more dangerous - trade routes in the South. With its impressive Polar past, Britain should look to play a role in the continuing, future development of the Arctic and not sit idly by on the sidelines, looking at the efforts – and profits – of others.
- 7) As there is no equivalent of the 1959 Antarctic Treaty, there is still a lot to play for as regards which country, (particularly those member-states of the Arctic Five) legally gets what of the Arctic’s potential wealth. Russia’s territorial claim is a strong one, but the United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) has still to decide and will not do so for a couple of years yet. However, Russia has set great store on UNCLOS’ decision going Russia’s way. There would appear to be very little evidence that Russia has a back-up position, should UNCLOS not support Russia’s territorial claim on the region.
- 8) In short, as far as both men currently holding the reins of power in the Kremlin are concerned – Medvedev and Putin – there is no doubt that “the Arctic is ours” and both look set to maintain what they see as their country’s natural dominance in the region in the future.

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Introduction

This is a very important topic, covering many important areas of concern both to Russia and the wider international community, particularly the other member-states of the so-called Arctic Five, (excluding Russia, these are USA, Canada, Norway and Denmark-Greenland), but also such up and coming powers as China and India. If the Northern Sea Route (NSR) ever becomes economically viable in the medium-to long-term future, many other countries both in the Euro-Atlantic region (not least Britain) and Asia, will also have cause to review their current position in relation to the Arctic. As the question of global warming becomes an ever more prominent issue on the global political agenda, there are fewer areas where its impact can be so demonstrably shown and whose long term implications could be extremely unsettling to the established economic and security agendas of many countries, than the Arctic.

Whilst, for some, talking about the Arctic is “boring” and should be replaced by more “action”, there can be little doubt that unless more talking is done on certain issues, and *not* replaced by *precipitous* action taken on the part of any single state, or group of states, in an effort to secure the potential hydrocarbon and mineral wealth of the region, then the world may end up being if not in a new Cold War, then at least in a hot “ice” war. This is a situation that is eminently avertable if all the main actors involved fully understand each other’s positions on the key issues. This paper will attempt to clarify the position of Russia – arguably, the most prominent of the Arctic powers through dint of history, geography, economy – on the Arctic, as the race to decide the region’s overall “ownership” reaches its climax within the next few years.

In many respects, events surrounding the Arctic in the 21st century partly mirror the scramble for Africa in the 19th century, as the contemporary Great Powers then carved up the continent to maximise economic gain. Similarly today, the world’s Great Powers are, once again, engaged in a race to decide who gets what of the world’s largest untapped natural reserves of hydrocarbons, various mineral deposits and trade routes. As global warming allows the real possibility of easier access to explore and exploit what could turn out to be the world’s largest – and last – reserve of natural wealth, greater attention will be paid to the region, as a whole, in all spheres – economic, political, environmental and, of course, security. Unlike Antarctica, there is no comprehensive treaty protecting the Arctic, or its resources, hence the importance of UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea) and its eventual deliberations in the not too distant future, as regards who gets what of the potential riches which lie above and beneath the Arctic seabed. Whilst there is no denying the fact that there are a number of conventions and declarations on issues relating to the Arctic, the fact is that, as things stand, there is no comprehensive treaty, a situation that may help complicate matters in the future.

This paper will examine the Russian perspective on the Arctic, by looking briefly at the historical record, as well as examining the general importance of the Arctic to contemporary Russia, Russia’s general strategic policy towards the Arctic, Russia’s defence and security interests in the area, the potential economic impact of further development of the NSR, Russia and UNCLOS. Based largely on Russian source materials, it is hoped that, once the reader has read through either all, or some, of the sections of the paper, he/she will be much better informed about why Russia considers this region to be of vital importance not just to Russia now, but also to Russia’s future socio-economic and political development. Whilst some would wish to belittle, even ignore, Russia’s historical and practical justification for their territorial claims, nevertheless, Russia is and will continue to be a major influence on, and in, the region for many years to come.

For its part, Britain too must show an increased interest in the future development of the region: for instance, if the NSR was to be actively developed and proved its economic worth, it could well lead to a revival of the old 1970s “Ocean Span” concept, with Scottish ports “serving as the European end of

a new global maritime trading system.”¹ In other words, Britain should not simply stand aloof from what is being discussed as regards the Arctic, especially given its own distinguished Polar past, and should seek to play a greater role in helping shape the informed argument and debate as regards the long-term future of the Arctic.

As with all things, nothing is born isolated from the past and part of the way that one can understand Russia's current stand on the Arctic and its determination to get the wider international community to recognise the fact that as the Russian President, D Medvedev, remarked in September 2010, “the Arctic is ours,”² is by briefly examining Russia's historical connections with the Arctic, both as an Empire in the making and during the Soviet period. Russia's connection with the Arctic is very deep, partly reflected in the national culture and should neither be overlooked, nor under-valued. A familiarity with Russia's Arctic past will allow the non-Russian expert and non-expert alike to better understand Russia's overall desire to maintain control over what it considers to be a natural extension of the Russian Motherland.

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¹ G Kerevan, “Why Scotland must not miss the High North boat”, *The Scotsman*, 23/9/2010.

² D Medvedev, “Sovmestnaya press-konferentsiya po itogam rossiysko-norvezhskikh peregovorov,” (official Presidential website, 15/9/2010).

Russia's Arctic past

As stated in the introduction, Russia's association with the Arctic is centuries old and its history with the region forms an important component of the reasoning behind its current assertions that "the Arctic is ours", (September 2010). Indeed, not only has Medvedev made such a statement, but so has the other half of the political *duumvirate* currently operating in Moscow, the Russian prime minister, Vladimir Putin. In the latter's recent address to the Arctic Forum – held in Moscow under the auspices of the Russian Geographical Society in September 2010, under the overall heading, "the Arctic – territory for dialogue" – not only did Putin make reference to the fact that Russian "sailors" ("*pomor*") had been active in the area since the 11th century, but also that 70% of the country is in "the North" and that Russia/the USSR had been at the forefront in many areas in opening up and developing the Arctic over the years, but especially in the 20th century:

Russia has played a leading role in the construction of the Northern Sea Route, it has been at the birth of the ice-breaking fleet, Polar aviation, created a whole network of stationary and drift stations on the Arctic.³

Regardless of the politics of the regime in power – either in St Petersburg or in Moscow - Russia has had a deep and involved connection with the Arctic, one which should not be dismissed lightly. For, example, a Soviet account of the history of Russia in the Arctic asserted that Russian "*pomor*", (old Russian word specifically for inhabitants of the White Sea area) had already sailed the Barents and Kara Seas and discovered the islands of Novaya Zemlya and Grumant, (Spitsbergen) by the end of the 12th century.⁴ A still earlier Soviet account of Russia's Polar past not only described the Russians as being the first to discover Grumant but also that, by the middle of the 16th century, "foreigners" knew that Novaya Zemlya was "Russian". Actual written records of Russia's "assault" on the Arctic began to appear from 1633 onwards.⁵ In similar vein, a detailed account of Russian/Soviet exploration of the world's oceans and seas also paid great attention to the earlier Russian exploration of the Arctic region and reminded its readers that Russians were the first in the world to propose a potential new trade route between Europe and Asia over the Arctic Ocean, as early as the 15th century:

[O]ne should also not forget the fact [*"obstoyatel'stvo"*] that in the 15th century, it was namely the Russians who were the first in the world, based on concrete evidence, to propose the idea that it would be possible to reach China and India over the Arctic Ocean.⁶

Thus, long before the Great Northern Expedition of the 18th century (one of the major European scientific expeditions of the 18th century), the Russian presence and interest in the Arctic was well-established and, despite the interest of other powerful naval powers at the time – Great Britain and Holland, for instance - no other country had a "closer interest" in the Arctic at this time than Russia.⁷

The Great Northern Expedition was conceived by Peter the Great and conducted under the overall leadership of the influential Danish explorer, V Bering, (who had earlier been called into Russian government service). The Expedition lasted 10 years and took place between 1733 and 1743. For the first time, the northern shores of both Europe and Asia from the White Sea to Kolyma, the Okhotsk Sea, Kamchatka, the southern and eastern limits of Siberia were described on maps. In assessing the Expedition's overall importance, both Western and Soviet/Russian historians seem to be of one mind. According to Mountfield, the Great Northern Expedition was "the first nationally directed, long term sustained effort in Arctic exploration, carried out to a large extent in a scientific manner. It had been costly, both in lives and money. But it was extraordinarily successful."⁸

³ V V Putin, "Arktika...", (<http://premier.gov.ru/events/news/12304/print/> Accessed 5/10/2010).

⁴ "O novykh issledovaniyakh sovetskikh uchenykh v Arktike", (M.1955), 3. It is also worth noting here that the original English translation of the Russian word, "*pomor*", "sailor" was not adequate. Thankfully, it was revised and was eventually replaced with the more accurate, if somewhat longer translation, of "an inhabitant of the sea coast, especially of the White Sea," Russian-English dictionary, 3rd edn., London, 1943, 487).

⁵ N N Zubov, "V tsentr Arktiki", (M.1940). 47.

⁶ V S Lupach, "Ruskiye moreplavately", (M.1953), 14.

⁷ D Mountfield, "A History of Polar exploration", (L.1974), 47.

⁸ Ibid.

Similarly, N Zubov, (himself a prominent Soviet academic on the Arctic), stated that:

...the expedition, in essence, laid the foundation for the scientific investigation of the Arctic and [also] for the first time aroused serious interest in scientific questions in relation to the Arctic.⁹

Partly funded by the great 18th century Russian scientist – and founder of Moscow State University – M V Lomonosov, (himself the son of a free fisherman from Arkhangel'sk), Lomonosov voiced the aspirations of many as regards the Arctic, when he stated that the latter was “like a huge, spacious field, where...Russia's glory can be enhanced in conjunction with its unbounded value thanks to the resources of the North Eastern Passage [Northern Sea Route].”¹⁰

In other words, by the end of the 18th century, Russia's presence in the Arctic had been long established and recognised by the other great powers of the world and had assumed a significance way beyond simply flag planting, or extending Russia's territorial limits. The effort expended was not simply material, but also human, designed to further expand Russia's “glory” and tap the region's “unbounded value.”

Further Russian exploration of the Arctic took place throughout the 19th century, most notably the 1864 S O Makarov expedition, which was instructed “to find the North Pole at any cost.”¹¹ Later, both Makarov and the famous Russian chemist, D I Mendeleev, (the founder of the modern periodic table of elements), found common cause towards the end of the 19th century in proposing to the Russian government – though admittedly for different reasons – to build a powerful fleet of ice-breakers for use in the Arctic. Makarov argued from the point of view for further navigational and scientific exploration of the Arctic, whereas Mendeleev argued the case from the point of view of finding a “free sea route” through the Arctic, during the summer months, to further bolster Russian economic growth.¹² Interesting: even as early as the 19th century, there were those in Russia who made the direct correlation between tapping the Arctic's resources and Russia's economic development and progress.

The early part of the 20th century saw further important landmarks in Russia's Arctic history: following the disastrous Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905, (during which Russia's Baltic Fleet had to literally steam half-way across the world in order to counter the *local* impact of the Imperial Japanese Navy operating in the waters of the Russian Far East for want of an easier, more navigable sea route), the Tsarist government decided to explore the possibility of moving Russian naval vessels along Siberia's northern coastline.¹³

On the outbreak of WW1, Russia confirmed its 12-mile territorial waters, (reaffirmed in 1918 following the Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917).¹⁴ In similar vein, one other important event of the WW1 period in Russia's Arctic history, which took place in September 1916, was the Tsarist government's decision to send an official Note, to the other Allied powers, announcing possession of a significant number of lands and islands in the Arctic.¹⁵ The Note produced no negative official reaction from any of the other Allied powers at the time, a point whose relevance Russian experts are keen to make even today:

⁹ Zubov, *ibid.*, 56.

¹⁰ “O novykh issledovaniyakh...”, *ibid.*, 3. Later, Lomonosov was to make a similar, even more popularly known statement about Russia's economic development being closely linked to exploitation of the country's northern regions: “the wealth of the Russian land will grow by Siberia and the icy seas,” (M Ignatova, “Podvodnoi shleyf”, *Izvestiya*, 17/4/2002).

¹¹ Zubov, *ibid.*, 52.

¹² *Ibid.* It is also worth remembering at this point that one of the most famous lines, concerning Russia and the Arctic belong to the pen of Admiral S O Makarov: “Russia is a building with one side facing the Arctic Ocean”, (I Mikhailov, “Norvezhtsy i russskiye na Spitsbergene”, *Mezhdunarodnaya zhizn'*, 9-10, 2001, 51-54; 51).

¹³ Zubov, *ibid.*, 58.

¹⁴ A L Kolodkin, G G Shinkaretskaya, “O kontinental'nom shel'fe Rossii v Arktike”, *Gosudarstvo i pravo*, 10, October 2009, 21-27; 21.

¹⁵ Kolodkin, *ibid.*, 21

not a single protest was sent by any foreign state to the official Note; the ownership ["*prinadlezhnost*"] of the Arctic lands and islands was not disputed.¹⁶

1916 was also important in terms of the security of the region. The decision was taken to increase Russia's military presence in the Arctic with the formation of the Arctic Ocean Flotilla in July, (initially commanded by Vice-Admiral Ugriumov, subsequently replaced by Vice-Admiral Korovin in October 1916).¹⁷ According to one Western authority on the subject, the decision to create the Arctic Ocean Flotilla was partly in response to increasing German naval activity in the area, as well as "fluctuating" Royal Navy commitments in patrolling and protecting the local sea lanes:

the increasing German naval activity meant that the Russian naval command could not afford to rely on fluctuating British commitments to the region and, during 1916, established a Flotilla of the Arctic Ocean. The establishment of such a force was no easy task given the dispersal of the key units around the world and the lack of suitable facilities for what was an increasingly substantial commitment. The Russian force...would operate from three bases – an operational base on the Kola Inlet...a manoeuvre base at Lokanga and a rear base at Arkhangel'sk.¹⁸

In effect, the Arctic Ocean Flotilla represented Russia's first independent attempt to create a maritime force able to defend Russia's interests in the Arctic region, but not last at addressing the maritime security interests of the state in the Arctic.

Depending on your reading of subsequent events following the October 1917 Revolution, Russian interest in the area ceased as Soviet interest took over. In a typical pre-1991 interpretation of Russia's Arctic in the immediate aftermath of October 1917;

the planned and systematic analysis of the Arctic became possible, however, only after the Great October Socialist Revolution.¹⁹

And, however unpalatable it may appear to a contemporary reader-Russian and Westerner alike- the FACTS, not the interpretation, would appear to partially support the essence of the above statement:

in 1918, V I Lenin signed a decree on the organisation of the Great Hydrographic Expedition of the Seas of the Arctic Ocean and, in 1921, the Council of People's Commissars created the [Ice-] Floe Maritime Scientific Institute with its biology, hydrology, meteorological and geology-mineral sections. In 1920, the Supreme National Economic Council created the Northern Scientific-Commercial Expedition to study the Arctic, [the forerunner to the All-Union Arctic Scientific Research Institute]...In 1923, regular [scientific] sailings from Vladivostok to Kolyma began.²⁰

Given these early steps and the beginning of regular scientific expeditions to the White and Barents Seas, as well as the expeditions to the Kara Sea, it is not hard to accept the fact that these expeditions, in the words of one Soviet account of the early development of the Arctic, "laid the foundations at the beginning of the Soviet period in the study and exploitation of the Northern maritime theatre."²¹

These scientific steps, taken both to further enhance the USSR's presence and reflecting its growing interest in the Arctic, were further strengthened, on the diplomatic front, when the Commissar for Foreign Affairs, G V Chicherin, reasserted Soviet control over the Arctic lands and islands, (previously announced "Russian" by the Tsarist government in 1916), with the publication of a further Note, issued

¹⁶ Kolodkin, *ibid.*, 21.

¹⁷ I A Kozlov, V S Shlomin, "Severnii Flot", (M.1966), 35; A Hill, "Russian and Soviet naval power and the Arctic from XVII century to the beginning of the Great Patriotic War", *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 3, July-September 2007, 359-392; 372.

¹⁸ Hill, *ibid.*, 372.

¹⁹ "O novykh issledovaniyakh...", *ibid.*, 4.

²⁰ *ibid.*; also M S Volin, "Organizatsiya izuzhechnykh estestvennykh resursov sovetskoi strany v 1917-1920 godakh", *Vorposy istorii*, 2, 1956, 80-88.

²¹ Kozlov, *ibid.*, 71

in November 1924, by a decree passed by the Council of People's Commissars (*Sovnarkom*) in April 1926.²²

In other words, the Soviet Russians took over where the imperial Russians left off. Increasing scientific and diplomatic interest ensuring questions of science, economy and security were never far removed from Soviet Russia's Arctic agenda and, indeed, it could be easily argued that, even today, these issues are still very much part and parcel of Russia's contemporary Arctic agenda. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the Russians continued developing their interests in the Arctic, producing "valuable material on the hydrology and climate of the Northern seas", according to one work.²³ With the successful sailing, in one season, (July-November) of the Northern Sea Route in 1932 by the "A Sibiriakov", it was only a question of time before the Soviet government paid closer attention to the operation of the Northern Sea Route. Thus, on 17th December 1932, *Sovnarkom* passed a decree, creating the Main Administration of the Northern Sea Route, (GU SMP). Its main task was: "to lay the definitive sea route from the White Sea to the Bering Straits, to equip the route, to maintain it in good, working order and ensure safe passage along the route."²⁴

The NSR – a topic which will be examined in more detail below – had a strategic, as well as economic importance: if fully operational, it could allow the safe and quick transfer of ships from West to East, i.e. to the Pacific Ocean. Remembering the fate of the Imperial Russian Navy in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905, the NSR in the 1930s must have looked a safe way to enhance the country's ability to defend itself.

The organisation and development of the drift stations ("North Polar-1", "G Sedov"), as well as Polar aviation (particularly the operational flights of SSSR N-169), in the 1930s, also helped the Soviet state to delve ever further into the mysteries of the Arctic Ocean. Although, obviously, the outbreak of War in 1941 put an effective block on any further investigation of the USSR's Arctic region, not long after the War finished in 1945 did the USSR resume its study of the Arctic ice cover. Particularly in relation to contemporary events, another major milestone in the country's Arctic history was made in 1948: Soviet scientists discovered the Lomonosov ridge, a fact referred to recently by S Lavrov (Russian Foreign Minister) during his press conference with the Canadian Foreign Minister, Lawrence Cannon, in September 2010:

with particular reference to the Lomonosov ridge, it was discovered by Russian explorers.²⁵

In short, contemporary events as regards Russia and the Arctic have a long tail in history, from the earliest origins of the Russian state itself, through War and Revolution, construction and collapse of Empire(s), straight through to the contemporary period, with discussions still ongoing as to exactly who owns what in the region itself. Russia's Arctic story has involved many of its most famous political, scientific and military figures and, given the potential wealth of its largely untapped reserves of hydrocarbons and various minerals, as well as the economic consequences of global warming on the navigability of the Northern Sea Route, the Arctic looks set to play a very prominent part in Russia's future history. Thus, Putin's recent statement, concerning Russia's long-term interest in the region and Medvedev's simple statement that "the Arctic is ours", especially to the ears of a Russian audience, would carry great resonance and simply represent a long-standing historical truth. The next few pages of Russia's Arctic history are going to prove very interesting and could have great significance in the future course of Russia's development as a state.

²² The original decree of 15 April 1926 stated that "the Praesidium of the Central Executive Committee of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics hereby decrees: are declared forming part of the territory of the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics all lands and islands already discovered, as well as those which are to be discovered in the future, which at the time of the publication of the present decree are not recognised by the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics as the territory of any foreign state, and which lie in the Arctic north of the coast of the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics up to the North Pole, within the limits of between the meridian longitude of 32 [degrees]-4'-35" east from Greenwich... and the meridian longitude 168 [degrees]-49'-36" west from Greenwich", (T A Taracouzio, *Soviets in the Arctic*, New York, 1938, 381).

²³ Kozlov, *ibid.*, 72.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 74.

²⁵ "O novykh issledovaniyakh...", *ibid.*, 11; Transcript of Russian, Canadian foreign ministers' news conference, (BBCM, 16/9/2010).

Before examining the military and security importance of the region to Russia, the paper will next examine the overall, general importance of the Arctic to contemporary Russia, providing a necessary and useful backdrop to understanding Russia's growing concerns about the security of the region.

General contemporary importance of the Arctic to Russia

Leaving aside, for the time being, the defensive-strategic significance of the Arctic to Russia, in general terms, the Arctic is important for a number of other reasons. For a start, the Arctic itself contains territories, continental shelf claims and exclusive economic zones, belonging to eight states, in total.²⁶ Other than Russia, the eight states include the other member-states of the Arctic Five, (those states that have a direct border with the Arctic, or have land which border the Arctic) the USA, Norway, Canada and Denmark-Greenland. The remaining three states are Iceland, Finland and Sweden. Russia's border with the Arctic is the longest, measuring just under 20,000 kms.²⁷ By nature of the sheer physical size of Russia's Arctic border, it behoves the Russians, to put it mildly, to be very interested and involved in Arctic affairs! After all, much of Russia's Arctic region is thinly populated, thus leaving it open to illegal activities on a wide scale, as well as presenting the local and central authority with a potential national security threat.

As shown earlier, as far as the central Russian/Soviet governments were concerned, Russian claims on Arctic territory have been well advanced over the years but, even so, it was not until comparatively recently that an attempt was made to define exactly what was meant by the phrase, "Arctic Zone." Thus, by decision of the State Commission on Arctic Affairs (USSR Council of Ministers), passed on 22nd April 1989, the Arctic Zone was defined. In terms of its actual physical size, it measured 3.1 million square kms, (or 18% of the total land mass of the Russian Federation). The area of the continental shelf, also enclosed in Russia's Arctic Zone, is an estimated additional 4 million square kms, (about 70% of the total size of Russia's continental shelf).²⁸ In other words, this is an enormous physical mass of territory, containing, potentially, a huge amount of hydrocarbons and other raw materials. However, even the physical territory, as pointed out by a couple of Russian experts recently, may also still have an important bearing on Russia's development:

for the new Russia, today the Arctic sector has become the most important reserve of land, [*prostranstvennyy rezerv*]...Under conditions when the independent living space, [*zhiznennoye prostranstvo*] of our country continues to be reduced and become exhausted, in the future, [the Arctic] will assist and become the fundamental [raw material] reserve for the Russian economy.²⁹

No country, Russia included, would be comfortable to lose control over such a huge mass of physical territory. It may not be fashionable, in today's multi-polar world, but actual, physical territory is still important and no single state would be prepared to cede control over such a huge expanse of sovereign territory.

²⁶ To quote the standard Soviet/Russian definition of the Arctic, the latter is described as "the northern polar region of the globe, including the outskirts of Eurasia and North America and nearly all of the Arctic Ocean (except the eastern and southern areas of the Norwegian Sea) and all of its islands (except the coastal islands of Norway), as well as the adjoining sections of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans", (*Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, M. 1970, vol 2, 267).

²⁷ M Shestopalov, "Vektor ustremleniy-Arktika", *Vozdushno-kosmicheskaya oborona*, 6, 2008, 16-24; 16.

²⁸ Shestopalov, *ibid.*, 16. According to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, the continental shelf is defined as follows: "the continental shelf of a coastal State comprises the sea-bed and subsoil of the submarine areas that extend beyond its territorial sea throughout the natural prolongation of its land territory to the outer edge of the continental margin, or to a distance of 200 nautical miles from the baselines from which the breadth of the territorial sea is measured where the outer edge of the continental margin does not extend up to that distance", (*The Law of the Sea. United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea with Index and Final Act of the Third United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea*, United Nations, New York, 1983, 27).

²⁹ S Koz'menko, S Kovalev, "Morskaya politika v Arktike i sistema natsional'noi bezopasnosti", *Morskoi sbornik*, 8, 2009, 57-63;57.

In terms of the reserves of hydrocarbons and minerals in Russia's Arctic zone, the figures are very significant and simply underline why the area is of such great significance to Russia's future economic and political development. According to one Russian expert, the zone contains:

- 80% of Russian's known reserves of industrial gas, 91% of [country's] natural gas;
- 90% of recoverable resources of hydrocarbons of Russia's entire continental shelf;
- an estimated 15-20 billion tonnes of hydrocarbons is to be found in the deep water region of the Arctic Ocean.³⁰

Other than the hydrocarbon reserves, the Arctic is also estimated to contain more than 90% of Russia's reserves of apatite coal; virtually all of the country's nickel reserves; 60% of its copper reserves; more than 95% of its rare earth minerals; more than 98% of its reserves of platinum, etc.³¹ Shestopalov quotes a figure, based on the calculations of others, that the total monetary value of the Arctic's combined mineral wealth could lie within the region of \$1.3-2 trillion. If the latter figure is anywhere near accurate, then it goes a long way to explain why Russia wants to hold onto as much of the Arctic as it possibly can – as well as explaining the interests of others in wishing to exploit the Arctic for their own interests.

Despite containing only 1% of the country's total population, Russia's Arctic zone accounts for 11% of the country's GNP and 22% of the total volume of Russian exports.³² The potential reserves of oil and gas in Russia's continental zone, beyond its established 200-mile limit, could amount to 9-10 billion tonnes.³³ Of course, what lies in Russia's Arctic zone is of primary interest to Russia, but there is increasing interest in what lies in the Arctic from other states in the region, as well as the huge and expanding economies of China and India. Largely using data provided by the US Geological Survey, (USGS), the generally accepted wisdom is that the Arctic could contain as much as 90 billion barrels of oil (12 billion tonnes) – enough to last the US for a dozen years at its present rate of consumption – as well as 47.3 trillion cubic metres of gas.³⁴ Although these numbers are big, representing, if accurate, a significant proportion of the calculated world total of oil and gas reserves, it should always be remembered that *these figures are estimates*, not proven facts. The geologists could have got it wrong and, in actual fact, the recoverable reserves – regardless of where they are located – could turn out to be considerably less. The other factor which should be borne in mind here is that for the reserves to become a significant "player" in the further development of the economies of Russia, China, USA, etc., they not only have to be physically recoverable, but also economically recoverable, at a cost which still makes them attractive to be extracted from a part of the world which is still pretty inhospitable to both man and machine. The cost factor alone, never mind the harshness of the physical environment for a lot of the year, could still militate against exploitation of the region's potential reserves for some time to come.

Thus, assuming the best case scenarios, both in terms of the reserves of hydrocarbons and minerals in the region, as well as the economic case for profitable exploitation of the region's resources, Russian analysts are under no illusion concerning the economic "attractiveness" of the region to other states. Needless to say, this has led a few Russian analysts to express concern over Russia's future ability to counteract the influence of third countries in the area. One article expressing such concern – written before the signing of the recent Russo-Norwegian agreement on the so-called "grey zone" of the Barents Sea – stated the following:

conflict already exists between Russia and Norway over the famous 'grey zone'...although the strategic interests of these countries – opposing the expansion of third countries – should coincide, as it is more than likely that within a few years, [both] the USA and China will arrive in the Arctic, interested in lowering the price of oil. Under such circumstances, will Russia be able to oppose the geopolitical influence of these powers?³⁵

³⁰ Shestopalov, *ibid.*, 16.

³¹ *ibid.*

³² Shestopalov, *ibid.*, 16.

³³ *ibid.*, 17.

³⁴ A Diyev, "Arkticheskaia strategiya Rossii", *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 8/4/2009; A Granberg, "Morskaiia strategiya kak osnova proizvoditel'nykh sil v Arktike", *Morskoi sbornik*, 8, 2006, 52-54; 53.

³⁵ S Savel'eva, G Shiyani, "Geopoliticheskiye predposylki ekonomicheskogo osvoeniya Arktiki", *Morskoi sbornik*, 2, 2010, 47-53;49.

In other words, the oil and gas potential of the Arctic region will attract the interests of other states, keen to drive the price of world oil down, in order to facilitate their own national economic growth, thereby decreasing the oil and gas revenues for countries like Russia and Norway, who need the price of either of the main hydrocarbon fuels if not high, then at least predictable in order to promote their own national economic growth. Although this is speculation, it could be that this was one of the hidden factors in the decision to bring the forty-year old dispute over the "grey zone" in the Barents Sea to an end.

Other than the Arctic region's potential hydrocarbon reserves, one other factor which makes the region important to Russia is the regions bio-resources. For example, although the Barents Sea has less potential significant oil deposits than other areas of the Arctic Ocean, it is recognised as being in the top fifty of the world's maritime zones for bio-resources:

in terms of biological productivity, the Barents Sea is second only to the seas of the Far East and is in the top 50 of bio-resource zones of the World's oceans.³⁶

Over the past decade, Russia's fishing fleet, operating in the seas of the High North, has pulled in an annual catch, on average, of 500,000-600,000 tonnes, approximately 50% of Russia's total annual catch.³⁷ One other author pointed out that Russia has also begun the commercial fishing of salmon, cod, Kamchatka crab, in the area. In relation to that particular species, one of the most commercially valuable, the plan is to produce some 3 million specimens for the tables of the best restaurants. Again, an indication of the potential non-hydrocarbon related wealth of the region.³⁸

Similarly, one Western study in examining the potential for future co-operation amongst the Arctic Five, also made an interesting remark about the region's food and non-food potential:

living resources of the deep Arctic seabed...have not been catalogued exhaustively. With deep areas lying generally beyond the limits of conventional fisheries operations and research, the varieties and quantities of food stocks have not been properly assessed...Non-food resources such as pharmaceuticals and DNA material might also be extracted from certain life forms that develop and flourish under the Arctic's unique environmental conditions (low temperatures, alternating seasons of light and darkness, and diminished ocean-atmosphere exchanges on account of permanent ice-cover.³⁹

Whilst it is unlikely that serious conflict would erupt over the Arctic's bio-resources, nonetheless the latter could become a source of additional tension between states, both local and non-local to the area. After all, as the stock of the world's natural resources – in all areas – diminishes, what is left increases in importance. In a detailed article examining the future of the Arctic and its potential to become a source of tension between states, one author made a passing reference concerning the region's bio-resources and, somewhat ominously, the region's importance as a source of one commodity of greater use and higher value than the Arctic's reserves of oil and gas, rare earth minerals, platinum, etc – simple, fresh, drinking water:

in the opinion of many experts, international rivalry will be exacerbated over the Arctic not only because of energy resources, but also bio-resources, fresh water.⁴⁰

Whilst, thanks to mighty Siberian rivers like the Ob, Yenisei and the Lena, Russia does not lack a supply of fresh drinking water, other states bordering Russia are not so well-supplied – China being the most obvious example. Although there is no imminent prospect of the Arctic being embroiled in any 'water war' in the foreseeable future, nevertheless as a potential additional source of tension between states, it cannot be excluded. Interestingly enough, back in April 2000, when Putin was

³⁶ I Solov'eva, "Globalizatsiya i korporativnye otnosheniya v morskoi ekonomike severa", *Morskoi sbornik*, 11, 2006, 51-56; 53.

³⁷ Koz'menko, Kovalev, *ibid.*, 60.

³⁸ N Sorokina, "Opasnaya Arktika", *Rossiyskaia gazeta*, 27/7/2007.

³⁹ R MacNab, P Netto, R van de Poll, "Cooperative preparations for determining the outer limit of the judic(i)al continental shelf in the Arctic Ocean: a model for regional collaboration in other parts of the world?" *IBRU Boundary and Security Bulletin*, spring 2001, 86-95;88.

⁴⁰ A Slizhevsky, "Arktika: eshchyo odna 'kholodnaya voina'?", *Nezavisimoye voennoye obozreniye*, 11 (608), 26/3-1/4/2010, 10-11; 11.

acting President, at a meeting in Murmansk, he did make a passing reference to the potential of the North as a supplier of fresh water:

in the future, we may find a foreign consumer for our pure, fresh drinking water which exists in abundance in the North.⁴¹

The most recent statements made by both halves of the *duumvirate* (Medvedev and Putin), currently running Russia, testify to the fact that Russia's senior political leadership are as one in making the Arctic one of Russia's key policy issues over the next decade – and beyond. This increasing attention was demonstrated when, a mere six months after taking office as President, Medvedev presided over his first session as Chairman of the national Security Council. And the title of his first session as Chairman? "Defending Russia's national interests in the Arctic."⁴²

Medvedev opened the session by emphasising the overall importance of the Arctic to Russia's future:

Without exaggeration, this region has a strategic significance for our country and with its [Arctic] development is directly connected the solution of long-term issues associated with the development of the state, its competitiveness on the global market.

According to figures which we have to hand, about 20% of Russia's GDP and 22% of Russia's exports are produced in the region. We extract rare and precious metals in the Arctic region. Here are located the largest oil-gas provinces such as Western Siberia, Tiuman-Pechora and Eastern Siberia. According to experts, the Arctic's continental shelf could contain about ¼ of all...the reserves of hydrocarbons in the world. The use of these energy reserves, these resources is a security guarantee, an energy security guarantee for Russia, as a whole.⁴³

Thus, in a few short paragraphs, not only did Medvedev outline the current importance of the region, but also the long-term plans which the men in the Kremlin have in relation to the Arctic. In order to maintain what Medvedev dubbed the country's global competitiveness, he emphasised the importance of the area's NSR "able to link in one the European and Far Eastern maritime and water transport systems and able [also] to lower transport costs, significantly invigorating business links of Russian and foreign business partners."⁴⁴

Although the NSR will be examined in much greater detail below, suffice it to say that Medvedev was simply reiterating the hopes and aspirations of many in Russia itself that the NSR, with the proper necessary levels of investment in infrastructure could provide an alternative, viable transport corridor between East and West, vying competitively for maritime freight trade competing along side the Suez and Panama Canals.

Medvedev went on to state that Russia's "first and main task" in relation to the Arctic is to turn the latter into "the resource base of Russia for the 21st century." For this to be realised, in his own words, the authorities must "secure the steadfast defence of Russia's national interests in the region" involving "the legal delineation of the outer limit of [Russia's] continental shelf."⁴⁵

In a bow to the sacrifices of previous generations of Russian and Soviet sailors, explorers, scientists and leading public figures, Medvedev remarked:

I want to especially underline that this is our duty, this is simply a direct debt [we owe] to those who have gone before us. We must firmly, and for the long-term future [of our country], secure the national interests of Russia in the Arctic.⁴⁶

⁴¹ S Sokut, "Putin povorachivayet stranu litsom k Severu", *Poliarnaya pravda*, 6/7/2000.

⁴² "Sostoyalos' zasedaniye Soveta Bezopasnosti 'o zashchite natsional'nykh interesov Rossii v Arktike', 17/9/2008, (<http://www.kremlin.ru/news/1434>. Accessed 29/1/2010).

⁴³ "Vystupleniye na zasedanii Soveta Bezopasnosti, 'o zashchite natsional'nykh interesov Rossii v Arktike', 17/9/2008, *ibid*.

⁴⁴ *ibid*.

⁴⁵ "Vystupleniye...", *ibid*.

⁴⁶ *ibid*.

The statement is unequivocal. As shown in the previous section, Russia's Arctic history stretches back over hundreds of years and contains many dramatic and tragic pages in the history of the country. Medvedev's remark that the Arctic is almost akin to a "generational debt" for Russia does resonate in the popular psyche. In order to further strengthen Russia's general strategy towards the Arctic, the session of Russia's Security Council approved "the fundamentals of the Russian Federation's state policy in the Arctic to 2020 and beyond" and it is that which this paper now examines.

"The fundamentals of the state policy of the Russian Federation on the Arctic for the period to 2020 and beyond"

Although the document was approved by Medvedev on 18th September 2008, it was not actually published until 30th March 2009.⁴⁷ The document is composed of six main sections – "general statements", "national interests of the Russian Federation in the Arctic"; "main aims and strategic priorities of the Russian state's policy in the Arctic"; "basic tasks and steps to put into effect the Russian state's policy on the Arctic" and, finally, the timetable "for implementing the Russian state's policy on the Arctic." In effect, it is nothing less than a formal declaration of Russia's plans to develop its strategic interests in the Arctic over the next few years and, as such, goes a long way to explaining Russia's current and future stance on Arctic issues. A proper knowledge and understanding of the document could assist the other member-states of the Arctic Five, and elsewhere, for instance, to better able understand Russian policy on the Arctic, thereby helping to reduce the potential both for misunderstanding and misinterpretation.

In the opening section of the document – "general statements" – is contained the definition of Russia's Arctic zone, as defined by decree of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, (22/4/1989) and reinforcing an earlier decree of the Praesidium of the Central Executive Committee of the USSR, (15/4/1926). Thus, officially, Russia's Arctic zone is defined as:

...fully, or partly, the territories of the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), Murmansk and Arkhangel'sk oblasts, Krasnoyarsk krai and the Nenetsk, Yamalo-Nenetsk and Chukotka autonomous districts.⁴⁸

The section also describes "the specific features" which influence Russia's policy on the Arctic such as the extreme weather conditions, the permanent ice-cover, drifting ice, as well as the low population density, the remoteness from other large industrial centres, etc.⁴⁹

The next section, detailing Russia's "national interests", as opposed to "strategic priorities", although comparatively brief, outlines the future, practical importance of the region to Russia's long-term economic survival:

the fundamental national interests of the Russian Federation in the Arctic are:

- a) utilising the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation as the strategic resource base for the Russian Federation, ensuring...the socio-economic development of the country;
- b) preserving the Arctic as a zone of peace and security;
- c) protecting the Arctic's unique ecological systems;
- d) utilising the Northern Sea Route as a seasonal, unified transport route.⁵⁰

"National interests" clearly outlined, the document proceeded to detail Russia's "main aims and strategic priorities":

- a) in the sphere of socio-economic development – to broaden the resource base of Russian Federation's Arctic capable, to a significant extent, of meeting Russia's [future] demands for hydrocarbons, maritime biological resources and other strategic raw materials;

⁴⁷ *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, 30/3/2009.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

- b) in the sphere of military security, defence and protection of the Russian Federation's state border...to maintain a favourable operating regime ["*blagopriyatniy operativniy rezhim*"] in the Russian Federation's Arctic zone, including support for the necessary [minimum] combat potential of the general purpose group of forces...other types of troops, combat units and organs [based] in the region;
- c) in the sphere of ecological security – to maintain and preserve the ecology of the Arctic, eliminate the ecological consequences of economic activity due to conditions of growing economic activity and global climate change;
- d) in the sphere of information technology and communications – creating a unified information space of the Russian Federation in the Arctic zone, taking into account [local] environmental conditions;
- e) stimulate the participation of Russia's state agencies and public organisations in the work of international *fora*, dedicated [to analysing] the Arctic, including inter-parliamentary interaction within the framework of the Russia-EU partnership;
- f) delimitation of the sea area in the Arctic Ocean and maintaining the mutually advantageous presence of Russia on the Spitsbergen archipelago;
- g) improving the system of state administration of the socio-economic development of the Russia's Arctic zone by the expansion of fundamental and applied scientific research in the Arctic;
- h) improving the quality of life of the indigenous peoples and social conditions of economic activity in the Arctic;
- i) developing the resource base of Russia's Arctic zone through the use of future technology" and, finally,
- j) modernising and developing the infrastructure of the Arctic's transport system and the fisheries complex in Russia's Arctic zone.⁵¹

Thus, as detailed above, Russia's "strategic priorities" in relation to the Arctic, other than developing it as the country's future resource base, are very much focussed on collaborative work with other states and international organisations in helping to further open up and develop the region, as a whole. Obviously, in its ability to exploit further the regions' natural resources, Russia will have to rely on international investment and the skills and expertise of others if it is to fully exploit the region for the benefit of the whole of the Federation and not simply those parts which are closest to the point of extraction and passage. Taken at face value, this part of Russia's formal declaration of its Arctic policy is an assured assessment of the way ahead, full of positive phrases and words like "active mutual assistance", "pulling efforts", "cooperation", etc. In overall terms, this part of Russia's officially declared Arctic policy would imply that the Arctic is less "ours" in the strictly commercial sense of the word and more to be developed "mutually" i.e. involving the participation of non-Russian "actors", for the benefit of a wider, non-Russian, audience.

However, judging by recent statements, as well as a number of concrete steps, it would appear that Russia's position has changed, quietly, over the past couple of years – possibly as a result of the global financial crisis of 2008. Although, on the surface, both members of Russia's political tandem are still keen to publicly voice that co-operation is the way forward on a number of Arctic issues,⁵² as Russia gets close to re-submitting its claim on the ownership of the continental shelf, there seems to be a change in the mood music emanating from the Kremlin, a greater stridency to assert Russia's position in the Arctic. As will be shown in more detail later, Russia is improving its military and security capability in the area and looks set to adopt a more "exclusive" position on certain Arctic affairs. It will seek co-operation, for instance, in the area of deep oil exploration, "co-operation" which will be of demonstrable utility to Russia, but not in areas that may jeopardise Russia's hold on the region, like the "internationalisation" of the NSR. In itself, this should not come as too surprising, or alarming. After all, as the world continues to come to terms with the decreasing quantity of exploitable and recoverable natural resources, what is left will command a higher premium and, in itself, may force states, not just Russia, to adopt a greater autarkic approach in the future. Even the recent Russo-Norwegian agreement on the "grey zone" in the Barents Sea whilst, on the surface, apparently indicative of a more collaborationist approach, may hide slightly darker tones: agreement between two prominent members of the Arctic Five does

⁵¹ *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, *ibid.*

⁵² Both Medvedev and Putin, at different *fora* in September 2010, were publicly talking about "co-operation" in the Arctic as solving "existing problems" in the Arctic, ("Sovmestnaya press-konferentsiya poi togam rossiysko-norvezhskikh peregovorov," 15/9/2010, <http://www.kremlin.ru/transcripts/8924>. Accessed 16/8/2010; H Devlin, "Putin offers rivals a 'spriti of co-operation' in scramble for stake in Arctic gas and oil", *The Times*, 24/9/2010.

not necessarily have to indicate that collaboration is on the cards, involving non-Arctic Five states. Logically, given the potential wealth of the region, joint efforts involving the Arctic Five states could well be seen by those states themselves as being much more acceptable than unilaterally taking action on issues. It is also the case that there is an economic incentive, if nothing else, of not inviting, or encouraging, “outsiders” to get too involved in Arctic matters: less states involved means that there will be more wealth to be distributed amongst the members of the Arctic Five.

The next main section of the document – “fundamental tasks and steps to put into effect the state policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic” – examined in more detail the socio-economic development of the region, military security, ecological security, information technology and, finally, various measures in the sphere of science and technology. With particular reference to the overall theme of the paper, only the section on military security will be quoted at length here, as this is the one which created the greatest stir in the West when the document eventually saw the light of day.⁵³

The section begins thus:

In the sphere of military security, defence and protection of the state border of the Russian Federation...it is necessary:

to create groups of general purpose forces from the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, other troops, military formations and organs (in the first instance, border organs) in the Russian Federation’s Arctic zone, capable of proving military security under various military-political conditions;
optimise the system of complex control over the situation in the Arctic, including border control at the points of entry along the length of the state border of the Russian Federation, introducing a regime of border [guard] zones in the administrative-territorial units of the Russian Federation’s Arctic zone and the organisation of the instrumental-technological control over the gulf zones, tributaries of rivers, estuaries along the length of the Northern Sea Route;
bringing border organs up to [full] capability in accordance with the nature of the threat in the Russian Federation’s Arctic zone.⁵⁴

The “fundamental measures” to be undertaken to enhance the security of Russia’s Arctic zone included:

...creation of an Arctic system of the coast guard of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation in the Arctic zone and increasing the effectiveness of interaction with the border guard services of the adjacent states on matters of combating terrorism on the sea, suppressing illegal activity, illegal migration, protecting water biological resources; developing the border guard infrastructure of the Russian Federation’s Arctic zone and the technical re-equipment of the border guard organs; creating a system of complex control of the above surface situation, strengthening state control over gulf activity in the Russian Federation’s Arctic zone.⁵⁵

As outlined above, all Russia would appear to be proposing is an improved border guard/coastal guard/ service in the region with a small set of general purpose forces in the background. There is very little, if anything, in the proposals which should have upset many Western capitals. Although Russia’s military stance will be examined in more detail later, what should be noted at this point is that this section was less a declaration of intent to militarise the region and more an expression of intent on how best to safeguard Russia’s interests, in the form of border security, more a public declaration of how best to “securitise” the area, rather than militarise. This is further borne out by the other main sections in the document – ecological security, information technology, scientific

⁵³ T Parfit, “Russia plans military force to patrol Arctic as ‘cold rush’ intensifies”, *The Independent*, 28/3/2009; “Russia’s Arctic designs”, *The Daily Telegraph*, 18/9/2008; “Skating on thin ice”, *The Times*, 14/5/2009; T Halpin, “Russia warns of war within decade over the hunt for oil and gas”, *The Times*, 14/5/2009; B Maddox, “Kremlin carries on playing James Bond theme”, *The Times*, 14/5/2009.

⁵⁴ *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, 30/3/2009.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

and technical services.”⁵⁶ There is much more in the document on these areas than on the military sphere and, given the earlier statements on the advantages to be had through “mutual work” involving the other member-states of the Arctic Five, put into the overall context, the section on military and border security appears considerably less menacing than it would appear at first glance, or interpretation.

The final two sections of the document concerned the mechanisms and the projected timetable of implementation of the programme. The timetable is interesting: divided into three periods, Russia is now entering the second period of implementing the policy. By the end of the second period, (2015), the following should have been realised:

The international-legal demarcation of the Russian Federation’s Arctic zone’s external border should be recognised and, on the basis of Russia’s competitive advantages, the realisation of the extraction and transport of [the zone’s] energy resources; solving problems [associated with] the structural reorganisation of the economy of the Russian Federation’s Arctic zone on the basis of exploiting the raw material/mineral base and the region’s water biological resources; creating and developing the infrastructure and communication systems of the Northern Sea Route up to solve problems of the Eurasian transit; completion of the creation of a unified information space for the Russian Federation’s Arctic zone.⁵⁷

According to the document, the main aim of the policy in relation to the proverbial “medium term” is to turn Russia into the Arctic’s “leading power” – no mean feat considering the other members of the Arctic Five include USA, Canada, Norway and Denmark-Greenland and an increasingly obvious and important Arctic ‘player’ in the future, China. By the end of the third period – 2020 – the policy’s declared aim is simply “to turn the Russian Federation’s Arctic zone into the leading strategic resource base for the Russian Federation.”⁵⁸

These are very significant objectives and could be easily influenced by a whole range of internal and external factors, not least being the increasing competitiveness for the world’s declining natural resources and the current Russian President’s policy of modernisation. The latter could increase the overall importance of the Arctic to Russia’s medium to long-term future and encourage a more entrenched position on the part of the Kremlin to developing Russia’s Arctic zone. But what cannot be in much doubt is that Russia has produced a comprehensive, clearly defined Arctic policy for the next decade. The implementation of that policy, as well as its eventual results, may still not match the objectives outlined, but at least Russia has enunciated a basic framework for development of the Arctic.

Russia and the Arctic – National Security Strategy

Within a comparatively short period of time after publication of its policy on the future development of the Arctic, Russia revised and published a new national security strategy, designed to reflect the changes which had taken place both within Russia, as well as within the world at large. Approved by Medvedev in May 2009 at a session of the country’s national Security Council, the document contained a number of references to both the increasing political and strategic importance of the struggle for the world’s diminishing reserves of natural resources, as well as the significance of the Arctic to Russia’s future.⁵⁹

The new National Security Strategy (hereinafter simply referred to as NSS) opened with a generally confident statement about how Russia had come through a particularly difficult period in its recent past:

Russia has overcome the consequences of the systemic political and socio-economic crisis of the late 20th century – stopped the fall in the level and quality of life of [its] citizens, withstood the phenomena of nationalism, separatism and international terrorism, prevented [the further] discreditation of the constitutional structures, maintained its sovereignty and territorial integrity,

⁵⁶ Rossiyskaya gazeta, 30/3/2009.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Strategiya natsional’noi bezopasnosti Rossiyskoi Federatsii do 2020 goda, (<http://www.scrf.gov.ru/documents/99.html> Accessed 3/2/2010).

restored the possibility, by strengthening its [global] market competitiveness and defending its national interests, of becoming a key element in forming multi-polar international relations.⁶⁰

Slightly further on in the document's preamble, the latter reinforces the political leadership's desire "to turn Russia into one of [the world's] leading states in terms of technological progress, quality of life for the population and influence on global processes."⁶¹

However, despite these opening, confident remarks, the NSS became less optimistic and more realistic as regards various local and global threats to international security over the coming decade, stating that the "globalisation process" carried its own risks, not least being "the inequality of development...the deepening of the gulf in levels of prosperity between countries" as well as an increase in the "tendency" of various "non-regional actors" to become involved in solutions to "existing regional problems and crises situations".⁶²

And if anyone was in any doubt as to which "non-regional actor" the NSS had in mind, the next point made it clear:

The unsustainability of the existing global and regional [security] architecture orientated, particularly in the Euro-Atlantic region solely on the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, as well as the imperfection ["*nesovershenstvo*"] of the legal instruments and mechanisms, more and more creates a threat to maintaining international security.⁶³

Thus, already quietly, subtly being put in place in the NSS are two-related points of significance in relation to Russia's security stance on the Arctic: first, non-regional actors becoming involved in regional security disputes and, secondly, the 'unsustainability' of the current security structure, specifically NATO and particularly the Alliance's conduct in the Euro-Atlantic region (which, obviously, includes the Arctic). Alarmed and concerned at NATO's increasing involvement in non-NATO member state theatre operations, as well as its more recent record of interpreting flexibly various UN mandates, Russia has not hesitated in expressing its own fears that the current NATO-dominated global and regional security structures poses a threat to wider international security. As reflected also in the latest version of the country's Military Doctrine, this emphasis in official Russian security/defence documents that NATO is a threat to international security has still to be addressed by NATO and Russian fears on this particular issue assuaged. Hence, as will be examined in greater detail below, Medvedev's statement – whilst applauding the recent treaty signed with Norway on resolving the disputed area of Barents Sea, (September 2010) – was also quick to point out that "the Arctic is ours" and that "it [Arctic] can completely do without NATO."⁶⁴

In the document, Russia counter-poses NATO with its own shift away from 'bloc' politics and a move towards 'multi-vector diplomacy':

the transformation from bloc-to-bloc confrontation to the principles of multi-vectored diplomacy, as well as the resource potential of Russia [with or without the Arctic] and a pragmatic policy of its exploitation should increase the possibilities of the Russian Federation to strengthen its influence on the world stage.⁶⁵

Following the demise of the Warsaw Pact, NATO, as far as the Russians are concerned, has not moved on sufficiently from its Cold War past to meet the ever changing global and regional security picture. However, given the fall of that self-same pact and the increasing presence and influence of NATO, both within the territory of the fSU and along the length of the border of the Russian Federation, what choice did the Russians have BUT to adopt a 'multi-vectored' foreign policy? By necessity, Russia had to adopt a much more flexible foreign policy approach if it was to avoid a further decline in its influence on the world stage. Given the continuing influence of fossil fuels on the world's economies – and the immense raw material resources located within the boundaries of the Russian

⁶⁰ Strategiya natsional'noi... *ibid.*.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ D Medvedev, "Sovmestnaya press-konferentsiya po itogam rossiysko-norvezhskikh peregovorov", (official Presidential website, 15/9/2010)

⁶⁵ Strategiya natsional'noi bezopasnosti..., *ibid.*

Federation itself – Russia has also displayed (in its various gas disputes with Ukraine, Belarus' over the past decade), that it has fully comprehended the practical power of its natural wealth and, when needs be, will use its natural wealth to protect, or advance, Russia's national interests. Unlike NATO, in advancing or protecting its national interests, Russia does not seem to be too inclined to seek anyone else's prior permission or, for that matter, blessing. Who can argue with its assertion that a "pragmatic policy" towards their natural resources will not increase Russia's influence on the world stage?

Listing a whole series of threats facing the world in the coming decade – ranging from disagreements between the world's leading states, weapons of mass destruction falling into the hands of terrorists, cyber-warfare, illegal migration, to the "increasingly noticeable deficit in fresh drinking water" – an important future source of which could be the Arctic itself – the Strategy proceeded to outline what it thought would be the main 'focus' of international politics in the years ahead:

The focus of international politics in the long term...will be concentrated on securing sources of energy, including the Middle East, on the shelf of the Barents Sea and in other regions of the Arctic, in the Caspian Sea Basin and in Central Asia.⁶⁶

Given the geographical location of the overwhelming majority of the areas listed, Russia's influence, whether benign or otherwise, could be a major determining factor in deciding the outcome of geopolitical tensions surrounding the future of fossil fuel energy supplies to the rest of the world. As if to underline the potential for military force to be used, slightly further on, the point is made that "under conditions of the competitive struggle for resources, solutions to the arising problems involving the use of military force cannot be excluded – the existing balance of power along the borders of the Russian Federation and its allies could be broken."⁶⁷

Pointing out the risks associated with the growing number of states seeking to acquire nuclear weapons, US plans to deploy a new ABM system in Europe – recent talk of Russian involvement has still to be firmed up and concrete proposals worked out – the continuing fall out from the recent global financial-economic crisis, the Strategy sought to underline the importance, once again, of the UN Security Council and the UN itself as a "central element in a stable system of international relations."⁶⁸

Once again, the NSS described "the further advancement of the military structure" of NATO to Russia's borders as "unacceptable" as well as "attempts to give it [NATO] global functions, sharply digressing from the norms of international law."⁶⁹

Thus, it is fairly clear from what has been quoted from the NSS that Russia will have problems with NATO getting involved in Arctic affairs on any level, as a bloc, regardless of the fact that 4/5 of the Arctic Five are NATO members. In other words, Moscow will have considerably less problems dealing with members of the Arctic Five on a bilateral basis, even, perhaps, as a collective bloc, despite being NATO members, rather than dealing with NATO, as a bloc on Arctic affairs. On the surface, this may seem to be a bit of mental gymnastics, on the part of the Russians but, as has been recently shown by the agreement with Norway over the Barents Sea, Moscow can deal with Oslo, representing Norway, than dealing with Norway-NATO member state. Russia can better understand Norway's national interests in the region, but would argue against NATO having any interests in the region. Russia would find NATO's involvement in the Arctic disputatious, to say the least, for a number of reasons:

- 1) the unwelcomed influence/interference of a non-regional actor in a region of particular importance to Russia's national security;
- 2) in principle, further concern over NATO's security over-reach;
- 3) growing concern over NATO's military 'creep' towards Russia's borders: a formal NATO security presence in the Arctic would simply confirm to many in Russia's senior political and military leadership that NATO is intent on hemming Russia in, on all points of the compass and, therefore, represents a recognisable threat to Russia;
- 4) if, as a bloc, NATO succeeds in establishing a presence in the Arctic, from Russia's point of view, this could easily be interpreted as a further attempt to thwart Russia's ambitions to turn the Arctic into Russia's future strategic resource base and, thus, hinder Russia's attempts to

⁶⁶Strategiya natsioanl'noi..., *ibid.*

⁶⁷*ibid.*

⁶⁸*ibid.*

⁶⁹*ibid.*

influence global politics, either through diminishing access and control of the region's potential hydrocarbon/mineral/biological/ wealth; reduce state control of the potentially lucrative NSR; enhanced monitoring of the Russian military activity in the Northern region, (one should always remember that the Arctic Ocean is still a very significant area for SLBM operations, both as a base for operations as well as a test firing range for the country's sea-borne strategic nuclear deterrent).

Further on, in the section entitled, "on state and public security", concerning maintaining the security of the border region, the document discussed "increasing the effectiveness of the security of the state border, particularly in the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation."⁷⁰ Similarly, in the section on "economic growth", it stated:

In the interests of maintaining national security in the medium term...the energy, information and military infrastructure, particularly in the Arctic zone...must be developed.⁷¹

Thus, although specific individual references to the Arctic are few and far between in the NSS, in overall terms, they clearly pointed out that the Russian intent was NOT to militarise the region, but to maintain the necessary level of security infrastructure, allowing the economic and social development of the region. As stated before, the NSS, similar to the Fundamentals...were more explicit on securitisation of the Arctic, rather than militarisation of the Arctic.

However, as will be shown below, it would be foolhardy to think that Russia's future military presence/activity/ in the region will not change in accordance with a new assessment being made concerning the threats to Russia's national interests in the Arctic. Both the Fundamentals...and the NSS clearly demonstrate that Russia has a well-defined national future strategy, designed to promote, secure and protect Russian national interests in the region in the coming decade. Bearing this in mind, despite the potential for change following the Russian Presidential election in 2012 in certain areas of Russia's national development, it is unlikely that Russian national strategy towards the Arctic, in overall terms, will see much change: both Putin and Medvedev seem to be as one in ascertaining that "the Arctic is ours". This is not be a view shared by other members of the Arctic Five – nor by other significant global players like China – and, by itself, may eventually become a source of tension between Russia and the other players in the area, (especially if the UN Commission does not accept Russia's evidence concerning the limits of Russia's continental shelf in the Arctic Ocean). But the documents detailed and examined here give a very clear indication of Russian policy in relation to the Arctic and, as such, should also help those other players in the area better understand Russian intentions in the coming decade concerning the Arctic.

In summary, the Arctic is seen as crucial in terms of Russia's future economic well-being, going way beyond the next decade and well into the rest of the century and, as such, a cornerstone to the very existence and viability of the state within its current borders. The weight of history adds further to Russia's public determination to hold and, if needs be, defend Russian interests in the region. This paper will now examine the Russian military dimension to the Arctic.

The Russian military and the Arctic

Following the publication of the "Fundamentals..." in March 2009, *RIA-Novosti* published a lengthy commentary on the strategic and military importance of the Arctic to Russia:

Increased traffic along the Northern Sea Route will require the development of the coastal infrastructure along the length of the Route...This will require tighter military and border control to check any attempt to violate the freedom of the seas. Busy maritime traffic is often accompanied by smuggling, poaching and piracy. Growing seaports will also need greater protection as they will become attractive military targets. The Russian Security Council's decision to maintain a military force...in the Arctic is aimed at enhancing such protection. To control the Arctic region an effective coast guard system should be established, as well as a developed border [guard] infrastructure in Russia's Arctic zone and strong, well-equipped military contingents in the military districts. Russia's Northern and Pacific Fleets will shoulder the greatest burden in protecting the Arctic and sub-Arctic regions.

⁷⁰ Strategiya national's bezopasnosti..., ibid.

⁷¹ ibid.

Commenting on Russia's ability to successfully defend its influence and interests in the Arctic, this country currently has the strongest standing position in the impending race for the Arctic. Russia controls the Northern Sea Route and has some infrastructure along the Route, including cities and seaports that could be used as bases for further development.

Finally, Russia today has the greatest military potential in the Arctic, as its Northern Fleet is stationed there along with several air force units. These forces are far superior to those [which] other countries in the region could deploy in the Arctic.⁷²

In general terms, the commentary more or less accurately reflected the security picture surrounding the Arctic - the importance of maintaining the NSR in good order; the necessity to make sure that the border was adequately protected, including the ports and the towns along the northern coastline, and a few references to the "proper" military force required for the area, including the presence of the Northern Fleet and units of the Russian Air Force.

Slightly more succinctly, a former C-in-C of the Northern Fleet, Admiral V Popov tied in both the economic and security aspects of Russia's presence in the Arctic in a couple of sentences:

In relation to the Arctic, [a region] possessing enormous mineral resources and having a significant transit-freight potential, its control by Russia is directly connected to ensuring the country's national security, both in the economic and military plan.⁷³

More telling was an article, written by a couple of economists, specialists on the Arctic who, somewhat straying from their normal academic beat, so to speak, also touched on the challenges facing Russia's defence capability in the Arctic:

Great is the role of the Arctic in maintaining the defence capability of Russia in controlling the sea, air and space expanse [*prostranstvo*] of our country. However, its main [importance] is to contain the growing military-political pressure and deep penetration of NATO and the USA in Russia's northern geopolitical space, aimed at neutralising Russia's nuclear deterrent potential.⁷⁴

The thought that both NATO and the US are using the Arctic to further encroach on Russia's national interests finds common ground among many commentators on military affairs in Russia and helps to increase Russia's concerns over the future "internationalisation" of many issues dealing with the Arctic. After all, if the US and NATO have increased access to the region, under whatever pretexts, this obviously would impact on Russia's ability to use the area for its own purposes, away from the prying eyes and ears of others, so to speak. As has happened before – largely unsuccessfully in the 1990s – Russia has displayed a tendency to write red lines in the sand. It could well be the case that Russia seeks to write a red line, only this time in the ice.

One article, published in the authoritative and influential journal of the Academy of Military Science, openly postulated about an attack being launched against the Russian North, using Norway, for instance, as a "lead platform" for a NATO-inspired attack, and the other Scandinavian states, as a "buffer zone". In the same article, the author also postulated an "occupation" of a number of military sites in Tiumen *oblast'* by American forces, as a result of the "deterioration in the military-political relationship between Russia and the US."⁷⁵

Yet another, discussing the actions of Russia's neighbours, partly reflecting Korabel'nikov's concerns, simply stated that:

⁷² I Kramnik, "Russian Security Council turns to Arctic", *RIA-Novosti*, 30/3/2009.

⁷³ V Popov, "Zakondatel'noye obespecheniye natsional'noi Morskoi politiki i ekonomicheskoi deyatel'nosti v Arktike", *Morskoi sbornik*, 9, 2006, 46-50; 46.

⁷⁴ S Koz'menko, V Selin, "Kontseptsiya soglasovaniya ekonomicheskoi i oboronnoi deyatel'nosti v Arktike", *Morskoi sbornik*, 4, 2009, 55-60; 55.

⁷⁵ Colonel A A Korabel'nikov, "Ob ugrozakh na severe Rossii i vozmozhnosti adekvatno reagirovat' na nikh", *Vestnik Akademii Voennykh Nauk*, 4 (21), 2007, 33-38; 35, 36.

...the neighbours, sensing Russia's weakness, momentarily, have been squeezing against Russia's Arctic expanses.⁷⁶

In harsher tones did one senior military figure describe the actions of what he described as Russia's "state-competitors" [*gosudarstava-konkurenty*] in the Arctic, realising:

The gigantic possibilities of the region...are moving the fight beyond the edges of the diplomatic table...masking their activities by the desire to solve ecological issues.⁷⁷

In short, this is simply a representative snapshot of what is being publicly and openly discussed in various Russian military journals, concerning the general picture surrounding the military's concerns over the Arctic. They are quoted here, not simply to give the reader an idea of what the military-political specialists are writing on this general theme, nor even because they reveal a deep seated mistrust of the West's activities in the Arctic, but also because, as in other areas, the bulk of what is actually published in the military-scientific literature in Russia does not seem to be being read by analysts who should be reading this and factoring it in their counsel to the people who make the decisions on how best to deal with Russia, especially more so in relation to an issue of such importance to Russia like the Arctic.

Thus, the concern surrounding the continuing expansion of NATO and the USA in a very sensitive area for Russia would, arguably be the equivalent if potential hostile forces were to begin "penetrating", say the Gulf of Mexico from the perspective of the USA, or the North Sea, from the point of view of Britain. Similarly, any attempt to advance the cause of "internationalising" – as will be examined in more detail below – of the NSR is also viewed by many in Russia as a further attempt to wrest control of the Arctic from Russian influence. Again, this is an area which the Russians are very sensitive about and they will do what they can to ensure that, in this particular case, the NSR remains under Russian jurisdiction and control.

One Western source would appear to have at least a degree of sympathy for Russian security concerns in the Arctic:

Russia has important strategic interests in the High North. These have not lost their relevance with the end of the Cold War... Hence, developments in the region ought to be seen from a long-term view, with an assumption that the military situation may develop in different directions and perhaps not all of them that pleasant for neighbouring states.⁷⁸

Depending on the steps taken by other countries in the Arctic, not solely the member-states of the Arctic Five, the race to control either the mineral wealth of the region or the potentially lucrative trade route represented by the NSR, there is the possibility of increasing deployment of military assets to the region as states simply attempt to bolster their claims to the area's potential wealth. As far as the Russians are concerned, Russia views the Arctic not only through the country's historical and scientific association, but also from an eminently pragmatic point of view: rightly, or wrongly, Russia views the Arctic as being crucial to the country's future socio-economic development and essential to the country's national security. Its most powerful navy – the Northern Fleet – is based there, as well as a number of air and ground force units and there is very little sign that Russia's local military strength is destined to become weaker.

In June 2008, an article appeared in one of the quality English papers, making reference to an interview given by the then Head of the Russian Armed Forces' Combat Training directorate, General V Shamanov, in which, according to the newspaper, Russia had announced its plans to beef up its military presence in the Arctic further. In particular, the article quoted him as saying:

We have a number of highly professional military units in the Leningrad, Siberian and Far Eastern military districts [the statement was made prior to the reform of the country's military-

⁷⁶ Yu Golotiuk, "Na strazhe belogo bezmolviya", *Rossiya v global'noi politike*, no3, vol.6, 2008, 1-11; 2.

⁷⁷ Major-General V I Sosnin, "Arktika – slozhniy uzel mezhgosudarstvennykh protivorechii", *Voennaya Mysl'*, 7, 2010, 3-9; 6.

⁷⁸ K B Zsyk, "Russian military power and the Arctic", No. 8: Russian Foreign Policy (EU-Russia Centre, Brussels, 2008, 80-86; 85).

administrative system carried out in December 2010 – SJM] which are specifically trained for combat in the Arctic regions.⁷⁹

The Russian version of Shamanov's interview revealed both the concern of the senior Russian military leadership to the activities of the "neighbours", as well as the proposed steps to be taken in order to defend Russia's national interests in the Arctic:

The talk was about a number of amendments to the combat training plans for troops from the Leningrad, Siberian and Far Eastern military districts. After leaders from a number of states disputed Russia's stated claims to the rich resources of the Arctic Ocean's shelf, the Main Combat-Training directorate immediately introduced clarification into the combat training plans for these units...which could be called upon to carry out combat tasks in the Arctic. *Because modern wars are won, or lost, long before they begin*, [my emphasis]. For instance, the Americans, after these statements, held a 12-day exercise in Alaska – 'Northern Region-2008' – in which 5,000 soldiers, 120 planes and a number of naval vessels took part.⁸⁰

In a further interview, published roughly the same time as his interview in *Krasnaya Zvezda*, Shamanov expanded his assessment of the US military exercise in Alaska, as well as reassure the reader that Russia was prepared for any eventuality in the region:

At one point, Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin uttered a memorable phrase [when he stated] that we will not go ape [*"obez'yanichat"*] in reacting to every kink and grimace [*"vyvikh ili grimacu"*] of our nearest and furthest [away] neighbours. We do not intend to militarise the Arctic, although our interests there are no less than others. We have units in a number of districts capable of conducting active combat and training tasks in the conditions of the Far North. If required, we can prepare larger-scale units. We have the invaluable experience of the Great Patriotic War in conducting military operations in the Far North [to draw on]. However, it is to be hoped that such experience will not be demanded.⁸¹

In a recent statement, the C-in-C Ground Troops, Colonel-General A Postnikov, confirmed that "issues" surrounding the creation of "Arctic brigades" were being worked out, including their "deployment, structure...equipment, making them air-mobile, training to a special regime."⁸²

According to "information agencies", "a special motor-rifle battalion for operations in the Arctic is planned to be deployed in the Kola peninsula already this year. The new unit is to be formed on the basis of the 200th MRB and will be based in Pechenga. Other than the usual weapons, the brigade's personnel will also be supplied with special clothing and technology for operating in the complex climatic conditions of the Arctic. The infrastructure of the unit will be created taking into account the experience of the neighbouring countries – Norway and Finland."⁸³

The article also pointed out that this was in conformity with the decision announced in the "Fundamentals..." about the creation of a group of forces in the Arctic and closed with reminding its readers that "basic structures [*"osnovnyye struktury"*] of the country's Armed Forces were already deployed in Murmansk and Arkhangel'sk *oblasts*, as well as on Novaya Zemlya."⁸⁴

Although it would appear NOT to be Russia's avowed intent to militarise the region – and one should always be wary of declaratory statements more designed to placate, rather than inform – nevertheless, it would also appear to be the case that Russia is prepared for any eventuality in the region, including force, should the "Arctic fist" be required more than the gloved hand. Interestingly

⁷⁹ A Blomfield, "Russia plans military build up in the Arctic", *The Daily Telegraph*, 12/6/2008.

⁸⁰ Lieutenant-General V Shamanov, "Podgotovka i oblik armii budut menyatsya", *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 24/6/2008.

⁸¹ Lieutenant-General V Shamanov, "Aktsent na kachestvo", *Armeyskiy sbornik*, 7, 2008, 2-3;3.

⁸² V Khodoleyev, "Oblik 'arkticheskikh' brigad", *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 18/5/2011. It is also interesting and worth noting that this issue of the paper also carried a detailed article on the training of the fighter pilots based on the Northern Fleet's "heavy aircraft-carrying cruiser", the *Admiral of the Fleet of the USSR A Kuznetsov* – and the training simulator *NITKA*, based in Ukraine - A Pinchuk, "Nad okeanom", *ibid.*

⁸³ Khodeleyev, *ibid.*

⁸⁴ *ibid.*

enough, in his address to the specific session of the Security Council, dealing with Russia's national interests in the Arctic, held just a few months after Shamanov's published remarks, Medvedev made no direct reference to Russia's current, or future, military plans to the Arctic, simply reaffirming the "strategic significance" of the region to Russia:

Without exaggeration, this region has strategic significance for our country, its development is directly linked to the solving of long-term issues in relation to the evolution of the state, its competitiveness in global markets...Of course, our first task is to turn the Arctic into Russia's resource base for the 21st century and, already, in [seeking to] solving this problem, we must solve a whole number of special issues, the main one [being] – maintaining the secure defence of Russia's national interests in the region.⁸⁵

Thus, Medvedev did not avail himself of the opportunity to announce – unlike Shamanov earlier – any major military plan to defend Russia's national interests in the Arctic, despite being the Supreme Commander-in-Chief of the country's Armed Forces and this being a session of the nation's Security Council, specifically devoted to examining Russia's national interests in the Arctic, a region which he had already publicly recognised on a number of occasions as being of "strategic significance" to his country's future socio-economic well-being. Why he chose not to do this on this particular occasion may have been due to a number of reasons: his natural inclination – as a civilian politician – not to over-play the military card; his professional instinct not to reveal, both as his country's President and as his country's Supreme Commander-in-Chief, too much, especially in the area of expressing views on his country's potential military intent in a region dubbed of "strategic significance" to his country and, finally, confirmation of his country's previously and oft-repeated declaration that Russia has no plans "to militarise" the region, only "to securitise" it.⁸⁶ This can be viewed as a bit of verbal, if not quite intellectual, gymnastics on the part of the Russians, but the inference would appear to be that in enhancing security in terms of the border guard infrastructure and the likes in the region, this should be viewed simply as an attempt to increase the general law and order in the area, whereas the introduction of ground force units and the like is a reaction to a more military threat, real or potential.

Even if we assume that all, or most, of these points are accurate, they do not devalue the pronouncements of the professional military on this issue, but does help place the latter in a broader political context. Occasionally, interpreters of events in countries like Russia do tend to over-(rarely, under-)exaggerate the import which should be attached to statements of senior members of the country's political-military leadership. However, what is always important in helping to see the full gauge of a statement is not only to place it in the contemporary framework, but also historical. The professional military, as a result of their training, experience, both personal and historical, will examine what lessons are to be learnt from past experience in an attempt to avoid the mistake of repeating past failures in the future. Almost as a question of personal, rather than simply professional, creed will they assume the worst and attempt to forestall, not just simply forewarn, potential military threats to their country. As Shamanov himself declared, most wars are lost before they have even been fought.

Therefore, Shamanov's views on the Arctic are not at great variance with those of Medvedev's. Both at a practical, as well as at an intellectual level, Shamanov is not talking up the potential of open conflict breaking out in the region, but simply preparing for a situation which *could* take occur in the future, should Russia not be seen, by others, as not being overly serious in its desire to hold on to this strategically important region. Given both Russia's physical size, as well as the nature and complexity of a number of the governing regimes bordering Russia, Russia faces many potential and very varied military and security threats throughout the rest of this century, hence the continuing – if not even growing – military and economic importance of the Arctic to Russia.

⁸⁵ D Medvedev, "Vystupleniye na zasedanii Soveta Bezopasnosti, 'o zashchite natsional'nykh interesov Rossii v Arktike'", (<http://www.kremlin.ru/transcripts/1433>, 17/9/2008). Accessed 29/1/2010.

⁸⁶ As one contemporary analysis of the "Fundamentals..." noted, the latter outlined plans for "strengthening border guard units" and "the necessity to create coastal protection units", there being not a hint of "militarisation" occurring in the area, no "nuclear-powered aircraft carriers" or "special units of combat penguins" (!) being deployed, (T Borisov, "No combat penguins", *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, 30-3-2009). Of course, any astute soldier worth his salt, serving in the Arctic, would immediately be suspicious of seeing any penguins in the Arctic, combat, or otherwise. They live in the Southern hemisphere, not the Northern, which is one of the reasons why they are not a staple of the diet of polar bears!

During a number of the country's most threatening periods in its history, its sheer physical size meant that it could not be conquered, in any practical sense. At most, it could only be subdued. Victory, in the classical military sense, could not be obtained and, despite the expenditure of vast military force, arguably would always remain an unachievable aim. However, its geo-strategic position and its natural wealth, have proven both a curse and a blessing for Russia/USSR, as one noted Russian academic wrote:

Russia is a great continental and sea power. It has no equal in the world in relation to the size of the country, the length of the state border, the variety of its environment and the abundance of its natural resources, [all] combining to make up the natural wealth of the country.⁸⁷

However, given the conduct of war over the past twenty years, or so, Russia's sheer physical size can no longer be counted upon, as was the case in the earlier half of the twentieth century, in coming to Russia's aid should military conflict break out. According to Lysukhin, the changing nature of modern military technology had degraded the value of Russia's sheer physical size:

As distinct from previous wars, today, in[side] Russia, despite its huge expanse, there is no spot hidden from observation from space, or unreachable by a precision-guided weapon.⁸⁸

What has made this position even worse was the comparative state of the country's Armed Forces, now "not in a position to maintain reliably the military security of our country by means of a balanced concentration of strength along the huge border perimeter."⁸⁹

Not only was Russia not able to militarily adequately protect itself along its border, but recent technological developments have further complicated matters by increasing the accuracy of conventional weapons, thereby allowing the potential opponent the real possibility of successfully launching a conventional military strike which could not only have a significant impact on Russia's civil and military infrastructure, but also reduce Russia's retaliatory capability:

The position has become even more complicated in connection with our potential enemies acquiring modern strike weapons, including long-range precision guided weapons, *the use of which grants [the enemy] the possibility of launching attacks over the whole of Russia, including the operational areas of missile units...* [emphasis mine- SJM] Under certain conditions, existing strike weapons [could] allow the enemy to achieve his political aims...without seizing territory, even if the defending side still has significant military capability.⁹⁰

Thus, within the context of Lysukhin's broader analysis of the changing nature of war in the past two decades, the Arctic becomes even more important to Russia, in that it allows an effective – still – launch area for the country's main nuclear deterrent force, its arsenal of SLBMs. Although the Arctic, as stated above, is largely seen as a potentially important strategic resource base, there can be no denying the region's continuing – and growing - importance to Russia from the point of view of providing an operational area which allows it still to maintain an effective nuclear deterrent force.

It can be predicted that further unregulated and unwelcomed international encroachment in the area will be resisted by Russia as it seeks not only to exploit the region's natural wealth for its own economic and socio-political development, but also because the region provides Russia's strategic nuclear submarine force not only with a valuable home base, but also a credible operational environment.

Along with Russia's Eastern regions, Lysukhin, in short, sees "the good order" of Russia's Eastern and Northern regions, as not a question of "whim, but...an urgent necessity as we are talking about the survival of the nation."⁹¹

⁸⁷ Prof N Ya Lysukhin, "Fiziko-geograficheskiye osobennosti oboronnogo prostranstva Rossii", *Voennaya mysl'*, 12, 2005, 14-19; 14.

⁸⁸ Lysukhin, *ibid.*, 15.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Lysukhin, *ibid.*, 16.

Reiterating the overall future importance of the region to Russia, as well as outlining a number of steps which Russia should undertake to maintain its security and economic interests in the Arctic, one of the country's most prominent civilian specialists on contemporary Russian military affairs, A A Kokoshin, interviewed shortly after the Security Council session devoted to the Arctic stated the following:

The task facing our Armed Forces is to maintain the military security of the economic interests of Russia in the Arctic region. Thus, we must strengthen the Navy, the border [guard] units, we must develop the infrastructure of the Air Force. We must, by all possible means, include [steps] strengthening the combat capabilities of the Fleet...We must strengthen the Northern and Pacific Fleets – both in terms of the numbers of submarines, surface ships and aircraft. We must build a new design [of ship] able to operate effectively in this zone with its particularly severe weather conditions, [we must] develop the necessary satellite-reconnaissance infrastructure. In this we are not alone – all the neighbours are improving their combat capabilities in the Arctic. The Arctic is becoming an increasingly important region for the world economy and an increasingly important factor and object of dispute in world politics.”⁹²

Like many in Russia's current senior political leadership, Kokoshin reiterated the economic importance of the Arctic to Russia but, unlike Medvedev and, to a lesser extent, Putin, was less coy about outlining a number of military/overall security steps which he thought had to be adopted in order to secure Russia's national interests in the region, particularly in relation to the country's local naval force. Given the potential economic wealth of the area, as well as the close physical proximity of former enemies or errant allies, Kokoshin was in no doubt that Russia will have to rely on its own military forces in the region to secure its position there. Whilst others in Russia's senior political leadership may be less direct than Kokoshin in stating what needs to be done in the Arctic to secure Russia's interests there, as will be shown later, there is already an accumulated body of evidence that, in relation to his views concerning the country's naval forces in the Arctic, for instance. Russia looks set to continue developing its naval forces there, particularly its powerful Northern Fleet, both historically, and currently, still its most powerful fleet, even in comparison with the Pacific Fleet. In the words of another Russian analyst, how will the other member states of the Arctic Five – never mind those outside the Arctic Five – take seriously Russia's claims to the region, unless it has a semblance of a creditable “Arctic fist”?⁹³

This may sound slightly primitive to our Western, early 21st century ears, but as natural resources become fewer and fewer and “resource nationalism” becomes an ever real factor in the pursuit of both national and international *realpolitik*, it would be unwise to deny the increasing possibility that nation states will resort to non-diplomatic methods in order to secure the means for national survival. As shown above, a number of senior Russian analysts and prominent political figures do not balk at drawing such a conclusion and urge their government to take all necessary steps – including military – in order to protect and, if needs be, defend Russia's national interests. We in the West have to realise, once and for all, that Russia clearly perceives that it has vital national interests, particularly in this region and, like other great powers, will do what it feels has to be done in order to protect and defend its interests there, as well as in other parts of its geopolitical space.

In a recent issue of the Russian Navy's main journal, *Morskoi sbornik*, the links between Russia's geo-strategic position, natural resources and the role of the Navy were clearly outlined:

To achieve the strategic aim of strengthening Russia's geo-strategic position and restoring its status as a naval power is the synergic result of the coming together of two other aims. Only the effective use of the sea's natural resource potential will allow the national economy to gain the competitive advantage (and ensure the high levels of socio-economic development) and only the Navy can ensure national security which will assist the strengthening of Russia's geo-strategic position. At the same time, the increase in the political influence of the RF [Russian Federation] in the world and the restoration of its status as a naval power will assist the

⁹² I Klimenko, I Lavrovsky, “Arkticheskiye prioritety Rossii”, *Pravitel'stvennaya gazeta*, 14-10-2008; K Atland, “The introduction, adoption and implementation of Russia's ‘Northern strategic bastion’ concept, 1992-1999,” *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, 20, 2007, 499-528.

⁹³ O Aleksandrov, “Labirinty arkticheskoi politiki”, *Rossiya v global'noi politike*, 4, 2007, 114-123;

broadening of its possibilities for a greater exploitation of the sea's natural resources and [its] maritime potential.⁹⁴

In order for Russia to regain its former geo-strategic position, it has to make greater use of the natural resource potential of the sea which, in itself, requires Russia to re-create a powerful Navy able, in turn, to defend Russia's economic interests. The creation of such a powerful Navy will not only create the necessary capability of Russia being able to defend its national interests, but will also aid considerably Russia to regain political influence worldwide. Admiral of the Fleet of the USSR Gorshkov himself could have written such a statement! But unlike Soviet times, there would appear neither to be the will nor, realistically, the means, to re-create such a powerful Russian Navy, at least not in the foreseeable future.

However, leaving aside their dreams for the future, specifically in relation to the Arctic, the authors stated:

The organisation of naval activity in the Arctic region should be made on the basis of the region's geopolitical significance in the [overall] system of the country's national interests. The change in the geopolitical status of the Russian Arctic is determined not only by the growing threat from the Atlantic to Russia's borders, with the advancement of NATO, but also [due to] the growing significance of the sea's natural resources of which the Arctic continental shelf is rich. Such states like the USA, Great Britain, Norway, Finland, even Germany and Japan, consider the wealth of the Russian Arctic sector a resource for the whole world community.⁹⁵

If the authors were being both honest and fair, they should also have included China in the list of states that consider the wealth of the Arctic as belonging to the world community and not the sole preserve of Russia. Both authors were in no doubt, however, about the intentions of the world's leading naval powers in relation to Russia:

The leading naval powers are striving to limit Russia's access to the resources and expanse of the world's oceans, international sea lanes, applying economic, political and legal pressure on the Russian Federation with the intent of limiting its naval activity.

Under these circumstances, in order to secure Russia's national interests on the world's oceans and, in particular, in the seas of the Russian Arctic, the Northern Fleet must have sufficient naval potential.⁹⁶

In a slightly different guise, we have the age-old fear of Russia being hemmed in, now not only on land, but also at sea. Ever since the collapse of the USSR, (once the initial honeymoon period in relations between the West and Russia had worn of), a number of Russians in various positions have expressed their concern time and time again about NATO enlargement, the danger of including former Warsaw Pact members, and then former Soviet republics, in the military infrastructure of NATO. The West took no heed. The publication of the latest Russian Military Doctrine in 2010 in which Russia stated that the "no 1" military threat to Russia in the West was NATO invoked a howl of protest from the West, stating that, to all intents and purposes, Russia "had got it wrong." On the eve of the Lisbon Summit in November 2010, the Secretary-General of NATO, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, once again reiterated NATO's continuing need to exercise military power "beyond our [NATO] borders."⁹⁷ The recent decision to carry out air interdiction operations against Libya would, once again, appear to confirm Russian suspicions that NATO is way too keen to employ military force "to solve" a myriad of international problems, well outwith NATO's borders. As far as the Russians are concerned, too many precedents have been established, and numerous pretexts invoked, with or without the sanction of the UN Security Council, over the past two decades, enabling and almost encouraging NATO powers to resort to military force and, **as Russian military power grows – as it will due to the increase in the monies flowing into the Russian coffers as a result of the huge leap in the world price for both oil and gas – it can only be a question of time before the bear stops simply growling, but flashes its teeth or, worse, begins to unsheathe its claws.**

⁹⁴ A Stolbov, N Portunov, "Optimizatsiya strategii razvitiya Morskoi deyatel'nosti v Arktike", *Morskoi sbornik*, 1, 2009, 56-63; 58.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁹⁶ Stolbov, Portunov, *ibid.*, 59.

⁹⁷ J Kirkup, "NATO 'must be ready to tackle overseas wars'", *The Daily Telegraph*, 19/11/2010.

Russia, rightly or wrongly, perceives that, slowly but surely, it is being hemmed in and even in what it considers to be traditional areas of Russian influence, NATO seems to be ever ready to ignore Russian security concerns and fears in order to further extend its own influence. Even the recent flare up with Japan, in relation to the long running dispute over the Kurile Islands is, in its own way, a further indication of Russian sensitivity to the territorial issue and, in relation to the Arctic, Russia will do what it considers it must in order to defend and protect its interests there.

For Russia, it is an unfortunate coincidence that four out of five of the Arctic Five are already members of NATO and, whether or not, NATO has an independent interest in Arctic affairs, outside of the 4/5 NATO members of the Arctic Five, whilst not being an irrelevance as far as Russia is concerned, is a moot point. Russia's senior political leadership have warned against NATO becoming involved directly in Arctic affairs, but given the geo-political reality of the membership of the Arctic Five, NATO is already involved.

To summarise: there is much at stake for Russia in relation to the Arctic – a combination of history, security, economics and, no less important, national pride as the country attempts to reclaim global influence. As shown in the preceding sections, Russia has invested a lot of time and effort, spread over centuries, in opening up and developing the Arctic, when few other states were much interested in the cold, icy wastes and it is not prepared to see all that investment count for nothing in the years ahead. Part of its national edifice, so to speak, had a very pronounced northern wing and, given both the region's potential natural wealth, as well as Russia's very strong reassertion of its traditional claims to the region, the Arctic is set to become of increasing importance to Russia's future. The August 2007 Arctic gesture of Chilingarov *et al.* – the planting of a Russian titanium *tricolore* at the bottom of the Arctic Ocean – was not a territorial claim *per se*, but more a reaffirmation of what many Russians consider rightfully theirs: the Arctic. The Western powers – and others – should have been more careful to interpret the gesture made properly: for Russians, the planting of the flag was not a new claim being made, but an old claim being reaffirmed.

No one should be in any doubt about the seriousness of the claim being reaffirmed, either or the steps being taken to defend Russia's economic interests in the region. Although the interests of the leadership are not to encourage militarisation of the region, nevertheless they are very aware of steps being taken by the US, Canada and Denmark, which seem to be designed to increase their respective military assets in the region, virtually guaranteeing that the Russians will react in a similar manner.⁹⁸ Of course, of all the member states of the Arctic Five, Russia, in a purely conventional military sense, has the obvious upper hand in the Arctic region – after all, it has the Northern Fleet – Russia's most powerful fleet – operating from its home base of Severomorsk. Thus, in examining Russia's hold on the Arctic, an examination of the capability and functions of the Northern Fleet are crucial to understanding Russia's military posture in the area, an important factor should the local situation undergo its own non-climate related "warming".

The Northern Fleet

As stated before, nothing is born in a vacuum and, as Russia's policy towards the Arctic was not developed overnight, but was centuries in the making, similarly in relation to its military presence in the region. Therefore, in order to better understand Russia's current military position in the North, it will be necessary to look back, particularly into the history and operations of the Northern Fleet – Russia's primary military asset in the North – and examine its development throughout the length of the 20th century, in order to better understand its current status and be better placed to examine public statements concerning its immediate future. The *more* we understand the past, the *better* we understand the present and the *greater* the possibility that we will not repeat the same (past) mistakes in the future.

⁹⁸ See, for example, Korabel'nikov, *ibid.*; V Nestyorkin, "Voennaya deyatel'nost' Kanady v Arktike", *Zarubezhnoye voennoye obozreniye*, 11, 2007, 28-32; A Barannik, I Vozniuk, "Arktika kak vazhniy geostrategicheskiy region stolknoveniya natsional'nykh interesov vedushchikh zrubezhnykh stran", *Zarubezhnoye voennoye obozreniye*, 1, 2009, 3-11; A Khramchikhin, "V perspective – Articheskii front", *Nezavisimoye voennoye obozreniye*, 6/2/2009; A Khramchikhin, "Severniy ledovitiy TVD", *Voenno-promyshlenniy kur'er*, 28/4/2010; A Diyev, "Arktika – eto ne dikiy Zapad", *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 2/3/2011.

There has been a specific Russian naval presence in the Arctic region for less than a hundred years: the Arctic Ocean Flotilla was created in June 1916, following an earlier decision to both significantly enhance the port facilities at Murmansk and build a railway line in order to assist the movement of military freight to and from Murmansk in 1915.⁹⁹ In assessing the overall importance of the Russian military performance in WW1 in the North, the authoritative historical account of the Northern Fleet stated the following:

The First World War particularly convincingly underlined the enormous significance of the Northern maritime theatre for Russia. This war, like no previous war, showed the exceptional importance of having...a sufficiently strong fleet. In many respects, the weakness of the Russian naval flotilla eased the operations of the German submarines in the North...The experience of the war also testified to the complete possibility of conducting combat operations in the conditions of the Polar region, including anti-submarine [operations].¹⁰⁰

A more recent assessment, however, of German naval activity in the First World War, underlines the relevance of studying the lessons of that conflict almost 100 years after the end of the War itself:

The lessons of the past are very instructive even for today. At the time, after defeat in the First World War, the Germans, having analysed the whole path of the War, realised that one of the reasons for their defeat was the insufficient activity of their navy. Even then they realised the role of the northern freight shipments from the Allies in supporting Russia and showed a great interest in [both] studying the Arctic and particularly the Northern Sea Route. One does not need to convince the reader that today interest in this transport artery has grown considerably as many countries, particularly the USA, apply great effort in order to obtain 'international status' for the Route, although historically, it is clear that it is an internal Russia route, flowing through Russia's internal water network.¹⁰¹

Obviously, it could be argued that the author made such a statement more with an eye to contemporary events, rather than just illuminating a historical event in a different light, but it is a point worth making. As stated before, there is a lot to be learnt from re-examining the historical record and, given the nature of the debate currently going on as regards Russia's claim to the "treasure" lying underneath, and above, the Arctic seabed, Russians themselves have been very keen, almost strident, in emphasising the historical record, as part justifying their initial claim, made in 2001, (not long before this article was published) and their re-submitted claim, (2013? 2014?). As in most things, the weight of history has a bearing on contemporary events and, as has been shown in statements by various members of Russia's senior political and military leadership, no less so than in relation to the Arctic.

Almost immediately following the victory of the Bolsheviks in October 1917, Civil War in Russia broke out. The war in the North of the country ebbed and flowed, made less predictable due to the presence of foreign troops fighting on Russian soil, attempting to protect their own interests in the region, as well as assisting the anti-Bolshevik forces in their attempts to overthrow the new order being established in the political heart of the country at the time. Thus, in July 1918, the Northern Dvinsk River Flotilla was created and took part in a number of military engagements in the Northern theatre, particularly in assisting the Bolshevik Sixth Army throughout 1919-1920.¹⁰² The Bolshevik capture of Murmansk in March 1920 effectively signalled the end of the Civil War in the North, leading to a further re-organisation of the naval forces in the region, concluding in the creation of the White Sea's Naval Flotilla, (March 1920), subsequently re-named the Naval Forces of the Northern Sea.¹⁰³

Needless to say, lessons were to be learnt following the conclusion of the Civil War:

The experience of the Civil War in the North that even using a conventional, developed navy, this theatre was [still] open to attack. [For instance, despite] its extreme locale, the possibility [still remained] of supplies by sea [which, in turn] created favourable conditions for supplying

⁹⁹ *Great Soviet Encyclopaedia*, vol.23, M.1976, 22; Kozlov, Shlomin, *ibid.*, 263.

¹⁰⁰ Kozlov, Shlomin, *ibid.*, 43.

¹⁰¹ V Kulichenko, "Maloizvestnye stranitsy istorii. Morskaya voina v Arktike", *Morskaya gazeta*, 2/10/2001.

¹⁰² Kozlov, Shlomin, *ibid.*, 55-65.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 71.

the interventionists and allowing them to broaden their aggression. During the course of the war, the interest of the imperialists in the northern areas of our country grew, understandably given the natural wealth of the region, its close proximity to the country's main [population] regions, as well as to Britain, the presence of ice-free, open access to the sea. All this helped to increase the importance of the Northern maritime theatre in defence of the Soviet state. One of the factors which facilitated the...invasion of Murmansk and Arkhangel'sk by the interventionists was the weakness of the Armed Forces of the young republic, above all, its naval forces in the North...The experience of war in other naval theatres, particularly in the Baltic Sea [area] showed that the presence of a sufficient naval force could serve as a serious obstacle to the fulfilment of the enemy's plans."¹⁰⁴

Thus, the Soviet analysis of the first two significant periods in the combat history of the background to the creation of the Northern Fleet has a number of important points for the contemporary audience, keen to arrive at a better understanding of Russia's military posture in the Arctic:

- 1) the need for a strong military presence in the region, particularly a strong naval presence;
- 2) the interests of foreign states to the area's natural wealth;
- 3) the importance of the physical locale – both in terms of access to the sea, as well as to the country's internal market;
- 4) the exceptional importance, in overall terms, of the North, not only to the country's socio-economic development, but also its military security.

All the factors, earlier discussed – economic, military security, the interests of non-local actors – are here, in different forms but, in essence, still here. In other words, the contemporary military posture of the Russian state in the North has been built on old, historical roots: a mixture of fear of the true intentions of non-local actors, as well as a very real need for a strong military – especially naval – presence in the region. Russia still has much to protect in the area, even without the Arctic, and already has had to fight to retain what it has on at least three occasions in the twentieth century, WWI, Civil War and, of course, WW2. Thus, through bitter experience, Russia knows how to fight to retain its northern territories.

In terms of the further local naval history, the Northern Dvinsk River Flotilla and shore batteries were reorganised and, in 1920, the Naval Forces of the Northern Sea came into being, (headed by V N Varvatski), based in Arkhangel'sk. However, despite its somewhat grandiose title, the Forces did not last too long – the men and ships being transferred to maritime coastal protection duties following the decision to abolish the Naval Forces in 1922.¹⁰⁵ Similar to more contemporary events, this was due to a shortage of funds and the necessity to concentrate on building up a naval presence in more vital regions to the young republic at the time:

In view of the economic difficulties in the country, the decision was taken, as a matter of priority,¹⁰⁶ to restore the more important fleets for us [at the time] - the Baltic and Black Sea Fleets.

As described earlier, however, the interest of the Soviet state in the Arctic did not diminish throughout the 1920s – the range and regularity of the various Soviet scientific expeditions to the Arctic alone is proof of that. The decision to downgrade the naval presence in the North was adopted simply due to economic expediency, allied to a fundamental re-examination of the main maritime threat to the USSR at that time, the threat seeming to come mainly from the West and the South, not from the Far East or the North. However, as events were to unfold throughout the 1920s and, particularly in the 1930s, the maritime naval threat was re-assessed and the USSR, once again, began to look at the necessity of building up its naval forces in both the North and the Far East. This became possible also thanks to the significant growth in the country's economic development, brought about as a result of enforced industrialisation and mass collectivisation of agriculture, leading to an increase in revenue which was then quickly re-channelled, partly, to increases in defence spending. On a strategic level, the actions of the other Great Powers at the time seemed designed to simply contain the USSR – there was little appetite amongst many of the contemporary Great Powers, with one notable exception, to engage in military operations against the "land of the Soviets." However, for the USSR, looking out at a benignly

¹⁰⁴ Kozlov, Shlomin, *ibid.*, 68.

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*, 71.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*

hostile world, a strategic reassessment of the main military threats to the country not only became necessary, it became essential:

At the beginning of the 1930s, in connection with the increase in tension in international relations and the growing threat of attack by Hitlerite Germany and Imperialist Japan against the USSR, the Communist Party and the Soviet government took the decision to create Fleets in the Far East and the Extreme North, able to defend securely the maritime borders of the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁷

Following the successful completion of the White Sea Canal, ships were moved from their bases in the Baltic Sea to the north in order to begin the actual physical construction and organisation of what, initially, was called the Northern Naval Flotilla, created on 1st June 1933, (its first commander being Z A Zakupnev, former CoS to the Baltic Fleet).¹⁰⁸ Gradually, over the ensuing months and years, more ships and men were duly despatched north and an intensive naval construction programme carried out, in and around Murmansk, to turn the latter into a proper naval base, able to house the increasing contingent of men and ships.

In 1935, a new Commander was appointed – K I Dushenov – and, within two years of the latter's appointment, the People's Commissariat of Defence, on 11th May 1937, issued a decree formally re-organising the Northern Flotilla into the Northern Fleet.¹⁰⁹ However, curiously enough, in deference to the initial order creating the Flotilla, the Northern Fleet's official "birthday", so to speak, is still commemorated on 1st June.¹¹⁰ As part of its new organisation, more submarines were added and personnel given all-year, all-weather training.¹¹¹ In the words of one recent English analysis of the early origins of the Northern Fleet, the re-designation of the Flotilla was of strategic significance, further underlining the growing significance of the naval presence in the North:

The renaming of the Northern Flotilla as the Northern Fleet certainly signified a substantial increase in Soviet naval strength in the Far North, in later Soviet terms the intention to establish an 'operational-strategic' capability there as opposed to merely an 'operational' one, suggesting in this instance the conduct of a range of operations of strategic, rather than merely local maritime significance.¹¹²

Within only a matter of a couple of years of its formal creation, the Northern Fleet was in action, against the Finns in the so-called Winter War, (1939-1940).¹¹³ Designed to secure extra physical protection for Leningrad and the important local military-industrial complex, the USSR militarily performed very badly against the Finns and, indeed, it has even been said that the military action against Finland, designed to make the USSR more secure against its potential enemies, ironically only helped embolden Hitler in his idea that the USSR could be successfully attacked and overcome by a sufficiently strong military force. In terms of the Northern Fleet, however, the military experience gained was of limited value, but the whole military operation did show that the USSR was not averse in using military force in a region of the world that it saw as vital to its survival.

¹⁰⁷ Kozlov and Shlomin, *ibid.*, 79.

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*, 81.

¹⁰⁹ An early memoir of the Northern Fleet's first Commander was published in 1965: Captain P Klipp, "Fligman Severnogo flota", *Voенно-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 1965, 7, 56-63; A Bereznev, "U istokov sozdaniya Severnogo flota", *Voенно-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 7, 1981, 85.

¹¹⁰ Kozlov and Shlomin, *ibid.*, 84.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*, 84, 86.

¹¹² A Hill, "Russian and Soviet naval power and the Arctic from the XVI century to the beginning of the Great Patriotic War", *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, vol 20, September 2007, 359-392, 380;

¹¹³ In the prelude to the outbreak of war between the two countries, the local Leningrad Party chief, A A Zhdanov, memorably warned against small nations becoming involved in the power machinations of great powers. At the 8th Congress of Soviets, held in November 1936, he stated: "watching from the window on Europe [a famous allusion to St.Petersburg/ Leningrad being, in the words of the great Russian poet, A S Pushkin, Russia's window on Europe] at what is happening outside, we can hear, ever more loudly, the howling of the fascist beasts and the snapping of their jaws...And if, in some of these little countries, for example Finland, feelings of hostility to the USSR are being kindled by larger and more adventurist countries...in the long run, it is these little countries alone which will be the losers. It does not pay for little countries to get entangled in big adventures.", (J Degras, ed., *Documents on Soviet foreign policy*, vol 3, OUP, Oxford, 1953, 270).

This was further reaffirmed by operations carried out during the Soviet-German War, (1941-1945), usually known in Russian as the “Great Patriotic War”. According to Kozlov and Shlomin, once again, the War proved the importance of the Northern maritime theatre to the centralised political leadership of the Soviet state:

The War affirmed the important significance of the Northern maritime theatre and confirmed the timeliness of the steps taken by the Communist Party and the Soviet government in creating the Northern Fleet. The significance of the theatre was underlined, first and foremost, by allowing vital and safe passage on the internal and external river-transport system of the USSR.¹¹⁴

The early Soviet history of the Northern Fleet also pointed out the importance of the Fleet to ground operations:

The experience of the War showed the importance of Fleet’s operations...in rendering assistance to ground forces. This support was dictated by specific geographical conditions [in the area]: strongly broken up country, poorly developed road system, jutting deeply into the shoreline of the fjords. In these conditions, the most effective [operation] is the parachute [airborne] drop. They can assist in holding back the attack of the enemy.¹¹⁵

And the importance of the Fleet in disrupting the enemy’s communication lanes:

The experience of the Northern Fleet...demonstrated that success against communication lanes of the enemy was achieved by systematic, often continuous, actions of various branches of the Fleet against the full length of the enemy’s lanes of communication and in the ports.¹¹⁶

This examination of the early history of the organisation of the naval military presence in the North during the early Soviet period shows that, even when the centralised state was either relatively weak, or even internationally isolated, it knew the importance of what it had and took steps to protect its presence in the region. The Stalinist political/military leadership did not have the knowledge of the huge, potential natural wealth of the area which, obviously, the current Russian leadership has, but was obviously more than aware of the strategic importance of the Arctic to the defence of the wider USSR, as a result of its physical proximity, as well as the potential of it becoming an active theatre of military operations.

It would be logical to assume that, given growing “resource nationalism” and the recently announced significant rearmament plans for the Russian military - the equivalent of just over £400 billion is to be spent on equipment for the Armed Forces between now and 2020 - the importance of the area to Russia will not diminish and neither will Russia’s resolve to take whatever steps it feels necessary to maintain and enhance its naval presence in the Arctic.¹¹⁷ In the construction of the White Sea Canal, the Russians literally moved the earth to be able to base the Northern Fleet in the Kola peninsula. It took a lot of effort, sacrifice and blood to get the Northern Fleet to the Kola peninsula, in order to begin the creation of a realistic “Arctic fist.” It was not created there for “show”, but had a definite military purpose and, to this day, Russia’s most powerful fleet, still has a very distinctive role to perform. Although, thankfully, the most recent large-scale combat experience of the Northern Fleet is now 70 years old, it should not be overlooked, that despite the changes elsewhere in the land mass that was once the USSR, there has been no territorial loss for Russia in the North, that what was the USSR in the North is the same as Russia in the North. Thus, the defence issues of Russia in the area are similar to those faced by the USSR and the solutions in holding onto its northern bastion, in essence, are similar to those advanced and realised by the USSR: first and foremost, a significant and strong naval presence. Russia is not the USSR, but it still is the world’s physically largest country. **The regime has changed, the country which decreed the very creation of the Northern Fleet no**

¹¹⁴ Kozlov, Shlomin, *ibid.*, 241; O Rybak, “Severnii flot v gody Veliko Otechestvennoi voyny”, *Na strazhe Zapolyar’ya*, 7/5/2011. Interesting, as will be described later, paras are due to be deployed in the new combined force currently being readied for the Arctic.

¹¹⁵ Kozlov, Shlomin, *ibid.*, 243.

¹¹⁶ Kozlov, Shlomin, *ibid.*, 244.

¹¹⁷ A Tikhonov, “Novoi armii – novoye oruzhiye”, *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 26/2/2011; A Osborn, “Russia goes on arms spending spree”, *The Daily Telegraph*, 25/2/2011.

longer exists, but the perceived need for the Fleet still does exist: its main purpose is simply to protect Russia's national interests in the Arctic in the most obvious way possible – by force of arms, if so required.

In light of the 70th anniversary of the creation of the Fleet, in 2003, the contemporary C-in-C Northern Fleet, Admiral G Suchkov, published a comprehensive analysis of the development of the Fleet in the post-World War Two period, analysing how its development and mission reflected the changing operational environment. The article divided the post-WW2 history into four distinct periods which can be summarised as follows: the first period was simply entitled, "the immediate post-war years" – characterised by analysing and working out "independent and joint operations" aimed at "wiping out the enemy's forces." In chronological terms, Suchkov identified this period as covering the years, 1945-early 1960s.¹¹⁸

The next period, covering the rest of the 1960s, taking into account the development and deployment of the USSR's nuclear missile force, was more complex and, subsequently, required more detailed examination. Suchkov described the operational role of the Northern Fleet as including "operations aimed at liquidating naval group of forces and important surface targets of the enemy. Its aim being, within a set period of time, to win control of the sea and air space in a particular region and weaken the military and economic possibilities [to wage war] of the enemy."¹¹⁹

The Northern Fleet was also heavily involved in developing a number of new "forms" of operations, specifically "complex" convoy patrols [tackling] the wide deployment of mines", as well as "liquidating troop and cargo transport ships". The Fleet was also training for a very specific operation, namely "operation to liquidate the aircraft carrier strike force". Needless to say, on a more practical level, there was a significant increase in combat patrols, undertaken by the Northern Fleet, in the Atlantic.¹²⁰ The other main operational and theoretical elements associated with the continuing improvement in the Fleet's capabilities lay in the area of the decision taken "to create a powerful ocean-going nuclear missile fleet."¹²¹

The penultimate period in the development of the role and capabilities of the Northern Fleet, in Suchkov's analysis, lasted from the beginning of the 1970s to the collapse of the USSR in 1991. According to Suchkov:

It can be characterised as a period of fundamental change, a period of consolidating and developing a qualitatively new fleet, a logical consequence of the influence of the scientific-technical revolution on military art. By the beginning of the 1970s, the combat composition of the Northern Fleet allowed it to perform tasks in any region of the World's oceans [original emphasis].¹²²

With such a capability, the Northern Fleet would have been a significant adversary on the world's oceans. However, closer to home, Suchkov listed the main duties of the Northern Fleet as follows:

To secure the country's northern maritime border, it being vital to maintain the deployment of such a force as the Northern Fleet which was able to match the enemy's [forces] should he use his forces in a first strike; to create the [necessary] preconditions to undermine [the effects] of an initial, powerful nuclear strike launched, initially, by nuclear-powered submarines. The key to solving this problem lay in the necessity of having [in a state] of constant readiness specialised groups of maritime forces, specifically tasked to attack the enemy in the areas of [combat] patrol of [both] the enemy's submarines and the aircraft-carrier strike force so that, on receiving [the appropriate] signal, their quick elimination would be guaranteed.¹²³

¹¹⁸ Adm G A Suchkov, "Severnii flot: 70 let na zashchite natsional'nykh interesov", *Voennaya mys'l*, 6, 2003, 67-79, 72.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 75-76.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 75.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 77.

¹²³ Suchkov, *ibid.*, 78.

Expanding further on the duties of the Northern Fleet during the height of the Cold War, Suchkov stated:

Indicators of the readiness of the Fleet to undermine the enemy's sudden nuclear strike were the constant tracking – in peace time – of the carriers of nuclear weapons representing a potential threat to our country and our ability to eliminate them quickly at the onset of war. The transfer of the Fleet to conduct combat duties fundamentally changed the means to fight [both] the nuclear-powered submarines and the aircraft carrier strike forces of the enemy and place our naval forces in a much better position by the beginning of the war, even despite the absence of a threat period.¹²⁴

In his overall assessment of the immediate post-war decades of the development of the Northern Fleet up to the collapse of the USSR, Suchkov summarised it as follows:

On the whole, in the post-war period, (up to 1991), the main tasks of the Northern Fleet were corrected several times: for about 6 years, it was assisting the Ground Forces; then, for approximately 7 years, its main task was to disrupt the ocean and maritime communications of the enemy; the subsequent 10-15 years – combating the nuclear-powered submarines and aircraft carrier strike groups; then – striking at ground targets in far off territories; in the future – combating naval groups in the enemy's first operational echelon.

Thus, in the first post-war decades, the main operations of the Northern Fleet were geared towards carrying out tasks at tactical and operational level, but already from the end of the 1950s/beginning of the 1960s, the majority of the tasks were operational-strategic.¹²⁵

In other words, the Fleet had changed to meet the perceptions and realities of the new military threats facing the country, moving away from simply assisting Ground Forces achieve their objectives to becoming, more or less, a significant military player in its own right, with a maritime capability not only able to repulse a large-scale military attack against the USSR but also, thanks to its nuclear submarine component, the capability to launch a large-scale nuclear strike against the enemy. Of course, times have changed a great deal since the height of the Cold War but, given the strategic environment, the unpredictable nature of the adversary, the Fleet's main operational zones – the Arctic, the Atlantic and, in time of a general war, no doubt, rendering assistance to its sister Fleet in the Pacific – the Northern Fleet, as had been the case during the Cold War, was the USSR's most powerful Fleet and, in many respects, still has to be the Russian Navy's most powerful Fleet. It still has a massive operational zone – the Atlantic and the Arctic – it still has a mix of maritime threats to face (both nuclear and conventional) – and, given the rise of China's interest in the Arctic and its plans for the future development of its maritime presence, could have the added responsibility and burden of having to watch the Chinese Navy in part of its operational zone in the not too distant future.¹²⁶

Thus, despite the formal ending of the Cold War, there is still much of concern to both the command of the Russian Navy, in general, and the command of the Northern Fleet, in particular. Added to this already heady brew, the likely increase in competition between the Arctic Five – and others – the potential huge reserves of oil and gas and you have a possible situation which, in some respects, could be much less predictable than any scenarios worked out and planned for during the Cold War itself.

Suchkov ended his article by examining the fourth period of the development of the Northern Fleet, following the collapse of the USSR in 1991:

The beginning of the fourth period of the development of the Northern Fleet is connected with the collapse of the USSR and the formation of the Russian Federation, which brought about a change in the geo-strategic and military-political situation in the world and demanded a

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 78.

¹²⁶ More and more articles are now appearing in the Russian media about China's presence in the Arctic, including from a military perspective: A Smirnov, "Zolotye marshruty", *Novye Izvestiya*, 18/3/2010; P Obraztsov, "Pingviny po-pekinski", *Izvestiya*, 28/9/2010; "Rossiya namerena borotsya za Arktiku, k kotoroi uzhe prismatrivayetsya Kitay – glavkom VMF", ITAR-TASS, 4/10/2010.

clarification of its role and place in the country's defence system, fundamental operational tasks, ways and means of solving them, defining the direction of the reform process.¹²⁷

As the contemporary C-in-C of the Northern Fleet, Suchkov initially outlined the Fleet's main strategic role and its still significant capability, a direct consequence of being the USSR's most powerful Fleet:

Today, the Northern Fleet, occupying the north-western flank of our maritime border, is called upon to play the fundamental role in maintaining the security of Russia's northern maritime border and is an important link in the country's whole collective security system. At its heart are the nuclear-powered strategic cruisers, the nuclear-powered multi-purpose submarines, the carrier, amphibious and multi-role surface ships, naval, missile-carrying, attack and fighter ASW planes.¹²⁸

Given the outline of its overall role in Russia's defence, Suchkov outlined the Fleet's duties during both peace and war time:

In peace time, the main forms [in terms] of the...use of the Northern Fleet is combat service, patrol duties and carrying out specific, individual missions. Concurrently, the Fleet must also undertake a number of complex tasks: maintaining safe passage for merchant ships in [times of] crisis and [in] dangerous parts of the world; security for the fishing, productive and economic activity of Russia; flying Russia's flag, [by] expanding contacts and co-operation with the navies of other states, undertaking official visits...to foreign ports, hosting foreign vessels to our ports, conducting joint exercises and manoeuvres; carrying out alliance duties at sea and participating in international collective security plans.¹²⁹

This part of the "mission statement" of the Fleet can be shown to have been carried out successfully by the Northern Fleet over the years – it has carried out a series of exercises, for instance, with the Norwegian Navy; visited a variety of ports in the Mediterranean, France, Great Britain, etc., over the past decade; hosted an official Chinese Navy visit; undertaken anti-piracy missions off the Somali coast. Thus, in all of this, the Northern Fleet has successfully carried out its pre-allocated tasks. **Of course, to date, it has not been involved in any major combat operations, but there can be little doubt that, given the Navy's increased military muscle, (set to increase further over the next decade and beyond), that it will also be able to carry out the other part of the Fleet's "mission statement"- maintaining the defence and security of the Russian Federation, by military force, if required, either in the North, or wherever else the Fleet may be deployed.**

Examining the future development of the Northern Fleet, Suchkov emphasised the necessity of looking forward, not backwards, in developing new approaches and techniques required to fight any future conflict:

At the present moment in time, maintaining the security of the Russian Federation demands new, non-traditional approaches and solutions, above all [in] working out ways concerning the future use of the Fleet to defend [Russia's] national interests at sea. The Northern Fleet possesses the means and must [continue to] do so in the future...The reduction in the order of battle of the Northern Fleet, the reduction in its basing system compels us even more to think about new forms and ways of using the Fleet, both in local wars and military conflicts, as well as in the event of the outbreak of a large-scale (world) war [original emphasis]. To solve this problem, it is pointless in attempting to apply what were true yesterday's principles of operational art. They have to be re-examined, taking into account the qualitative leap in the development of the means to fight war, the change in the scale, as well as the changing possibilities in the capability of the fleet in future war.¹³⁰

This is no backward thinking Fleet, relying on simply analysing past glories from the days of the Great Patriotic War, for instance, blind or indifferent, to the current operational environment, but one which has realised and come to terms with the nature of the changing threat Russia faces and is learning and adapting to the changes both in technology and the nature of military operations in the future.

¹²⁷ Suchkov, *ibid.*, 78.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 78-79.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 79.

Like all previous C-in-C of the Northern Fleet, both before and after his tenure in the top job, Suchkov was in no doubt that Russia's Arctic "fist" had to be strong and flexible, so that if non-combat deterrence failed and Russia was/is compelled to use military force, at whatever level, it had/has the means to do so. Thus, it would be safe to assume that, as long as oil and gas monies keep flowing into the Russian Treasury, in terms of allocation of future defence spending, the Northern Fleet will be accorded sufficient sums in order to maintain Russia's military posture both in the Arctic and Atlantic Oceans. Given the range of exercises that the Fleet has been involved in since 2003, as well as the new ships and boats which are projected to come into service in the future, this would appear to be the case.

Since 2003, the Northern Fleet has been involved in a number of "Ocean"-style exercises, beginning in June 2003 with units of the Baltic Fleet in the Atlantic, followed by joint exercises with the Pacific Fleet in the Indian Ocean a year later, then more joint exercises with the Baltic Fleet in the north-east Atlantic in August-September 2005, then further "large-scale tactical exercises" with the Black Sea Fleet in the Atlantic in January 2008. In the words of another former C-in-C of the Northern Fleet, Admiral N M Maksimov:

The restoration of joint long-range voyages of Russia's fleets in the world's oceans is being conducted in a planned fashion.¹³¹

Thus, it was with a distinct element of national pride that, on the day that the Russian Minister of Defence, A Serdiukov, (5/12/2007), announced formally to the Russian President – V V Putin – at their joint working meeting, that the Russian Navy had restored a "permanent presence" in the "operationally vital regions of the world's oceans", that the Northern Fleet's naval strike group sailed into the north-east Atlantic heading for the Mediterranean:

From today to 3rd February, a voyage of the Northern Fleet's Naval [strike] group to the north-east Atlantic and the Mediterranean is planned. The aim of the voyage is to maintain the military-naval presence [of Russia] in operationally vital areas of the world's oceans...and create conditions for the peaceful passage of Russian shipping. At the end of the meeting, Vladimir Putin wished all the sailors success and seven feet under the keel!¹³²

According to the report of the meeting, the main tasks of the voyage were outlined and involved:

...studying the ocean and sea communication lanes, [various] elements in the management of operations in the ocean and maritime zones in the world's oceans, The Northern Fleet will also take part in joint operations with units of Long-Range Aviation...In undertaking combat readiness measures, the Northern Fleet plans to study all possibly adequate steps to maintain safe passage, by sea, of hydrocarbons and other maritime economic activity, [*morskaya khoziastvennaya deyatel'nost'*], combating pirate activity in relation to civilian maritime traffic, combating illegal arms and drug trafficking.¹³³

The report also mentioned that, when in the Mediterranean, along with units of the Black Sea Fleet, the Northern Fleet would be conducting joint operations involving Northern Fleet's aircraft-carrying heavy cruiser, *Admiral of the Soviet Union Kuznetsov* and, of course, literally flying the flag in various foreign ports along the way.¹³⁴

Further remarking on the ocean-going capability of the Northern Fleet in 2008, M Maksimov, remarked not only on the necessity of the former, but also the time delay in equipping the Fleet with the necessary ships to realise the Fleet's full potential:

Re-equipping the Fleet is a lot more complicated...To build a tank, for example, is considerably quicker than constructing a ship, or a submarine. But there's nowhere else for

¹³¹ S Vasil'ev, "My zayavili o natsional'nykh interesakh Rossii", *Rossiyskoye voennoye obozreniye*, 3, March 2008, 20-26; 22.

¹³² S Vasil'ev, *ibid.*, 2, February 2008, 14-17; 14.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

us to fall back to. In order to defend our huge sea border, solve the complicated tasks placed before the sailors, we need large ocean-going ships and submarines.¹³⁵

Once again, commenting on the range of potential operations of the Northern Fleet, the current Commander-in-C Chief of the Northern Fleet, its former CoS, Vice-Admiral V Korolyov, recently remarked that:

The area of operations of the Fleet is not limited by anything – neither distance nor means. The Fleet can successfully operate on any part of the globe, either on the surface of the sea or under it, in the air and on the ground.¹³⁶

Korolyov also outlined what he saw as the main role of the Northern Fleet in the Arctic region:

The main task of the Northern Fleet is maintaining military-political stability, defending national interests, the firm defence and protection of the state border in the surface water environment and in the under-water environment, the expanses of the sea, natural resources and the national standing [*natsional'noye dostoyaniye*] of the Russian Federation in the Arctic region.¹³⁷

In his interview, he also stated that “all ships, units and formations of the Northern Fleet are in [a state of] permanent combat readiness.”¹³⁸

In short, since the collapse of the USSR in 1991 and the financial crisis of 1998, the Northern Fleet has steadily been developing its capability and credibility and is playing an increasingly important role in helping to re-establish Russia's naval power in the world's oceans. Over the past decade, it has grown in capability and reach and is fulfilling Serdiukov's confident statement that the Russian Navy, as a whole, is now one of the major world navies and has now returned as a maritime force to be reckoned with. The Northern Fleet has played its part in the reassertion of Russian naval power and, as long as the monies keep flowing into the Russian Treasury, its strength and presence will become ever more obvious as the years roll forward. It is no exaggeration to state that, given the medium to long-term importance of the Arctic region to Russia's future, Russia's primary military asset in the region – the Northern Fleet – will play a telling role. The actions of others, obviously, will also affect both Russia's and the Northern Fleet's role in the Arctic. In a recent article, examining Russia's economic and national interests in the area, one long-term naval analyst of Arctic affairs, quoting the Chief of the Russian General Staff, (CGS), General N Makarov, wrote:

The Russian side will react adequately to attempts to militarise the Arctic. In the first instance, this will be in relation to the tasks [set for] the Northern and Pacific Fleets... The military leadership will pay close attention to defending the country's national interests in the Arctic over the full length of Russia's northern coastline. The main role in this will be undertaken by the submarine force, which is the nucleus of the navy's strategic forces. We will carefully monitor the level of militarisation in the Arctic region. Russia will [re-] act depending on the latter.¹³⁹

Thus, as far as the Russian CGS is concerned, the scale of direct military activity of others in the Arctic will have a corresponding effect on the military activity of Russia. This conveniently ties in with previous statements made by the political leadership, that Russia has no plans to actively militarise the region, only to securitise its presence there. On the surface of things, Russia's declared intent is laudable, but the reality of the situation dictates actions other than “wait and see”. When you're dealing with, potentially at least, the world's no 1 military power – USA – the soon to be the world's no 1 economic power - the People's Republic of China – as well as the world's no 1 natural resource power – Russia - and a number of NATO powers with direct interests in the region – conflict is distinctly possible. Given the growth in “resource nationalism”, the ever growing need for less and

¹³⁵ A Bondar, “Vitse-admiral Nikolai Maksimov: ‘nam neobkhodimo dvigatsya vperedy’”, *Na strazhe zapol'yara*, 28/5/2008.

¹³⁶ O Vorob'eva, “Realii i perspektivy Severnogo flota”, *Na strazhe Zapol'yarya*, 2/6/2010.

¹³⁷ Vorob'eva, *ibid.*

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ Capt. (1st class) A Smolovskiy, “Arktika-2010: Voенно-politicheskiye, transportnye i drugiye arkticheskiye faktory”, *Morskoi sbornik*, 7, 2010, 38-44, 44.

less, the effects of global climate change, potentially making more accessible the Arctic's increasingly in demand hydrocarbon and mineral wealth, its water and bio-resources, etc. – the Russian military seems to be taking a much more pragmatic view of the situation than others and is openly warning the political leadership of the necessity of taking a more active interest in the area, as a whole:

The changes which are taking place in the Arctic represent a potential for economic growth of countries and are a source for competition and conflict as regards access to its [Arctic's] natural resources...the Russian leadership must stimulate its attention towards the question of the Arctic.¹⁴⁰

These views are not uncommon amongst many of Russia's leading military analysts of the Arctic and are to be found, with increasing frequency, in the main journal of the Russian Navy, *Morskoi sbornik*. For instance, in assessing the future importance of the Arctic to Russia regaining its great power status, as well as the threat posed to Russia from the Atlantic, one analyst recently wrote:

To achieve the strategic aim of strengthening Russia's geostrategic position and restoring its status as naval power – is the synergic result of the coming together of two factors. Only the effective exploitation of the sea's natural resource potential in order to help secure competitive advantage of the national economy, (maintaining the high tempo of socio-economic development) and the navy's potential to defend national security can assist the strengthening of Russia's geo-strategic position. At the same time, increasing Russia's political influence in the world and restoring its status as a naval power would assist boosting the possibilities for the fuller use of [the sea's] natural resource and naval potential.¹⁴¹

It was also the case, however, that Russia's national interests in the Arctic would have to take into account the ambitions and politics of others in the region:

The organisation of naval activity in the Arctic regional direction should be built on the basis of the geopolitical significance of the region in the country's system of national interests. The change in the geopolitical status of the Russian Arctic is defined not only by the growing threat from the Atlantic, with the advancement of NATO on Russia's borders, but also the growing significance of the sea's natural resources, of which the Arctic continental shelf is rich. Such states as USA, Great Britain, Norway, Finland, even Germany and Japan consider the wealth of the Russian Arctic sector a resource of the whole world community...the leading naval powers are striving to limit Russia's access to the resources and expanse of the world's oceans, international sea routes, applying economic, political and legal pressure on the Russian Federation with a view to limiting its naval activity.

In this situation, in order to maintain Russia's national interests on the World's oceans and, in particular, in the seas of the Russian Arctic, the Northern Fleet must have sufficient naval potential.¹⁴²

But in examining the actual potential of the Northern Fleet, as it currently stands, according to an interview of the governor of Murmansk oblast', D V Dmitrenko, it's not particularly impressive. As of December 2010, the strength of the Northern Fleet was 21 surface ships and 37 submarines.¹⁴³ For his part, Khrumchikhin quoted slightly different figures, stating that the Northern Fleet consisted of (April 2010):

...(not including the nuclear-powered missile cruisers which belong to the country's Strategic Deterrence Forces) 16 nuclear powered and 7 diesel-powered submarines, 1 aircraft carrier, 3 cruisers, 2 destroyers, 5 large and 6 small ASW ships, 3 small missile ships, 7 mine sweepers, 5 troop landing ships." He also quoted numbers for ships and submarines belonging to the Fleet currently undergoing refit and repair, including a further 7 nuclear-

¹⁴⁰ Rear-Admiral A Rudomyotkin, Capt (1st class) A Nagorskiy, "Arktika kak vazhneysheye napravleniye Rossiyskoi Morskoi deyatelnosti", *Morskoi sbornik*, 8, 2010, 64-69, 66.

¹⁴¹ A Stolbov, "Optimizatsiya strategii razvitiya morskoi deyatelnosti v Arktike", *Morskoi sbornik*, 1, 2009, 56-63, 58.

¹⁴² Stolbov, *ibid*, 59.

¹⁴³ A Potekhina, "Severniiy forpost", *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 1-7/12/2010.

powered submarines, but, as he concluded: “from repair [back] to our Navy, very rarely do the ships return. More often than not, they are broken up.”¹⁴⁴

Thus, although on the surface, the Northern Fleet’s capability is not what it once was, certainly by comparison with the other local naval forces in the Arctic, it is impressive and, as the process of renewal, Khramchikin’s pessimism aside, continues apace, it is set to become even more so. The region is simply too important for Russia for the state NOT to channel more resources in beefing up its military presence in the area, regardless of the outcome of the eventual decision of the UN Commission. One thing which the latter will not change is the length of the surface border which Russia has with the Arctic – just short of 20,000 kms – and regardless of who owns what of the shelf, Russia, by dint of both geography and actual physical security, will need to ensure that the border is adequately protected and, if needs be, defended. Russia’s senior politicians may not want to militarise the region, but they may not have much of a choice, especially if the other major powers – USA and China – seek to influence further the course of events in exploring and exploiting the Arctic’s “treasure.”

Thus, for his part, Stolbov had no hesitation in joining up all the dots and making the assessment that for Russia to compete effectively in the new world order, it will need its presence felt on the world’s oceans, in general and, in the Arctic Ocean, in particular, especially as the other great naval powers attempt “to internationalise” the natural resources of the Arctic region for their benefit, but to the detriment of Russia. Could the power play over the Arctic see the return of that old Cold War formula: what is good for the USA/China is bad for Russia? Or, put it in reverse, what is good for Russia is bad for the other two powers? Stolbov’s comments are interesting in that he does not mention either of the emergent nations, also interested in internationalising the Arctic’s resources – namely, China and India.

His argument that Russia is now feeling hemmed in, as described earlier in this paper, is a worrying trend: neither the world, nor Russia, need Russia to feel hemmed in. It has a dangerous parallel in the history of the 20th century: the USSR felt hemmed in by the fascist powers of the 1930s and felt hemmed in during the Cold War, as well. The actions and consequences of the actions of the Great Powers in the 1930s led directly to the outbreak of war in 1939 in Europe and between Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia in 1941. Although the Allies won the war, the Cold War then quickly ensued, leading to the USSR building its own “geopolitical wall” which didn’t come down until 1989/1991. Although the current world situation is very different from the 1930s (and the immediate post-WW2 period), nevertheless, even just the talk of Russia being hemmed in is disturbing and should not be dismissed lightly.

One of the main factors contributing to the overall power of the Northern Fleet – and Russia – is its maritime strategic nuclear deterrent. Russians are extremely mindful of the fact that were it not for the strategic nuclear deterrent carried by the country’s strategic nuclear missile carriers, Russia’s geopolitical position would be considerably weaker than at present. The Northern Fleet, to all intents and purposes, is the home of Russia’s maritime strategic nuclear capability and the Arctic Ocean provides a degree of protection and secrecy to the operations of the Russia’s SSBN deterrent, (yet another extremely important reason why the Arctic is vital to Russia). As quoted earlier:

Great is the role of the Arctic in maintaining the defence capability of Russia., in [maintaining] control over the sea, air and expanse [“*prostranstvo*”] of our country. However, its main [importance] is containing the growing military-political pressure and deep penetration of NATO and the USA in Russia’s northern geopolitical space, designed to neutralise Russia’s nuclear containment potential [SLBM forces].¹⁴⁵

The perception of a military threat to Russia, particularly in this part of the world, emanating from NATO and the USA, is clearly stated, with its main object being neutralising Russian’s maritime nuclear capability. Given that both authors are Doctors of Economic Science and not professional military specialists, their views are even more interesting, possibly reflecting a deep and widely held suspicion amongst many in Russia’s military strategic elite concerning the true medium-to long-term interests of the Western powers in relation to Russia. In examining Russia’s security interests in the

¹⁴⁴ Khramchikhin, “Severniy ledovitiy...”, *ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ S Koz’menko, V Selin, “Kontseptsiya soglasovaniya ekonomicheskoi i oboronnoi deyatel’nosti v Arktike”, *Morskoj sbornik*, 4, 2009, 55-60, 55; Korabel’nikov, *ibid.*

Arctic, as well as the possible range of threats and missions which the Navy – i.e. the Northern Fleet – could face there, the authors stated:

Russia's security interests in the Arctic region, as well as the spectre of possible threats, will predetermine priorities in the selection of means and forces of the Navy sufficient to repel attack and inflict the necessary destruction on the aggressor in retaliatory strikes under all [operational] conditions; protect the Navy's strategic nuclear forces; protect the coastal maritime economic zones and communication [lanes] in the Arctic; support peace-keeping operations as well as limited participation in multi-national naval operations under the aegis of the UN and the OSCE.¹⁴⁶

“Great” is the role of the Arctic, not only to Russia's security but also, as implied before, maintaining the nuclear balance between the two world's nuclear super-powers. Any attempt to encroach on Russia's nuclear retaliatory capability, based in the North of the country, will only serve to further enhance Russian apprehension of the true intentions behind NATO and US activities in the Arctic region and feed Russian fears that, once again, Russia is being “hemmed in.” This may prove uncomfortable reading for some in the West, but a reading of the most recent published Russian strategic thinking on the Arctic confirms this thought process to be very evident. **Little is to be gained if we in the West simply dismiss Russian concerns along the lines that, once again, they've “got it wrong.” We have to prove to the Russians that they have got it wrong, not by words alone, but by deeds.**

The official website of the Northern Fleet lists four main tasks of the Northern Fleet and number one on the list is: “maintaining the Navy's strategic forces in a state of permanent readiness in the interests of nuclear containment.”¹⁴⁷ Examining the submarine component of the Northern Fleet – particularly its nuclear strategic component – will form the basis of the next part of this examination of the Fleet.

In relation to submarine development, the Northern Fleet has a long and distinguished history. The first launch of a ballistic missile from the surface of the sea took place in the White Sea in September 1955; the first submarine-launched ballistic missiles entered the service of the Northern Fleet in June 1956; the world's very first nuclear-powered submarine - *Leninskiy Komsomol* – entered the service of the Northern Fleet in July 1958; the first underwater launch of an SLBM was carried out by the Northern Fleet in September 1960.¹⁴⁸ There is a very strong, almost organic, link between the Northern Fleet and the development and operation of the country's maritime nuclear capability. Only the Pacific Fleet has a relationship which can be compared to, but not match, the relationship between the Northern Fleet and Russia's nuclear-powered submarine force. Even in terms of the current leadership of both the Fleet and the Navy, the link with the submarine force appears to be almost organic: both the current head of the Northern Fleet, Vice-Admiral V Korolyov and the head of the Russian Navy, Admiral V S Vysotskiy, are not only ex-submariners, they are also both ex-Northern Fleet submariners!¹⁴⁹

Without going into great detail about the technical characteristics of the Northern Fleet's submarine forces, suffice it to say that, according to Russian sources, it consists of 3 x heavy strategic missile submarine cruisers (“Typhoon” class) – “Dmitriy Donskoi”, “Arkhangel'sk” and “Severstal” submarines, each equipped with 20 “Bulava” SLBMs, as well as a variety of advanced torpedoes and the “Igla” surface missile complex; 6 x “Delta-IV” class strategic missile cruisers, each armed with the “Sineva” missiles, as well as torpedoes and the “Igla 1/9K38” ground missile complex; 6 x “Akula” nuclear-powered torpedo submarines; 3 x “Sierra” class nuclear-powered torpedo submarines; 4 x “Victor-III” nuclear-powered torpedo submarines and, finally, 7 x diesel-powered “Kilo” class submarines. Although not all the Fleet's nuclear-powered and armed submarines are at sea at any one time – a number of them are either in repair, or waiting to be extensively modernised – nonetheless, the submarines which are at sea still pack a powerful punch and are guaranteed – along with other parts of the Russian Navy - to ensure that, if needs be, Russia still has a nuclear maritime capability sufficient to give any of the world's great powers pause to think about any form of military action

¹⁴⁶ Koz'menko, Selin, *ibid.*, 55.

¹⁴⁷ Severniy flot. (http://flot.com/nowadays/structure/north/?_openstat=ZGlyZWNOLnlhomh/eC5ydTsx. Accessed, 5/11/2010)

¹⁴⁸ *Istoriya Krasnoznamennogo Severnogo Flota*, (http://www/gov-murman.ru/patronage_on_fleet/history.shtml). Accessed 17/6/2011.

¹⁴⁹ *Na strazhe Zapolyar'ya*, 19/9/2007; 2/7/2011.

directed against the Russian Federation in the North, or anywhere else for that matter.¹⁵⁰ In a contemporary analysis of the development of Russia's maritime nuclear strike force, three of the country's leading academics, closely associated with the development of Russia's SSBN force, with particular reference to the "Typhoon" class of submarine, stated the following:

An independent unit of six of these cruisers was quickly formed. It became the main strike force of the Navy, capable of solving the most complicated strategic tasks, a salvo from even one such submarine would cause huge damage to the enemy.¹⁵¹

A further interesting development in the future capability of the Northern Fleet was revealed in an interview of the acting head of the Fleet's submarine forces, Rear Admiral A Volozhinskiy, published in April 2010. As of 10th February 2010, the Red Banner Submarine Forces of the Northern Fleet, uniting all the fleet's nuclear-powered submarine units into one, was formally created.¹⁵² The main aim behind bringing all the units based at Gadzheiva, Gremikha, Western Litsa and Vidayev together, according to Volozhinskiy, was simply "to optimise the structures of control" and was simply a reflection of the further reform of the country's Armed Forces currently taking place. Commenting on the "correctness" of the decision taken, Volozhinskiy simply pointed out that it would mean that all the forces under his command would now operate "according to a unified leadership and a single plan", thereby helping to improve their overall combat effectiveness.¹⁵³ Volozhinskiy was keen to emphasise that the nature of the tasks facing the new unit had not changed – "preparing the boats and crews to carry out their functions and to make recommendations concerning their use, preparing the boats for deployment in accordance with the instructions of the commander of the fleet".¹⁵⁴ Commenting on the overall combat capability of the new unit was still too early – given the fact that it was only created a couple of months before the interview. However, Volozhinskiy did point out that the individual units which had gone to make up the new whole had scored a number of very impressive achievements over the past year, the success of one being a reflection, as well as being a vital component, of the success of the whole:

The Gadzhiev unit was recognised as being the best [submarine] unit in the entire Navy. All tasks set for 2009 had been [successfully] carried out by the submariners of the Northern Fleet. This included successful operations carried out in the Atlantic Ocean in the summer of 2009, the results of which led to a number of officers being recommended for state awards.[Added to this] the carrying out of the launch, rated 'excellent', from underneath the polar ice cap, on 1st November 2009, of an intercontinental ballistic missile by the nuclear-powered cruiser, 'Briansk'. The crews of the nuclear submarines, under the command of Captains (1st class) Sergey Dominin and Aleksey Dmitrov, who won the C-in-C Russian Navy's Cup, [also] received the highest ratings of the Navy, based on the results of the year. Not that long ago, another successfully completed task was the launch, on 4th March 2010, of a 'Sineva' class ballistic missile from the area of the Barents Sea by the nuclear-powered strategic cruiser, 'Tula'.¹⁵⁵

As Volozhinskiy himself stated, "our boats are continuously at sea, our crews have good experience of long voyages. What could be better for a sailor?!"¹⁵⁶

Concerning the modernity of the boats under his command – given the back drop of years of over-reliance on Soviet weapons and Soviet weapons technology, now 20 plus years old – Volozhinskiy emphasised that, in his opinion, the boats could be considered "modern" and that there was "a process of constant improvement" going on, an interchange between, for example, the men who served on the boats and the men who designed them, in particular from the design *bureaux* of "Malakhit" and "Rubin." In fact, further on in the interview, Volozhinskiy described his own personal

¹⁵⁰ [Severniiy Flot](http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%CA%D1%D4), (<http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/%CA%D1%D4>). Accessed 19/4/2011.

¹⁵¹ Zh Alferov, S Kovalev, A Rodionov, "Iubilyary. Glavnaya udarnaya sila Rossiyskogo flota", *Nauka v Rossii*, 1, 2008, 54-58, 56.

¹⁵² Rear-Admiral A Volozhinskiy, "Strategii iz Gadzhieva", *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 21-27/4/2010.

¹⁵³ Volozhinskiy, *ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.*

relationship “with the representatives of industry” as “excellent”, thereby leading to further improvements in the weapon systems and the living conditions on board the boats.¹⁵⁷

Attesting to the increase in combat training of the crews was his admission that there had been a significant increase in sailing activity of the boats, “in the past two years, there has been a sharp increase in the intensity of combat training at sea”, further adding that new boats would arrive “this year” (2010). However, he refused to detail exactly when and what would arrive, remarking simply that “if you want to make God laugh, tell him your plans.”¹⁵⁸

In replying to a question concerning the Fleet’s strategic “partners”, Volozhinskiy is “happy” that the Fleet has moved away from the “direct confrontational” [*“pryamoye protivostoyaniye”*] stance of previous times and is involved in more joint operations in securing right of free and safe passage, maintaining regional stability in various parts of the world, combating terrorism, rescue missions, etc., but he is also mindful not to ignore “areas of dispute, connected with the Arctic Ocean, where our naval presence, the demonstration of the Russian flag – are important and necessary steps, reminding those of the strength of the Russian Navy and that it is a power to be reckoned with.”¹⁵⁹

Thus, when all is said and done, the function of both the Northern Fleet and its submarine component is still divided between defending when and where needs be Russia’s economic, political and strategic interests, as well as physically demonstrating the power of the Russian Navy to the world at large and, particularly in relation to the Arctic, its maritime pre-eminence in an area of the world which it considers vital to the future of the country. The West may have other views as regards the long-term ownership of the potential natural wealth of the Arctic, (as does China), but the Russians consider the Arctic as vital in ensuring the country’s well-being deep into this century and, possibly, even beyond that. **Russia is slowly, but surely, in the process of developing an “Arctic fist” and, within the next decade, if not less, could be strong enough to be able to mount an effective, *military* challenge to anyone who seeks to change the current balance of forces in the Arctic.**

Towards the end of the interview, once again, remarking on the general tasks facing the new unit and, more importantly, the level of combat readiness of the crews, Volozhinsky drew on the lessons learnt as a result of the last combat period of the Northern Fleet, the Soviet-German War of 1941-1945:

This year’s [2010] tasks are no less intense and important, than the tasks of previous years. After a long break, as a result of the tragedy of the ‘Kursk’, submarines will, once again, go to sea in the oceans [of the world] and this makes us very happy.

If you remember the opening period of the war, that is 1941, in the make-up of the Northern Fleet’s submarine forces, there were 15 boats, and not one of them, unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, had first-line crews, which met the demands of wartime. Right now, we have the task of maintaining constant [combat] readiness, and we achieve this: we constantly train at our training centres and at sea. Every crew annually carries out a full range of missions, which allows them to remain first-line and ready for use without restriction. It is gratifying that all the tasks, associated with combat exercises, are traditionally undertaken by submariners rated as ‘excellent’.¹⁶⁰

As far as Volozhinskiy is concerned, the new Red Banner Submarine Forces of the Northern Fleet, although comparatively new, have both a distinguished history to emulate and, more importantly, a very distinctive future role to perform, not only in relation to the immediate geo-strategic area of the Arctic Ocean but, obviously, much wider afield, both in flying the flag and, when/if needs be, revealing the military power which undoubtedly, as described earlier, it has at its disposal and will continue to have in the years ahead. Capability, as many readers will be well aware, by itself does not prove intent. However, capability plus a careful examination of what is said can reveal much, though obviously not the whole, picture. An openly published interview will not supply all the answers, it is in the nature of senior political and military figures of any country, for instance, to reveal so much, but not the whole story. As described here, there is enough publicly available information to support the assertion that, if needs be, Russia will have a sufficient military presence in the Arctic region – and

¹⁵⁷ Volozhinskiy, *ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.*

one which looks set to improve in the coming decade – to mount an effective challenge to any one who may seek to upset the current balance of power between the member states of the Arctic Five in the Arctic geo-political space. **Of course, any decision which may seek to employ force will be taken by the political establishment but, as it stands, the Russian military/security infrastructure is being developed in the Arctic and the ‘holes’, left by years of neglect and indifference shown by previous administrations in the Kremlin, since the collapse of the USSR, are being gradually filled in.** To assert that this is not the case would not only contradict the statements of many of the leading Russian military “actors” on the Arctic stage, but would also seem to fly in the face of the steps being demonstrably taken to enhance Russia’s overall local military/security infrastructure.

In an article commemorating the Day of the Northern Fleet, (1st June), published in the main military newspaper of the Russian Ministry of Defence, *Krasnaya Zvezda*, a brief reference was made to the creation of Volozhinskiy’s Red Banner Submarine Forces of the Northern Fleet and the overall important role being played by the Northern Fleet’s submariners:

“And today the Northern Fleet’s submariners make a significant contribution to maintaining and strengthening the defence capability of the country, successfully carrying out all the training-combat missions placed before them. In February, the largest unit of nuclear-powered submarines in contemporary Russia – the Red Banner Submarine Forces of the Northern Fleet – began their full existence [“*polnopravnoye sushchestvovaniye*”].”¹⁶¹

Although the reference was brief, it was considerably more than that which appeared, less than a week later, in the published interview of the Northern Fleet’s current C-in-C, Korolyov. In his detailed interview, he made no specific reference to the Red Banner Submarine Forces of the Northern Fleet and only a small number of references to the work of the submarine forces, in general, but he did emphasise the “peculiar” nature of the Northern Fleet in having both nuclear and air force components, “ensuring strategic stability and defending the economic and political interests of Russia.”¹⁶² In examining the overall importance of the Fleet in today’s world, Korolyov pointed out the almost Janus-faced nature of the contemporary role of the Fleet:

Evaluating the role of the Fleet in the modern world and the naval policy of the industrially-advanced states, we see that the Fleet is the only Service branch able to be used effectively during war and, especially in peace time, in solving a variety of tasks – from military to humanitarian. The area of use of its forces knows no limits: neither distance, nor [operational] environment. The Fleet can successfully operate on any point of the globe, on the sea, under the sea, in the air or on the land.¹⁶³

Given the recent announcement that approximately \$140 billion is to be spent on the purchase of armaments and military hardware for the Russian Navy alone over the next 8 years, it would appear that the Russian government is also very aware of the real, practical role of the Navy in the years ahead.¹⁶⁴ It is to be wondered whether other governments will also realise the importance of the Navy in defending their respective national interests in the years ahead.

A year after the creation of the Red Banner Submarine Forces of the Northern Fleet, *Krasnaya Zvezda* conducted an interview of the latter’s Chief-of-Staff, Admiral V Kochemazov. From the outset, Kochemazov was quick to point out that, despite its comparative youth, it had already won 4 major naval prizes and the increase in intensity of sailings of both the boats and crews would only help to further increase the overall levels of combat capability. In response to a specific question concerning the “adequacy” of the “intensity of sailings”, Kochemazov replied:

I think it is adequate. Our boats successfully carry out their allotted tasks in the depths of the oceans. Back in the 1990s, we couldn’t even have dreamed that we would be out [at sea] with such regularity. The maritime component of combat training has significantly grown in the last few years and grows with the passing of every year. Today, even staff officers are out at sea

¹⁶¹ A Gavrilenko, O Vorob’eva, “Vakhta v polyarnykh shirotakh”, *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 1/6/2010.

¹⁶² Vice-Admiral V Korolyov, “V moryakh nashi dorogi”, *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 2-8th June, 2010.

¹⁶³ Korolyov, *ibid*.

¹⁶⁴ Russian Navy to get up to 140bn dollars to buy armaments until 2020-official, (BBCM, 5/4/2011).

for 4-5 months of the year and the crews of the nuclear-powered submarines considerably longer.¹⁶⁵

Whilst acknowledging that there were “certain difficulties” in relation to “the material-technical equipment” of the boats themselves, he also pointed out that these “difficulties” were being resolved at the specialist ship-repair yards. In a passing reference to the decision to create the Red Banner Submarine Forces of the Northern Fleet, he remarked that the decision was taken “to improve the quality...of training...[to improve] the operation and mobility of controlling the boats at sea, maintaining them in a state of constant [combat] readiness.”¹⁶⁶

Again, from an important source, we have a very clear indication that in creating such a grouping in the first place, first and foremost in the minds of the senior command of the Russian Navy was a twin desire not only to improve the training of the men and boats, but also to improve their overall – publicly admittedly already high – levels of combat readiness. There is no doubt, certainly in the writer’s mind, that Russia is not preparing to start any significant combat operations in the Arctic but should any military conflagration break out, the submarine forces, in particular, and the Northern Fleet, in general, will be ready to defend Russia. *Of course, as a professional serving submariner, this is no deep revelation, but putting all these statements together, as well as examining what is being done in terms of practically improving the military capability in the area, both now and planned projections and acquisitions, the other members of the Arctic Five should pay very serious heed both to what Russia IS doing and what it has already announced it PLANS to do in the future.*

After all that has been described in this particular part of the paper, in conclusion, Kochemazov simply underlined a fundamental truism in relation to the role of the submarine forces of the Northern Fleet:

The basic burden and responsibility in solving tasks placed before Russia’s nuclear-powered submarine fleet lies on the submarine forces of the Northern Fleet.¹⁶⁷

Russia’s main maritime strategic nuclear deterrent capability currently mainly lies in the SSBNs of the Northern Fleet. With this in mind, he expressed confidence that by the end of the year (2011), the Northern Fleet would see its strength being increased by the addition of the SSBNs, “Yury Dolgorukiy”, “Aleksandr Nevskiy” and “Vladimir Monomakh”.¹⁶⁸ Analysing the results of the latest exercise in the Barents Sea, one further report confirmed that the Northern Fleet would receive three submarines of the “Borey”-class, i.e. SSBNs; that Russian pilots operating from the sole “heavy aircraft-carrying cruiser” – “Petr Velikiy” - would have their own training facility in Russia, instead of having to hone their skills on the NITKA facility in Ukraine by 2015; that the Northern Fleet, following further re-organisation, had lost some 17% civilian and 15% military posts over the past year and, that last but not least, according to the Commander of the Red Banner Submarine Forces of the Northern Fleet, I Mukhameshin:

All crews on these submarines [those being equipped with the ‘Bulava’ missile system] have received the [necessary] training at special training centres of the Northern Fleet and are fully prepared to carry out their tasks.¹⁶⁹

In short, the submarine forces of the Northern Fleet have a vital role to play, not only in terms of the local security picture in and around the Arctic Ocean, but also on a global scale. The increase in training, qualified manpower – regardless of how it has come about – more sailing time, new surface ships, as well as new SSBNs, being brought into service, more money being spent on armaments and military hardware, etc., would all clearly show that **not only is there the political will to maintain a significant military presence in the Arctic region, but there is now also the intent to match that will with the necessary capability.** However, one should be very careful that this should not be

¹⁶⁵ O Vorob’eva, “Podvodnye sily SF: itogi i perspektivy”, *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 2/4/2011.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ Vorob’eva, *ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.* Putin has confirmed that “Aleksandr Nevskiy” will enter service in 2011, (“New nuclear ballistic missile sub to enter service in 2011 – Putin”, BBCM, 13/12/2010).

¹⁶⁹ Major naval exercise under way in Barents Sea, (BBCM, 1/4/2011). According to a recent report, Russian reliance on the NITKA in Ukraine may soon be coming to an end: a similar facility is being constructed at Yeysk, Krasnodar *krai* and is planned to be operational by 2013, (“Russian naval air arm chief notes modest carrier aircraft plan, training dates”, (BBCM, 16/7/2011).

interpreted that the Russians are getting ready to swamp the Arctic with thousands and thousands of “combat penguins”, ready to take on Canadian Inuit Rangers at ‘the top of the world’ at some not too distant point in the future.¹⁷⁰ The increase in capability and the future intent to maintain that capability, already described, are strong indications that Russia, especially its senior military and political leadership, do view the Arctic as a very important region to the country – history aside – and are determined to make sure that, everyone else knows it and, this time, takes them seriously and, unlike other parts of the world in the 1990s, Russia will not be squeezed, or threatened, or muscled out, of a region of the world which it does seriously consider vital to its long-term future.

As described above, the military view the Arctic as being very important to Russia and, for the time being at least, so too does the central Russian political leadership. The interests of both groups have coalesced on this and, given the additional weight of the Russian and Soviet historical background, (and the potential natural wealth of the region), in many respects, it could not be otherwise. Unlike many other areas of geo-strategic importance to Russia, the Arctic is still a region where, militarily at least, it can still be a dominant power, if not *the* dominant military power.

But this is not a question of Russia developing its “fist” there simply because it has a “fist” that it can develop there. It is more complicated than that. Russia perceives a threat to its hold on a region of the world which, until comparatively recently, few of the other world’s major powers had shown any great interest. Feeling increasingly hemmed in, the Arctic is militarily important to Russia, as it still allows its Fleets access to the Atlantic and, further east along its Arctic border, the Pacific Oceans; it is a vitally important area for the deployment and operational effectiveness of its nuclear-powered strategic submarine fleet – thereby helping to both defend Russia from possible aggression and maintain a degree of balance in the nuclear threat that still hangs over the world, at large.

As Russia’s conventional military threat and capability has declined, since the collapse of the USSR, its reliance on its nuclear deterrent has grown, perhaps unhealthily, but nevertheless grown. Given the importance of the maritime portion of its nuclear forces to its overall retaliatory nuclear capability and the importance of the Arctic to the viable, operational deployment of Russia’s maritime nuclear deterrent, the Arctic assumes an importance for Russia way beyond simply the potential reserves of oil and.

The Arctic is vital to Russia’s security and, as the years ahead will clearly show, the Northern Fleet’s military capability, both at the local and strategic level, will be enhanced and augmented. In any understanding of the Russian position on the Arctic, more weight should be given to the military dimension: it is not simply a question of the Arctic being the home base of the Northern Fleet, to date, still the most prominent military asset of any of the Arctic Five in the region; the Arctic plays a very important role in terms of Russia’s nuclear deterrent retaliatory capability not only being viable but, just as importantly, being seen to be viable, helping to counteract the less benign actions of others, deliberately, or accidentally, misperceiving Russia’s intent, either in relation to the Arctic, or defending Russia’s economic and political interests elsewhere in the world.

Plugging the gaps: resource grab, border security and satellite reconnaissance

In an article unusually critical of past actions shown by previous central Russian administrations towards the Arctic, published recently in the main organ of the Russian General Staff, *Voennaya mysl’*, one military academic stated the following:

In the post-Soviet period, a very dangerous tendency manifested itself amongst Russia’s highest leadership: an underestimation of the threat to the national security of the RF in the [Arctic] region. Suffice it to say that in the 1990s, (particularly in 1993), all the Arctic units of the MoD RF’s radio-technical troops, monitoring the air space of the region, were disbanded swiftly. Following that, in June 2006, the Independent Arctic Border Guard detachment, based in Vorkuta, was abolished, border guard units quit the Arctic [en masse]. It was argued that the cost of maintaining the aforementioned structures was too expensive and not profitable.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ F Pope, “Inuit Rangers lead troops into frozen waste to guard treasure of Arctic”, *The Times*, 12/3/2011.

¹⁷¹ Major-General (reserve) V I Sosnin, “Arktika – slozhniy uzel mezhgosudarstvennykh protivorechiy”, *Voennaya mysl’*, 7, 2010, 3-9, 6.

Quoting a recent statement made by the current Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, S Lavrov, concerning the “impossibility” of the Arctic becoming “a zone of potential conflict”, Sosnin, in the following paragraph, simply stated:

The scale and consequences of these mistakes speak loudly enough for themselves.¹⁷²

In Sosnin’s opinion, it has only been in the past “2-3 years” that the central government has spent the money “to fill in the holes” left by previous Russian governments, but that there were “still a lot of problems to solve.” Repeating Medvedev’s earlier pronouncement that “no money should be spared on re-equipment or cadres”, Sosnin endorsed such a stance, reminding the reader that the money spent here would go a long way “to ensuring the reliable defence of Russia’s national interests in the region.”¹⁷³

Again, endorsing Medvedev’s earlier (September 2008) remarks concerning the necessity of “optimising the system of complex control of the situation in the Arctic,” including border guard controls, border posts, coastal protection, introduction of border controls in Russia’s Arctic zone, as well as along the NSR, Sosnin had this warning if Russia did not introduce such a complex series of measures to ensure its control of the area:

[Russia’s] state-competitors, realising the gigantic potential possibilities of the region, will move the struggle beyond the diplomatic table, masking their activities [under the pretence] with the desire to solve ecological issues.¹⁷⁴

Quoting various actions by both the Americans and the Canadians in the region – the US declaration at the beginning of 2009 that the Arctic was now a “zone of national interests to the USA”; Canada’s declared intent to construct a couple of military bases in the region, with a permanent Canadian military presence there; proposals that the USN should have a permanent naval presence in the Arctic, etc¹⁷⁵ - led Sosnin to make the following conclusions concerning the growing importance of the Arctic to Russia and the future struggle for the world’s declining natural resources and the necessity for Russia to maintain control of the region at whatever cost:

The struggle for the resources of the World’s oceans has assumed a qualitatively new character. This is confirmed by the fact that countries which have borders with the sea have, in real terms, begun to carve the sea up. Exclusive economic zones have been declared by 114 states, between them accounting for some 40% of the World’s oceans...it cannot be excluded that the further division of the deep water regions of the World’s oceans will continue, but from a [future] position of strength.¹⁷⁶

Comparing the natural resource grab of previous centuries with the one to unfold in the 21st century, Sosnin’s outlook was less than optimistic:

Increasingly more obvious is that the confrontation in the Arctic has a completely natural, objective character, due to a number of reasons. If the 19th and 20th centuries were characterised by a fierce struggle for the continental zones for their raw materials and reserves, the 21st century, as a consequence of the catastrophic exhaustion of the accessible natural resources on land, will unavoidably become the age of struggle for the ‘re-division of possession’ [*peredel sobstvennosti*] of [in] the oceans, which we are already witnessing even today. On top of that, the outlook for the exhaustion of the reserves of the hydrocarbon fuels, other useful raw materials on land and in the shelves, as well as from the easily accessible regions, in the not too distant future will compel the governments of many countries to become involved in exploiting the [previously] untouched significant reserves of the Extreme North. The future of the human race will be determined by access to these resources...the desire of the USA to single leadership [of the world] following the collapse of the USSR is universal and cannot but involve the Arctic.

¹⁷² Sosnin, *ibid.*

¹⁷³ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ *ibid.*, 7-8.

¹⁷⁶ *ibid.*, 8.

Thus, the overall thrust of Sosnin's article is that, as the world's natural resources become scarcer and scarcer, more and more attention will be devoted not only to the natural wealth of the World's oceans, in general, but also the potential natural wealth of the Arctic, in particular, leading to an increase in the possibility of confrontation breaking out between powers, vying for an a share of a decreasing natural resource pie. Whilst Sosnin still seems to see things partly through the prism of the Cold War – with China on the scene, does the USA still have the desire to continue being the world's policeman? – there is a logic in his argument which would seem to confirm current trends, previously described here, concerning the further augmentation of Russia's security posture in the Arctic. If Lavrov – as quoted earlier – did not see the potential for conflict in the region, neither Sosnin nor, more importantly, did other members of the central Russian political leadership seem to share this opinion.

Examining other trends towards the region which could bode ill for Russia, Sosnin pointed out one more “very dangerous tendency” appearing recently namely, “the solution of the question of ownership of the raw material reserves of the Arctic less and less depending on the results of scientific analysis.”¹⁷⁷

This is in part reference to Russia's attempts to persuade the relevant UN Commission, concerning its bid, claiming a large part of the Arctic Ocean as part of Russia's continental land mass, as well as a response to Chinese policy statements, in particular, concerning the Arctic as not being the ‘property’ of any one nation, but the general inheritance of humanity. Given Russia's declared policy that, as far as Russia is concerned, “the Arctic is ours”, the Russians will resist most strongly any attempt to undermine their efforts to retain a significant part of the Arctic as Russian sovereign territory and exploit it in Russia's national interests. This stance, in itself, could become a source of some friction between two of the world's main powers in the years ahead.

His final conclusion also does not bode well for the future:

In relation to maintaining Russia's national security in the Northern air-space environment, another issue becomes ever more obvious...confrontation on the Arctic's maritime borders. This inescapably leads to the situation that, despite the official position of the Russian Federation being against an arms race in the region, it will have to adopt a number of concrete steps, including those of a military nature, to underline the seriousness of its intentions to maintain its national interests.¹⁷⁸

Border security

As detailed above, various steps have been taken to further enhance Russia's security position in the Arctic and, as alluded to by Sosnin, such practical measures, “including of a military nature” are also being put into effect. The “holes” left by years of neglect are gradually being repaired. A number of these will be examined below. In general, though, anyone who doubts Russia's resolve to hold and protect what it holds should disavow themselves of any illusion that, if force is required, not only will Russia have the renewed capability required, but also the will to employ whatever means it thinks will be necessary in order to maintain and defend Russia's national and strategic interests in the area. Both Putin and Medvedev are on public record, on a number of occasions, emphasising how vital the Arctic will be to Russia in the future and there is a lot of evidence – deeds, rather than words – which support this view. Other than what has been previously described in relation to Russia's most obvious military asset in the region, the Northern Fleet, in two other areas, in particular, are the “holes” being repaired: one, in terms of border guard security and the other - increased satellite reconnaissance, for a variety of non-military and military purposes. Both of these particular areas will be examined below. In a recent interview of the first deputy chief of FSB's Border Guard Service, Colonel-General V Dorokhin, stated that “equipping the Arctic sector” was “one of the priorities of the federal programme for 2010-2017.”¹⁷⁹ In particular, Dorokhin stated that the programme envisaged the creation of “several checkpoints in the area stretching from Murmansk to Novaya Zemlya...which will help monitor vessels' movements along the NSR.”¹⁸⁰ He also noted that, at present, the NSR was monitored by a collection of ships and aircraft from not only the FSB Border Guard Service, but also local Coast Guard department. In conclusion, he stated that, once the federal programme was fully enforced,

¹⁷⁷ Sosnin, *ibid.*, 9.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁷⁹ “Russia strengthens the protection of Arctic border-official”, (BBCM,1/3/2011).

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

“potential will be enhanced in the area. We will not allow anyone to do anything he likes in the future.”¹⁸¹

In many respects, the latter announcement was one in a line of recent similar statements, all attesting to the fact that the central authorities were paying ever greater attention towards enforcing the border regime. As outlined in Russia’s National Security Strategy to 2020, (published in May 2009), not only did the Strategy warn of the danger of “international politics in the long term...concentrated on securing sources of energy...on the shelf of the Barents’ Sea and in other areas of the Arctic”¹⁸², but also detailed the “threats” with particular reference to the “border sphere”:

Amongst the main threats to the interests and security of the Russian Federation in the border sphere are the presence and possible escalation of armed conflicts close to the state border” requiring, amongst other things, “ increasing the effectiveness of protecting the state border in the Arctic zone.”¹⁸³

There are a number of references to the future work of the border guard/coastal defence units contained also in “the Basics of the state policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic” (2008). As shown earlier, after outlining the overall importance of the Arctic to Russia’s political and economic future, specifically in terms of improving the overall level of border security, the Basics listed the following:

Optimising the system of complex [‘multi-agency’, as opposed to ‘difficult’]control over the situation in the Arctic, including border control at the points of entry...introducing a regime of border [guard] zones in...Russian Federation’s Arctic zone and organising an instrument-technical control over gulf zones, tributaries of rivers, estuaries, along the length of the Northern Sea Route; bringing border [guard] organs up to [full] capacity.¹⁸⁴

The Basics...also discussed the creation of an “actively functioning system of shore defence...and increasing the effectiveness of mutual interaction, with the border guard departments of coterminous states on issues of combating terrorism at sea, suppressing contraband activity, illegal migration, protecting the sea’s biological resources; developing the Russian Federation Arctic zone’s border guard infrastructure and technically re-equipping the border [guard] units.”¹⁸⁵

In the press release which accompanied the publication of the Basics...,the former emphasised – as previously noted – that the Basics...was not aimed at “militarising” the Arctic, but was designed to improve “the internal border [guard]/shore security organs.”¹⁸⁶

Given what’s already been written here, this is a somewhat moot point. Whilst it could be argued, especially from a Russian point of view, that the measures outlined in both the Basics... and the Strategy do fit in with Russia’s assertion that it genuinely has no desire to militarise the region, but to preserve it as a “zone of peace and cooperation”,¹⁸⁷ it can also as easily be argued that any measures, designed to secure and maintain Russia’s economic, political and security interests in the Arctic – never mind the practical steps taken to ensure that security, for instance in maintaining, if not improving, the actual combat capability of the Northern Fleet, for example – cannot be treated in splendid isolation and have to be taken as part of a complex whole, whose main design must be not only to maintain Russia’s interests in the Arctic, but also defend – **by force of arms if necessary** – those interests if and when required. Given both what is, potentially at least, at stake in the region, as well as the actual physical border which Russia has with the Arctic, Russia has considerable interests in the Arctic and, as detailed here, is not prepared to see them bargain away, or reduced, by the increasing security presence of others in the area.

A couple of interesting articles appeared in 2009, concerning the role of the Border Guard units in relation to the Arctic. In one, outlining the general role of the Border Guards Service in the area, it

¹⁸¹ Russia strengthens..., *ibid.*

¹⁸² Strategiya natsional’noi ..., *ibid.*, 12/5/2009,

¹⁸³ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ “Osnovy...”, *ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ “Press-reliz po Osnovam...”, 27/3/2009.

¹⁸⁷ T Borisov, “Voina i mir vo l’dakh”, *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, 21/4/2009.

confirmed that more border guard posts would be created in the Arctic and that the Service would be heavily involved in “working on a large-scale concept for the development of shore defence to 2017...with the intention of creating naval border [guard] regions.”¹⁸⁸ Kulikov also mentioned that the Service would receive a new type of vessel of operating in the Arctic waters “later on in the year” but that, between 2004-2008, 46 new vessels had already been added for border guard/maritime protection duties.¹⁸⁹

In an interview given by Colonel-General V Trufanov – head of coastal defence, Border Guard Service – the latter, whilst lamenting the reduction by one third in the number of coast guard cutters between 2000-2005, stressed, however, that the region’s security would still have to be re-examined taking into account both the activities of the other member-states of the Arctic Five, as well as the need to create a system adequately safeguarding Russia’s maritime border area:

The Arctic Five are paying close attention to the Russian zone of the Arctic, as an area of economic development.. This [in turn] has made it necessary [for us] to re-examine the concept of maintaining national security in the region, particularly in the border area. Border departments have been created for Murmansk and Arkhangel’sk oblasts. The construction of the northern border [guard] complex, ‘Nagarsk’, on Franz Josef Land has been completed. There are future plans to create similar such complexes on Wrangel’ Island and throughout the entire length of the Arctic coastline. A complex of measures is being organised and gradually being put into effect for the deployment of a system off technical control of the surface water environment in the Arctic region. A model for maintaining border security...in the Arctic region, taking into account the future formation of a unified complex...to guard the border sea area and the shore [is being developed]. In 2008, for the first time in many years, a patrol, using border guard patrol vessels, was organised along the Northern Sea Route.¹⁹⁰

In short, as in the military sphere, Russia is developing its overall security infrastructure with a keen eye on current and future activities of the other Arctic Five member-states. The neglect of the past looks set to be repaired, gradually perhaps, but repaired, both as a direct consequence of more resources being made available for various security and military matters. An investment now is being made with an eye on securing Russia’s long-term interests in the region in the future. A reliable and comprehensive border guard structure in the Arctic region would assist not only, for instance, in the development and safe use of the NSR, thereby assisting in Russia’s long-term economic future. Given what has already been described earlier, it would be safe to assume that further monies will be spent on Russian border security measures, both by central and local government, to continue re-building an effective border control regime.¹⁹¹

In a more recent interview of the 1st deputy director of the FSB, V Pronichev, the latter emphasised the work of the border guards on what he described “in the protection of distant and frequently lifeless territories”:

The Arctic now finds itself at the crossroads of the interests of the Arctic region[a] states [i.e. the Arctic Five] and states at some considerable distance from it [China]...The number of individuals and organisations looking to undertake one form of activity or another in the Arctic has increased several times over...Every month our staffers [border guards] are uncovering

¹⁸⁸ V Kulikov, “Severniy poyas”, *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, 16/9/2009.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ V Mokhov, “Beregovaya okhrana: dva goda v puti”, *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 13/9/2009.

¹⁹¹ In the Trufanov interview, mention was made of the border guard complex, “Nagarskoye” on Franz Josef Land. In a later article, detailing Putin’s visit to the area in April 2010, the complex was described in some detail. Opened in 1981, its original purpose was “to protect the state border surrounding the archipelago.” Consisting of an “admin-living bloc, garage, energy bloc[sub-station], fuel reserve, water tank and pipe system, and, more recently, a Russian Orthodox Church has been added.” The admin-living bloc is “5,000 sq metres” and is made up of a “communication point, signals, living accommodation, training hall.” The complex also has a 24-bed hospital, operating in conjunction with the Ministry of Emergency Situations. The complex’s main purpose now is described as “ensuring the safe passage of ships along the Northern Sea Route and defending the economic interests of Russia...On top of that, the border guards must deal with the illegal shooting of polar bears [a subject very close to the PM’s heart], whose migration paths cut across Franz Josef Land,” (V Markushin, “Arkticheskiy forpost’ Rossii”, *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 30/4/2010).

instances of illegal labour migration by CIS citizens in all the RF's Arctic region components. We are also suppressing attempts to smuggle narcotic substances and to engage in poaching. Just last year [2009] over 650 individuals were detained in the Arctic for violations of the border-zone or entry-point regulations and procedures. So conclusions have to be drawn as to what is more expensive. The creation of a costly infrastructure, thereby ensuring the state's security, or an inexpensive system of border security and the loss of precious resources.¹⁹²

With specific reference to the Nagurskoye facility, Pronichev confirmed that "several border complexes similar to the Nagurskoye detachment" would be built over the length of the NSR and that not only would they carry out border guard duties, but also scientific ones in assisting expeditions heading to the North Pole.¹⁹³

Thus, to all intents and purposes, Russia has taken the decision to go for the more expensive option in order to secure and defend Russia's border in the Arctic region, as well as have a viable force able to counteract the growing levels of illegal activities forecast for the years ahead. This was confirmed recently in a report of a session of the Collegiate of the Border Guard Service (FSB Russia), held towards the end of 2010, specifically devoted to analysing problems in maintaining Russian security in the Arctic. Debate was continued with the holding of a conference on the same issues in the Border Guard's Academy of FSB of Russia, chaired by Colonel-General V Trufanov. In his opening remarks to the conference, Trufanov outlined the "basic elements" designed to maintain and defend Russia's interests in the Arctic:

...development of the organs [responsible for] coastal security, conducting counter-intelligence measures, opposing the Arctic desires [*"arkticheskiye ustremleniya"*] of foreign special services, combating terrorism and organised crime.¹⁹⁴

Trufanov further pointed out that "20 new and reconstructed border guard infrastructures would be built in the Arctic, as well as the creation of a complex system for controlling the surface water environment, broadening the zones of operation of the border guard ships."¹⁹⁵

Moving on to discuss the tasks for the organs of coastal defence, Rear-Admiral A Vol'skiy listed them as follows:

...defending the economic interests [of the country], supervising [*"kontrol"*] the observance of the law and international treaties, maintaining the security of maritime transport lanes, as well as [conducting] search and rescue [operations] and preserving the environment.¹⁹⁶

Vol'skiy also informed the audience that, in the previous three years, 12 x new coast guard cutters had been added to the arsenal of the coastal border guard forces.¹⁹⁷

According to one of the FSB's academic consultants, A Yegorov, the "main mass" of the threats facing the Arctic throughout the rest of the decade "will lie in the areas of economic activity" as states and foreign companies look and begin to extract the region's hydrocarbon reserves, as well as using the NSR to freight goods and carrying out industrial-scale fishing in the Arctic's seas.¹⁹⁸ In relation to matching intent and capability, Yegorov also made public that an ice-class border guard cutter [*"pogranichniy korabel' ledovogo plavaniya"*] for service before the end of the current decade was "being actively examined."¹⁹⁹

Another speaker at the conference, N Orlova, moving slightly away from the economic/military security side of the Arctic question, spoke about the need to preserve the Arctic's unique environment, warning the audience that, unless the necessary ecological security steps were taken to manage the

¹⁹² "V Pronichev. Spotlight on the Arctic", (BBCM, 2/6/2010).

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ A Peslis, "Zashchitit' interesy Rossii v Arktike", *Granitsa Rossii*, 35 (771), September 2010, 13, 15; 13.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

exploitation of the region's resources, then "a global ecological catastrophe" could take place.²⁰⁰ She also expressed the view that the proper disposal of spent nuclear fuel was "a subject of concern for the whole world community."²⁰¹

Although the newspaper report does not make it clear whether, or not, Orlova expressed this view – and it would appear not to fit in with what she is reported to have said at the conference, so it seems unlikely – certainly someone did state that the issue of the ecology of the Arctic was being used, by other states and organisations, both to apply political pressure on Russia, or as a cover by "foreign secret services" to gather more sensitive information:

The ecological issue is being used as a form of political pressure and [is] a dirty set of [behind the scenes] games. In particular, many developed countries strive to present Russia as the main polluter of the Arctic region, with the aim of acquiring political dividend and pressuring our country on issues of exploring the Arctic expanse...under cover of preserving the environment, foreign intelligence services make [various] attempts to acquire secret information, detrimental to Russia's interests.²⁰²

These views, as demonstrated earlier, are not just the product of the imagination of some local, over-zealous, parts of the local security apparatus, keen to see the work of foreign intelligence services everywhere and anywhere – redolent of a past, more sinister, age in the history of the country, trying to look, or sound, impressive to their bosses in Moscow - but, in actual fact, a reflection of views held centrally, i.e. emanating from Moscow itself. The Russian government on a number of occasions has expressed and shown its disquiet at the activities of the Norwegian ecological/environmental pressure group, "Bellona" – and it is a common feature of this local security environment that, rightly or wrongly, *the perception holds that environmental/ecological concerns are being used for political purposes, a way to gather more intelligence on Russian military facilities in the Arctic region. From the Western perspective, this may seem absurd but, given the importance the Russians attach to the Arctic, the very real military assets it has in the region, the growing activity of non-Arctic Five member states in the Arctic, Russia has a strong misperception and fear of the true intent of others in the region. In terms of its historical record, it does not take much for Russia to be suspicious and fearful of "the foreigner."*

Again in terms of matching intent and capability, one of the other delegates, Professor N Kudinov, argued that coast guard service should be equipped with ice-class ships, with "on board aviation assets", including helicopters, pilotless drones, all-weather aircraft. Each ship should have a displacement of 12,000-15,000 tonnes.²⁰³

If any, or all, of these steps are realised, it would indicate strongly that, combined with the steps undertaken in the military sphere, Russia not only has an "Arctic fist" but, judging by a number of public announcements and equipment upgrades and plans for the future, its "Arctic fist" is set to become considerably stronger. The words are there, the overall strategy has been outlined, the national interests clearly defined, money is being spent on correcting the mistakes of the past. All the preliminary steps are being taken to ensure that Russia has adequate force in the region to meet a number of threats; for Russia, it looks increasingly likely that, despite the positive words about the region being a zone of co-operation and peaceful development, there will be conflict, even if the precise nature of the extractable natural wealth of the Arctic is still the subject of estimation, learned as it may be. **One of the questions of the early half of the 21st century may already be crystallising in front of our very eyes: will conflict break out in Arctic over the latter's *potential* resource base, or its *known and proven* extractable reserves? Looking at Russia's policy - and the practical steps undertaken and planned for in the future - towards the region over the past ten years, Russia looks to have decided the answer to that question already.**

²⁰⁰ Peslis, *ibid.*

²⁰¹ *ibid.*

²⁰² *ibid.*

²⁰³ *ibid.*

'Arktika' for the Arctic

As stated earlier, in his criticism of the failings of past administrations in relation to maintaining Russia's interests in the Arctic, Sosnin made reference not only to the downgrading of the border guard presence in the area, but also to the disbandment of the MoD's local radio-technical units:

In the post-Soviet period, amongst the leaders of the highest echelon of the Russian Federation, there appeared a very dangerous tendency: an underestimation of the threat to the Russian Federation's national security in the region [Arctic]. Suffice it to say that in the 1990s, (on the whole in 1993), all the Arctic units of the RF MoD's radio-technical troops, who maintained radar control over the air environment in the area, were hurriedly disbanded.²⁰⁴

In another article, on the same theme, Sosnin further examined Russia's lack of radar control over the local air-space environment and the very real threat, as he saw it, facing Russia in this part of the world:

In general, within the [physical] parameters of the Northern air-space axis ["*severnoye vozdušno-kosmicheskoye napravleniye*"] during [the length] of an air-space operation, one could expect [the enemy] to use about 2,400-2,500 units of aerial attack and, in the conduct of [such] an air operation, upwards of 500-520 'Cruise' missiles, aircraft carrier, tactical and strategic aviation [assets]. Thus...the aerial threat from this axis over the past 10-15 years has increased due to the improvement and radical increase in the quantity of sea-borne 'Cruise' missiles. The danger to the Arctic sector of the Russian Federation has increased further if one takes into account...that this development has not been matched [by developments] in PVO [anti-air defence] of the [Russian] Navy.²⁰⁵

In other words, having analysed conflicts over the past two decades and knowing, from their own experience, the current state of the Russian Navy's PVO system and the increasing intensity for control of the Arctic's potential hydrocarbon and mineral wealth, both authors are convinced that Russia will face a military challenge to its role in the Arctic and, given the current primacy of the air as the preferred means of operational assault, both authors, having identified the nature and means of the aerial threat – obviously, it has to be emanating from the West – proceed to sharply criticise the earlier decision to effectively denude the Arctic region of comprehensive radar cover:

Having saved money in the 1990s by not maintaining the radar system [in the Arctic], Russia lost the main factor in employing [its] PVO system in the event of aggression...the factor of timeousness in using the PVO system of the Northern Fleet, as well as the men and means of the Air Force's naval units.²⁰⁶

And, as far as both men were concerned, the situation has not improved that much, either:

Today, above the endless expanse of the Arctic Ocean, Western and Eastern Siberia, Chukotka and the Kurile Islands, the radar net is completely non-existent.²⁰⁷

Of course, this lack of radar cover, whilst being exceptionally lethal to Russia being able to defend its national interests in the Arctic sufficiently, or even adequately, was good news, in the thinking of both Sosnin and Ryzhov and, no doubt others, to the US. Now dubbed a "zone of national interests to the USA", the USA has shown an ever-greater interest in the Arctic with the passing of time and, like it or not, there is very little Russia can do to stop this growing influence, hence its earlier decision to go ahead and beef up its formal military presence in the area, including its monitoring systems:

In such a situation, Russia had no choice but to create afresh a group of means and men in the region, the basis of which are...the Northern Fleet...and the [local] men and means of the

²⁰⁴ Sosnin, *ibid.*, 6.

²⁰⁵ Major-General V Sosnin, Colonel G Ryzhov, "Vosstanovleniye kontrolya za vozdušnoy i nadvodnoy obstanovki v Arktike-vazhneyshaya zadacha Rossii", *Morskoj sbornik*, 7, 2010, 32-37; 33.

²⁰⁶ Sosnin, Ryzhov, *ibid.*, 34.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

Air Force. The guarantee of [their] effectiveness is their use in a constant [permanent] functioning system, monitoring the air, ground and underwater environments.²⁰⁸

Ruling out the creation or, rather, the re-creation of the former Soviet radar network in the region, on the grounds of a number of “technical and economic reasons”, both authors were in favour of an airborne technical capability on the basis that the latter would be harder to target and also because it could mean employing pilotless drones and could be considerably cheaper to develop and deploy.²⁰⁹

In general, both men were in no doubt about the possibility of force being used in the Arctic and the necessity for Russia to have an integrated complex ready to hand in the Arctic:

Russia, in essence, already has got an area of conflict on its northern borders, which we earlier would have considered secure...In the Arctic, at the present moment in time, active inter-state competition for control of [its] natural resources is taking place. Under such circumstances, it is necessary more fiercely and decisively to maintain the position of the state. *In order to effect the defence of [Russia's] national interests in the Arctic, [we] will require a system of political, economic and other measures which [in turn] will have to rely on an element of force in the shape of a multi-disciplinary and multi-functional group of men and means in the aforementioned region [emphasis mine – SJM].* It goes without saying that one of the priorities in the creation of such a group of men and means...must be the development of a reconnaissance and [early-]warning air-space attack system. Solving this issue will depend on the smooth integration of all current and future information systems, of various operational types...regardless of their Service branch or departmental ownership.²¹⁰

Thus, both men must have welcomed the decision, formally announced in the spring of this year (2011), of the unification of Russia's air-space defence assets into one united whole.²¹¹ With particular reference to the Arctic, they must also have slept a bit easier at night following the announcement, at the end of April 2011, by the then Head of the Russian Space Agency (*Roskosmos*), A Perminov, to create a satellite-based monitoring system for the Arctic, (somewhat unimaginatively titled, 'Arktika'). At long last, both men must have thought that their public concerns over the lack of a radar monitoring system for the Arctic, were now being addressed.

Opening the press conference, Perminov stated that:

Currently, one notes that the governments of many countries are paying particular attention to the Arctic region. The Arctic was and is 'the kitchen' for the [world's] climate, [but] especially for those countries which it borders. A multitude of countries have interests in the industrial development of the resources of the Arctic region. That is why...knowledge of the situation, monitoring, becomes ever more important. The main task of the new space system is, in the shortest possible space of time, to secure the primacy of Russia's national interests in the Arctic, particularly in the detection and development of new sources of hydrocarbons on the shelves of the Arctic seas. This work has to be undertaken from space, both to ensure the security of oil and gas extraction, as well as [assisting] in transporting oil and gas. Many firms which are planning to become involved in the extraction of hydrocarbons in the Arctic demand security for their economic activity from space.²¹²

Perminov outlined the overall main tasks of the new satellite-monitoring system:

Meteorology; development of the information infrastructure; control ['kontrol'] of economic and other activities; information security for transport systems; control of emergency situations; tasks of a geological, geophysical and geochemical nature; ecological monitoring.²¹³

In order to achieve these goals, 'Arktika' will consist of three sub-systems:

²⁰⁸ Sosnin, Ryzhov, *ibid.*, 35.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 35.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 37.

²¹¹ BBCM reports, various, March 2011.

²¹² A Il'in, "'Arktika' dlia Rossii", *Novosti kosmonavtiki*, 7, July 2010, 4-43; 42.

²¹³ Il'in, *ibid.*, 42.

'Arktika-R', (radar monitoring], 'Arktika-M', (hydro-meteorological monitoring) and 'Arktika-MS' (communications).²¹⁴

He further estimated the total cost of the system at 68 bn roubles – half of which he confidently predicted would come from private sources, keen to get the system up and running in order to further their search for potentially new sources of the region's hydrocarbon and mineral wealth. Deployment of the system would begin in 2014-2015, with profit beginning to flow into the state's coffers, in his estimation, as early as 2016.²¹⁵

This may not seem as fanciful as it looks: 'Arktika' is partly designed to ensure more accurate long-range weather forecasts. According to the head of Russia's Meteorological Service, A Frolov, Russia's weather can cost the country an annual 40-60 bn roubles worth of economic damage, thus anything which can help to ameliorate the economic cost of Russia's climate can only be but a good thing.²¹⁶

Other than helping to increase the accuracy of Russia's weather forecasts, the system is also specifically targeting providing accurate information for cross-polar flights from Europe-North America; improving communication links; enhancing the safety of passage for ships traversing the Northern Sea Route, etc.²¹⁷ If, as many Russian academics predict, the 21st century becomes the 'Arctic century', then 'Arktika' could play a very significant role in opening up and helping to exploit the Arctic's potential natural wealth and realise their prediction.

Although primarily designed to assist in the peaceful development of the Arctic, there can be little doubt that some of the intelligence gathered will have a military edge to it, thus, when the system is fully deployed and operational, it should go some way in alleviating the concerns of Sosnin and Ryzhov – and, no doubt, others in the Russian military/security apparatus –over the current poor state of radar protection for the region. *What the development of the new satellite-based system for the Arctic also proves is, once again, how serious Russia's commitment is to maintaining its "lead" position in Arctic affairs.*

As stated at Perminov's press conference, one of the functions of the deployment of the 'Arktika' system is to improve the passage of ships along the NSR, the infamous north-east passage, designed to route the fabulous riches of the East to the West. Potentially, at least, the NSR could be one of the world's most important arterial freight routes, if the necessary level of investment could be secured; the northern part of the world continues to heat up and, last but by no means least, contrary to centuries of international economic trade, both countries and companies the world over, decide to transport a significant volume of the world's freight by the northern route, as opposed to the southern arterial routes of Suez, Panama Canal and the Cape of Good Hope.

The Northern Sea Route

As stated at the beginning of this paper, the Northern Sea Route (NSR, also known as the North-East Passage), has been the object of much attention and speculation about its role and utility throughout Russian and Soviet/Russian history. Potentially, if properly developed and made economically viable, the NSR could prove to be just as important to Russia's long-term economic well-being, as the reserves of oil and gas reputed to lie underneath the Arctic ice.

As a trade artery between Europe and Asia, the NSR could significantly reduce the freight times of goods being transported between the two continents, as well as producing a much safer trade route for ships, now no longer needing to sail through the increasingly pirate-ridden waters in and around the coast of East Africa. For instance, St Petersburg-Vladivostok via NSR is approximately 14,000 kms; the same route via the Suez Canal is more than 23,000 kms. Similarly, Murmansk-Yokohama, via the NSR, is 5,770 nautical miles; same route, via Suez Canal, 12,840 nautical miles. Jumping slightly ahead, such a significant reduction in the amount of time ships would be at sea would mean a significant financial saving for all companies and countries concerned. However, for the NSR to be commercially successful, a significant investment would have to be made in local infrastructure, as

²¹⁴ Il'in, *ibid.*

²¹⁵ *ibid.*

²¹⁶ N Slavina, "Sputniki nad Arktikoi", *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, 5/5/2010.

²¹⁷ *ibid.*

well as an increase in the number of both ice-class ships and ice-breakers, available for use by companies traversing the NSR when it still has significant ice cover; an improvement in the accuracy of both long-range weather and ice cover forecasts, etc. Although much has been written about the NSR over centuries, this section will simply concentrate on providing the reader with a summary examination of the Russian perspective on NSR, the historical background, (both Russian and Soviet), its economic development, the threat of “internationalisation”.

For the purposes of this particular section of the paper, the NSR is defined, in geographical terms, as “a system of shipping lanes traversing the coastal waters north of Siberia, bounded by Bering Strait in the east and by the straits between the Barents Sea and the Kara Sea in the west.”²¹⁸

Touching on a few of the issues which will be looked at later, a Soviet definition of the NSR, published in the mid-1970s, still has value. Issues of geography and navigation do not change simply because the political colour of the regime in power changes:

The principal ice-encumbered path of the Northern Sea Route from the straits of Novaia Zemlia to the port of Providenia is 5,160 kms long; the navigable river routes with access to the Northern Sea Route have a total length of approximately 17,000 km. Long, severe winters and short, cold summers, however, make the Arctic seas icebound and render ship passage difficult over considerable segments of the route. The most difficult conditions for navigation occur near such regions as the Taimyr Peninsula and Aion Island, where large accumulations of thick ice never completely break up, even in the warmest months. Only with icebreakers can ships pass through these areas.²¹⁹

Even though the Soviet entry is over 30 years old, it still has value, in pointing out a few of the difficulties which still have to be tackled with today, if the NSR is to prove economically – as opposed to politically and strategically – important, both for Russia and the other nations of the world. Ice is still a problem for many months of the year – regardless of global warming – and ice-breakers are still very much required to ease the passage of ships along the NSR. Thus, the role and number of the latter, at commercially attractive rates, is vital if Russia is to successfully market the NSR as an economic artery between East and West. There have been various attempts, over the centuries, to explore the commercial viability of the NSR, including a number made by intrepid British sailors in centuries gone by. As early as the 16th century, the English sea Captain, Sir Hugh Willoughby, made a number of attempts to find an easy – or easier – passage to the riches of the fabled East, but never managed to get further than Novaya Zemlya. Such attempts were eventually to cost him his life.²²⁰

As described earlier, a number of prominent Russian academics also devoted much time and effort to studying the lands of the Far North, in particular M V Lomonosov and D I Mendeleev, speculating about the possibility of a northeast passage to the Far East. Various expeditions were undertaken in the 18th and 19th centuries and, amongst other things, proved that, despite the ice, for certain times of the year and with great fortitude and endurance, the NSR was navigable. By the beginning of the 20th century, “one steamship made annual trips from Vladivostok to the Kolyma River”, but these trips were suspended as a result of regular supply facilities not being made available over the whole length of the route.²²¹ The NSR was to assume ever greater importance from the very beginning of the 20th century to its very end. Invoking the “sad” memory of the Russo-Japanese War, one Soviet commentator remarked:

The sad lesson of the 1904-1905 Russo-Japanese War forced the Tsarist government to consider the Arctic. The defeat at Tsushima of Rozhdestvenskiy’s squadron caused such a wave of protest amongst Russian patriots. ‘If 1/10 of what we lost at Tsushima’ – wrote D I Mendeleev – ‘had been spent on getting to the Pole, our squadron, probably would have been able to reach Vladivostok, bypassing the German sea and Tsushima.’²²²

²¹⁸ T Armstrong, “The Northern Sea Route, Soviet exploitation of the North East Passage”, (Cambridge, 1952), xii.

²¹⁹ “Great Soviet Encyclopedia”, vol 23, 3rd edn., M.1976, ‘Northern Sea Route’, 176-178; 176.

²²⁰ D Mountfield, “A history of Polar exploration”, (London, 1974), 27.

²²¹ “Great Soviet Encyclopedia...”, *ibid.*, 177.

²²² V S Lupach, “Russkiy flot kolybel’ velichayshikh otkrytiy i izobreteniy” (M,1952), 57.

Not for the last time, 1905 saw a renewed interest in the NSR as a result of famine elsewhere in Russia. Famine had broken out in central Siberia in 1905 and, as the Russo-Japanese War was in full swing and the Trans-Siberian Railway Line, (itself just completed that year), was over-laden with military freight, so the government decided to send a large convoy of food ships through the Kara Sea. This was a success but, as soon as the Russo-Japanese War had come to a conclusion and the immediate famine crisis abated, the NSR fell into inactivity, the government in Moscow thinking that, in terms of trade routes east, all that was needed was the Trans-Siberian Railway Line.²²³

As described earlier, the 1917 October Revolution further stimulated Bolshevik interest in the Arctic, not least because of its natural mineral wealth.²²⁴ As had been the case with its Tsarist predecessors, the NSR was to be of great practical value when, once again, it was found necessary to use it in order to avert famine in Russia. In an article commemorating the 75th anniversary of the creation of the Great Northern Sea Administration (*Glavsevmorput'*) in December 1932, one author wrote:

The NSR rendered invaluable assistance on more than one occasion to Russia during many critical moments in its history. At the beginning of the 1920s, the NSR saved European Russia and Ukraine from severe famine, maintaining the supply of bread from the mouths of the rivers Ob' and Yenisey.²²⁵

The importance of the NSR was to grow throughout the early period of Soviet power. In that part of the article commemorating the role of *Glavsevmorput'* in the 1930s, Yakovlev struck a tone very reminiscent of an earlier period in Soviet history:

In the 1930s, unified in the structure of *Glavsevmorput'* were industry, transport and trade [of the North] which made it possible in the shortest possible space of time to raise the economy of the North. The mastery of the NSR was one of the [main] branches in the great reconstruction [of the country]. The country carried out a gigantic economic leap forward and placed it[self] amongst the most powerful states in the world.²²⁶

In a report of Molotov's speech at the 18th Party Congress, there is a distinct foretaste of what Yakovlev wrote 70 plus years ahead:

Following the report of comrade Molotov at the 18th Party Congress...the decision was taken to turn the Northern Sea Route into a normal waterway, ensuring the [Five Year] planned links with the Far East. This decision was exceptionally important both for the continuing strengthening of the country's defence might, as well as increasing its economic potential, the well-being of the people. At the same time, this decision also brought about to a head the age-old struggle of humanity to master the harsh Arctic, subordinating it to the interests of man...the Land of the Soviets remembers the efforts and sacrifices of those who went before it, whose labour eased the conquest of the Northern Sea Route.²²⁷

A Norwegian historical account of this period has a more pragmatic approach:

Stalin had begun to invest heavily on polar research and exploration in the 1930s, with an eye to exploiting the far north economically and forging a heroic Soviet identity that would overcome polar challenges.²²⁸

With the creation of the Northern Sea Route Administration in 1932, the latter helped to make the Route safe for navigation and passage. Thus, in 1933, work was begun to create a new fleet of

²²³ Armstrong, *ibid.*, 10.

²²⁴ M S Volin, "Organizatsiya izucheniya estestvennykh resursov sovetskoi strany v 1917-1920 godakh", *Voprosy istorii*, 2, 1956, 8-88; A I Timoshenko, "Sovetskiye initsiativy v Arktike v 1920-e gg. (K voprosu o strategicheskoi preemstvennosti)", *Gumanitarnye nauki v Sibiri*, 2, 2010, 48-52.

²²⁵ A Yakovlev, "Rossiya ne sdavala i ne sdaet svoi pozitsii v Arktike", *Morskoi sbornik*, 4, 2007, 61-68; 64.

²²⁶ Yakovlev, *ibid.*, 64.

²²⁷ L Baranov, "Otkrytiye i osvoeniye Severnogo morskogo puti", *Istoricheskiy zhurnal*, 9, 1939, 108-123; 108.

²²⁸ E-A Drivenes, H D Jolle, (eds.), "Into the ice. The history of Norway and the Polar Regions", (Oslo, 2007), 323.

icebreakers and freight carriers, as well as providing more supply points for ships and, increasingly, airplanes, as well. Several Arctic ports were built in the 1930s and 1940s – Igarka, Dikson, Pevek, etc. In 1936, ships of the Baltic Fleet used the NSR to sail to the Far East proving, amongst other things, that if and when required, the Route could be used to help strengthen Soviet defences in the Far East, turning the NSR into the largest inland waterway.²²⁹ Without going into exhaustive detail, suffice it to say that the Great Patriotic War, (1941-1945) also proved the vital utility of the Route to the USSR, being used to supply vital supplies to the front from the East, helping to put the USSR's defence industry in the North onto a war footing and, last but by no means least, safe passage of military ships from the East to the West.²³⁰ According to one source, the significance of the NSR during wartime was "great":

Great was the significance, for both the Front and the Rear of the country, of the freight transported along the Northern Sea Route. Sailings in the eastern part of the Barents Sea, in the White and Kara Seas were undertaken in extremely harsh ice and weather conditions. In the White Sea, with the assistance of the ice-breakers, the sailors of the North during the war not only significantly extended the time of the summer navigation, but made it year round...the maritime fleet [in the North] transported to the Front and the [overall] national economy 4,230,000 tonnes of cargo.²³¹

After the war, according to Yakovlev, the development of the NSR became a "priority" in the USSR's plans to develop the North. By the end of the 1980s, after considerable investment both to develop USSR's strategically important North and the NSR, the USSR boasted 16 icebreakers, 8 of which were nuclear-powered and a further 200 ice-capable ships, carrying an annual amount of 6.6 m tonnes of freight by the end of 1987.²³²

However, as noted elsewhere, following the collapse of the USSR in 1991, matters took a decisive turn for the worse both for the NSR and Russia's North. Both were still important areas for Russia, Russia simply failed, initially, to appreciate and value how important both were to the continuing economic well-being and survival of the country until well into the 1990s. In the mean time, much of the infrastructure which had been built up and maintained during the Soviet period was allowed to go to waste and a prolonged economic crisis also ensured that Russia lost much valuable time in realising both the importance of the region and NSR to Russia's future economic well-being and prosperity. As Yakovlev somewhat dryly noted:

Due to the period of reforms, begun in the 1990s...a significant part of the traditional [economic] production of the North was curtailed. Consequently, the freight base of the NSR was reduced by more than three times, (in 2005, it was about 2 million tonnes). The movement [of freight, ships] along the NSR ceased.²³³

However, despite the disastrous impact of events, brought about both by the collapsing centralised state economy, as well as the initially ambivalent attitude shown by central government to the both the North and the NSR – previously described in various parts of this paper – by the middle part of the previous decade, things were beginning to look better. Yakovlev points out that new freight appeared – namely, oil– and had to be transported along the NSR. Quoting figures for 2005, Yakovlev stated that oil transported along the NSR amounted to 7.2 m tonnes, of which 40,000 tonnes was shipped out of Tiski; from the mouths of the rivers Ob' and Yenisey, a further 386,000 tonnes; 600,000 tonnes from the terminal at Varandey, over 6 m tonnes from the ports of Arkhangel'sk and Vitino.²³⁴

²²⁹ Great Northern Route..., *ibid.*, 177. Legally, the term "inland waterway" may not be being used correctly here, but it is the term found regularly in Soviet/Russian literature on the NSR.

²³⁰ Yakovlev, *ibid.*, 64.

²³¹ S F Edlinskiy, "Severnii transportnyi flot v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine Sovetskogo Soiuza, 1941-1945," (M.1963), 219-220.

²³² Yakovlev, *ibid.*, 65.

²³³ *Ibid.* In the words of another contemporary report on the NSR: "the basic reason for the decline in commercial shipping was the fall in the volume of industrial output, investment activity, and geological exploration, as well as in the population in regions adjacent to the NSR and affected by the general economic crisis", (A Granberg, "The North Sea Route", *International Affairs*, 5, 1997, 188-197; 190).

²³⁴ Yakovlev, *ibid.*

Looking towards the future, Yakovlev projected that, by 2020, the amount of freight transported along the NSR would be in the order of 30-35m tonnes, estimated to require upwards of 95 ice-capable ships and 12 icebreakers, including 5 nuclear-powered. With this in mind, Yakovlev argued that a variety of federal and regional programmes would have to be developed and that this would require greater unanimity of views from the Presidential administration, the government and the local political leadership, than had previously been the case:

A common understanding has to exist amongst academics from the Russian Academy of Science, the Presidential administration and the government of the RF, leaders of the Arctic territories of the Federation.²³⁵

Like many other Russian specialists on the Arctic, Yakovlev was against any attempts to “internationalise” the NSR, arguing that its status should be confirmed as a “Russian Eurasian transport corridor”, with the emphasis most definitely on the word “Russian”. He argued for the swift adoption of a new federal law on the NSR, necessitated by the need to further improve the control of shipments of oil and gas from the area; better protection for the local environment; clearer elaboration of the various rules and regulations concerning the operation of shipping along the Route, etc.²³⁶ In his opinion, the new law should have greater clarity “in defining the specific legal regime, allowing a broadening of all types of economic activity, as well as taking into account the interests of the Navy, other Service branches of the Armed Forces, whilst establishing [Russian] jurisdiction and control over the sea’s ocean floor, both in the shelf and Arctic sector.”²³⁷

In a later article, expressing his worry at the increasing attempts by other states to reduce Russia’s influence in the region by attempting “to internationalise” the NSR, Yakovlev pointed out that this process was also running in parallel with an increase in the activities of both the USA and a number of NATO countries in the Arctic:

An important factor necessitating the strengthening of the state’s control over shipping along the NSR currently is the desire of foreign states to internationalise the NSR, exploit the resources of the Russian Arctic and the growing [presence] of (USA and NATO) of their military in the Arctic zone. In connection with this, Russia’s ‘Maritime doctrine’ advanced the task of securing Russia’s national interests along the NSR, [by means of] creating a centralised state administration for this transport system.²³⁸

For his part, Medvedev has also said that any attempts to limit “Russia’s access to developing the deposits in the Arctic” (by implication, if not in real terms, using the NSR) would be “unacceptable”.²³⁹ **In the eyes of many Russians, the North’s resources are vital for Russia’s continuing well-being, both in the medium to long-term.** In exploiting what they consider to be *Russia’s* natural wealth in the region, Russia will require a fully functioning transport corridor, namely the NSR:

Taking into account all circumstances, in the foreseeable future, there is no alternative to the Northern Sea Route, in the Far North and in the Arctic regions of Siberia, as a national transport corridor, the former will remain an important factor in the business and economic development of the above-named regions... Subsequently, there is no alternative to icebreakers with nuclear-powered engines, maintaining the stability and security of passage in the Arctic’s vast expanse.²⁴⁰

According to one source, Russia’s Ministry of Transport has calculated that in order to maintain safe, regular passage along the NSR, Russia will require a minimum of 4 nuclear-powered and 6 diesel-powered icebreakers.²⁴¹ If these figures are accurate, then it could be that Russia will miss out taking full advantage of the commercial opportunity represented by the impact of climate change in the

²³⁵ Yakovlev, *ibid.*, 66-67.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 67.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 68.

²³⁸ Rear-Admiral, Professor A Yakovlev, G Lebedev, “Kto upravlyaet severnym morskim putyom?”, *Morskoi sbornik*, 6, 2010, 34-43; 40.

²³⁹ Smolovskiy, “Arktika-2010...”, *ibid.*, 38.

²⁴⁰ Yu A Rogozhin, V N Barinov, “Kuda plyvyot atomniy flot?”, *Atomnaya strategiya*, 1, 2008, 15-16; 15.

²⁴¹ S Golubchikov, “Mirovoi kholodil’nik prirodnykh resursov”, *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 24/11/2010.

region – reduction in ice cover, as well as a reduction in the thickness of ice - and increasing insurance costs for freight being shipped through the more traditional southern route, i.e. Suez, as a result of pirate activity in the Indian Ocean.²⁴² As it currently stands, Russia's nuclear-powered icebreaking fleet is ageing rapidly: the first nuclear-powered icebreaker, "Lenin" entered service in 1957, but was withdrawn in 1989, having clocked up over 650,000 miles and escorted over 3,700 ships along NSR. Using the experience of the latter, the USSR/Russia constructed a number of others – "Arktika", "Sibir", "Rossiya", "Sevmorput" – to date the first and only nuclear-powered cargo ship – "Taimyr" - "Sovetskiy Soiuz", "Vaygach", "Yamal" and, finally and most recently, "50 let Pobedy".²⁴³ Of this number, what is known is that, other than the "Lenin", "Sibir" was withdrawn from service in 1993; in October 2008, the "Arktika" was laid up and, despite programmes to extend the lives of its "sister ships", in order to meet the increasingly stringent safety requirements, it is unlikely that the rest of Russia's nuclear-powered icebreakers will be much further behind in being withdrawn from service, with the sole exception of "50 let Pobedy".²⁴⁴ Lamenting the loss of so many of Russia's nuclear-powered ice breakers over the course of the next decade, a former C-in-C of the Northern Fleet, writing in his capacity as deputy chairman of the Federation Council's Security and Defence Committee, stated that:

It is planned to take out of service the nuclear-powered icebreakers, 'Arktika' in 2008, the 'Taimyr' and 'Vaygach' in 2012-2013. Given such a turn of events, after 2013, the transport system of the company 'Noril'sk Nickel' will be left without the security of an ice breaker. By 2018, there will only be three nuclear-powered ice breakers in service: 'Yamal', 'Sibir' and "50 let Pobedy", by 2020, only one – '50 let Pobedy.' Losing the nuclear-powered ice breakers, which have been the main factor in the steady operation of the Northern Sea Route, will have a negative impact not only on maintaining the Northern flow of freight to the Far North, but also on the return flow of raw materials [from the North] which, [in turn] will lead to a further weakening and constriction in the influence of Russia in the Arctic zone. Taking into account the strategic significance of Russia's presence in the Arctic seas and maintaining the Northern Sea Route, a state programme for the renewal and support of the nuclear-powered ice breakers is necessary.²⁴⁵

Writing four years after Popov's gloomy assessment of the future, Makarov did have some good news for the future. Writing in the authoritative popular science magazine, *Nauka v Rossii*, he stated that a new design for a nuclear-powered icebreaker is being worked on at "Iceberg" Central Construction bureau in St Petersburg – "Project 22220" – but it's not expected to enter service until 2015 at the earliest.²⁴⁶ Of course, Russia still possesses diesel-powered icebreakers – four according to one source – but if their technical state is similar to that of the nuclear-powered icebreakers, then it too can only be a matter of time before they will have to be replaced (and pretty quickly), especially if Russia maintains the position that only icebreakers flying the Russian flag are allowed to sail along the NSR.²⁴⁷

However, the main object of the report cited above was to confirm the transport, along the NSR, of a large tanker supplying gas condensate from Murmansk to one of the ports in southeastern Asia, accompanied by one of the working nuclear-powered ice breakers.²⁴⁸ In August, one of the main

²⁴² Golubchikov, *ibid.* According to the latter, ice cover is being reduced in the area 5% every ten years and the thickness of the ice is half what it was 50 years ago. Due to pirate activity in the Indian Ocean, insurance for freight being shipped through Suez has increased x10 between September 2008-March 2009. According to another source, *Rosgidromet* –Russia's main meteorological service – has undertaken a "strategic forecast" for climate change in Russia over the next 50 years and has concluded that "the area of ice in the Arctic will significantly fall", (L G Tsoy, N A Vysotskaya, Yu v Glebko, "Chem teplee v Arktike, tem nuzhnee ledokoly", *Nauka v Rossii*, 1, 2009, 16-17; 16).

²⁴³ Rogozhin, Baranov, *ibid.*, 15.

²⁴⁴ V Makarov, "Budushchee sudovoi atomnoi energetiki", *Nauka v Rossii*, 4.2010, 34-40;35.

²⁴⁵ V Popov, "Zakonodatel'noye obespecheniye natsional'noi morskoi politiki i ekonomicheskoi deyatel'nosti v Arktike", *Morskoi sbornik*, 9, 2006, 46-50, 49-50.

²⁴⁶ Makarov, *ibid.*, 37.

²⁴⁷ "Rossiya stanovitsya na Sevmorput", (Bigness.ru. Pravda, ru.

<http://www.bigness.ru/?area=articleItem&id=110007&mode=print>. Accessed 20/12/2010. Indeed, according to the latter report, at the present rate of wear and tear, by 2015-2016, there will only be one nuclear-powered icebreaker left at Russia's disposal, "50 let Pobedy."

²⁴⁸ *ibid.*

Russian newspapers carried details of the shipment of 72,000 tonnes of gas condensate being transported from Murmansk to China, on board the Russian super tanker, "Baltika" accompanied, at various times, by the "Rossiya", "Taymyr" and "50 let Pobedy." Owned by the Russian shipping giant, *Sovkomflot*, at over 114,000 tonnes, the tanker was the largest vessel ever to navigate the NSR. In a contemporary press release, the company stated:

The aim of the voyage is to determine the feasibility of delivering energy on a regular, economically viable and safe basis along the Northern Sea Route from the Barents and Kara Seas to the markets of South-East Asia.²⁴⁹

Everything went smoothly and the shipment arrived in record time, thus making the point that such shipments could be undertaken. However, the report also made note of the fact that the journey was "experimental" and, at various points of the journey, 3 nuclear-powered ice breakers had been required. This, in turn, meant that the cost of the escort "had been sufficiently high" but that the overall costs of such an escort could be reduced, in the future, if the ice breakers were escorting not just one tanker, but several.²⁵⁰ *Sovkomflot*, despite the success of the voyage, also pointed out that there were still "many obstacles" to overcome before the NSR would be able to steal much business from the established southern trade routes. Details of another major shipment, this time of iron ore, leaving the port of Kirkenes, in Norway in late September 2010, again headed for China, along the NSR, were released, under the heading "new shipping route opens." Whilst not wishing to belittle the practical impact of another major cargo being freighted along the NSR, as shown by this paper, the NSR cannot be described as representing a new shipping route!²⁵¹

However, not all are convinced inside Russia that the NSR will be able, any time soon at least, to attract a significant volume of trade away from the more established southern routes, even if the latter now do suffer from an increased risk of piracy. In one article, the author also criticised the current PM, V Putin, for talking up the potential future of the NSR, against a background where the words bore very little resemblance to the deeds, or simply ignored the many difficulties which lie ahead of turning the NSR of Putin's wishes into the NSR of Russia's reality:

The re-birth of the Northern sea Route has, for a sufficiently long time, figured in the number of Vladimir Putin's favourite 'children'. The noisy campaign to popularise the shining future of *Sevmorput'* became one of his first pre-election forays when he was acting President of Russia. In April 2000, at a meeting held to discuss the problems of the Northern Sea Route and shipbuilding in Russia, in general, specially convened in Murmansk, staged on the nuclear-powered ice breaker, "Rossiya", Putin affirmed that already 'in the not too distant future', the annual level of freight being transported in the Arctic 'will exceed more than 10 m tonnes' (despite the fact that, at the time, the level of freight barely exceeded 1 m tonnes).²⁵²

Quoting Putin's own words, Golotiuk listed three main areas which Putin himself emphasised:

First of all, in his [Putin's] words, 'the state needs a seaborne traffic ['sudokhodnaya'] policy and the Arctic transport system could serve as an excellent test bed ['poligon] for developing one.'

Secondly, 'in the North there is such wealth, which will be needed not only by Russia, but also all of mankind' and following on from that, 'the northern territories – are our strategic reserve for the future.'

And from that, it [also] logically follows, thirdly, that '*Sevmorput'* is an important factor in maintaining the security of the state.'²⁵³

²⁴⁹ "First Russian gas tanker forges passage to China", 26/8/2010, (http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2010-08/26/content_11204270.htm) Accessed 5/10/2010.

²⁵⁰ P Obraztsov, "Rossiya idyet Severnym putyom", *Izvestiya*, 27/8/2010.

²⁵¹ "New shipping route opens", (http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/hkedition/2010-09/07/content_11264507.htm) Accessed 5/10/2010.

²⁵² Yu Golotiuk, "Na strazhe belogo bezmolviya", *Rossiya v global'noi politike*, no. 3, vol.6, 2008, 169-179; 178.

²⁵³ Golotiuk, *ibid.*, 178.

Golotiuk had no argument about the logic of the statements made, only their realisation or, more to the point, the *possibility* of their realisation. In his words, the NSR still remained simply:

...an internal Russian artery. At best, it could be used as a route for the transport of Russian raw materials abroad, most of all, hydrocarbons and metals. Hopes that the route could be used for transit freight between Europe-Asia are not justified...The former head of the Federal Maritime and River Transport Agency, Vyacheslav Ruksha, has publicly stated that under current conditions, transit[ing] freight between Europe-Asia along the Northern Sea Route is not profitable, as the route passes through the gulfs (Vilkitsky, Sannikov) which have a depth of [only] about 17 metres. This limits the tonnage of freight ships and, consequently, even the much longer southern route, Europe-Asia, is considerably cheaper because the ships used can be of bigger tonnage.²⁵⁴

Thus, as with most things in relation to the NSR, it is not simply a question of ice cover and/or the length of time ships will have to take navigating the Route. It is also very much a question of cost. Ice cover restricts passage duration and incremental passage duration cost per tonne/kilometre obviously also increases costs. Therefore, whilst it may be true that thanks to global warming, the Arctic will become more navigable, a lot of the time, unlike Suez, the NSR will still not be navigable. Until there is a greatly improved weather/ice monitoring system in place, unlike Suez, it will still be difficult to accurately predict exactly when it will be possible to set sail. Despite, according to one report, new port facilities being built at Murmansk, Indiga, Yasya, etc., the NSR still requires significant investment if it is to compete economically with the other, better established trade routes between East and West. The consequences of the previous years of neglect are still evident for everyone to see. Indeed, it has been estimated that to renew and build the necessary infrastructure will require no less than \$7 bn.²⁵⁵ Even given the scale of investment required, the potential natural wealth to be reaped once everything is in place, has still led a number of Russian commentators to argue that “modernising and restoring the whole [transport] system of the Northern Sea Route...must become the priority of the state’s policy in Russia’s North.”²⁵⁶

Time will tell whether, or not, the Russian government and/or private investment will allocate sufficient funds not only to maintain Russia’s lead in the continuing development of its nuclear-powered ice-breaking fleet, (without which the NSR for a large part of the year will not be economically viable) and, in turn, further develop the whole maritime infrastructure of the NSR, thereby mounting a real challenge to the trade dominance of the current southern trade routes) or simply leave the NSR to become yet another Russian missed opportunity?

Russia and United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)

As detailed above, one of the primary motives behind Russia’s reinvigorated interest in the Arctic, after decades of neglect, is economic. The living and non-living wealth of the Arctic is potentially enormous – ranging from the potentially huge reserves of hydrocarbons in the area to the region’s biological wealth, represented by its marine fauna.²⁵⁷ As the world’s natural resources continue to decline, so the potential wealth of the Arctic will attract not only those whose interests are already represented there, but also those whose growing power and need for more of the Earth’s dwindling resources will force them to seek further and further afield for more of less and less.

²⁵⁴ Golotiuk, *ibid.*, 178-179.

²⁵⁵ Golubchikov, *ibid.*

²⁵⁶ Istomin et al., *ibid.*, 171.

²⁵⁷ A Russian newspaper report, published just after Russia submitted its first claim on the Arctic territories in 2001, stated that “recoverable resources of hydrocarbons in the Russian shelf could be as much as 100 bn tonnes...including 15.5 bn tonnes of oil and 84.5 trillion cubic metres of gas”, (M Ignatova, “Podvodnoi shleyf”, *Izvestiya*, 17/4/2002). For more on the potential oil/mineral wealth of the shelf from a Russian perspective, see also: I Gramberg *et al.*, “Continental shelf: Russia’s last fuel- and power-reserve”, *Science in Russia*, 1, 1998; S Golubchikov, “Arctic shelf, Russia’s chief reserve”, *Science in Russia*, 1, 2000; N Bogdanov, “Search and development. Russia’s shelf, its riches”, *Science in Russia*, 4, 2003; R K Balandin, “Panorama pechati. Osvoeniye shel’fa Rossii”, *Nauka v Rossiii*, 1, 2005; M Alekseyev, V Drushchits, “Human environment. Geology and mineral resources of the Russian shelf areas”, *Science in Russia*, 1, 2006.

Ever since Putin came to power (first as PM in 1999 and then as President in March 2000), Russia has developed an increasingly more strident attitude towards its Arctic façade. As the price of hydrocarbons has steadily increased, (and the flow of oil and gas revenues to the Russian coffers), Russia has adopted an increasingly distinctive foreign policy, one more reflecting Russia's traditional foreign policy/national security concerns, rather than one trying to curry favour with an increasingly annoyed and, apparently, misunderstanding West. Even so, Russia has played according to "the rules" and avoided openly challenging the West in any military fashion.

However, as has been argued elsewhere in this paper, it would be both short-sighted and potentially dangerous if the West deluded itself into a false sense of security, that because nothing has happened which could have entailed the potential use of military force in the recent past, (with the possible exception of NATO's military action against FRY in 1999), that there will be no major rift between us and them, that we in the West can sit back, "run the show" as we best see fit, confident in the belief that "the Bear" has been "tamed", (or at least "contained" within its own psychological and physical borders, more interested in events much closer to home than anything the West is involved in). This is delusional, especially more so given the rise in power of other actors on the world stage. **If Russia's "vital, national" interests are placed under threat, it will use all that it has – including military force - to protect and defend those interests as it has shown in the wars against Chechnya and, to a lesser extent, its 2008 military action against Georgia.**

In discussing the possibility of the Arctic being involved in any future European Security Treaty, one author, referencing the events of August 2007, as well as the contemporary statements of the Russian CGS, General N Makarov, stated simply that:

In principle, Russia is prepared to use military force to uphold its interests in the Arctic [emphasis mine – SJM]. Unfortunately, the realities of today are such that even if the depths of the Arctic are buried in flags, nothing will change. PVO [anti-air defence] system, submarine and ice-breaking fleet more effectively convinces our opponents. As stated by CGS Russia, [our] military training plans for the Navy now factor in the presence of NATO ships in the Arctic. As CGS, First Deputy Minister of Defence, General N Makarov [recently] warned: 'the Russian side will adequately respond to [any] attempts to militarise the Arctic. In the first instance, this affects the tasks of the Northern and Pacific Fleets. The military leadership will pay particular attention to defending the country's national interests in the Arctic along the full length of Russia's northern maritime border.²⁵⁸

Russia is a skilful player on the world stage and will not instinctively reach for the gun, so to speak, it will use other means at its disposal, (political, economic, diplomatic), before using the military option. Both the civilian and military leadership are keenly aware of Russia's geopolitical position in the world and the limitations – now less than what they were, admittedly, even 5-10 years ago – of the power that the leadership can wield to influence world events. If, in the past, Russia was guaranteed protection at least along the Northern axis, this is no longer the case. Due to climate change, if nothing else, the political and military leadership are now very aware that the North no longer affords them the defensive protection that it once did. Given the situation elsewhere along Russia's state border, Russia does not need to look too hard, or very far, to see potential conflict points along many sections of its border, including the North.

Thus, in a further attempt to increase its hold on the Arctic, Russia will seek to use whatever means it can in order to further firm up its presence there, hence its ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in February 1997, three years after the latter came into force, and its subsequent attempts, through the UN, to get its claim on its Arctic zone formally recognised by the international community.²⁵⁹

Without going into great detail, UNCLOS was concluded in 1982, came into force in 1994 and, in the words of the Official text, the Convention:

²⁵⁸ O Kolesnichenko, "Arktika-prioritet rossiyskoi vneshney politiki", *Voенно-promyshlenniy kur'er*, 33, 26-8-2009.

²⁵⁹ Yu Kazmin, "K voprosu o vneshney grantise kontinental'nogo shel'fa Rossii v Arktike", *Mezhdunarodnaya zhizn'*, 3, March 2010, 12-35, 18.

...establishes a comprehensive framework for the regulation of all ocean space - and contains provisions governing, *inter alia*, the limits of national jurisdiction over ocean space, access to the seas, navigation, protection and preservation of the marine environment, exploitation of living resources and conservation, scientific research, seabed mining and other exploitation of non-living resources, and the settlement of disputes.²⁶⁰

In the words of one source, the Convention “defines the rights and responsibilities of nations in their use of the World’s oceans, establishing guideline for businesses, the environment, and the management of marine natural resources.”²⁶¹

Whilst great attention has been paid to the potential wealth of the “non-living” resources of the Arctic, as Kolesnichenko stated there is more to the wealth of the Arctic than simply its potential hydrocarbon reserves, however great they may be. In her words, there is also the region’s “bio-resources, the fresh water [not everyone is as blessed to have as much of “Adam’s wine” as we do in Scotland!] as well as the transport, shipping and air routes.”²⁶²

In similar vein, a Western analysis of the continental shelf, published in 2001, also outlined the potential “living” wealth of the Arctic:

The living resources of the deep Arctic seabed...have not been catalogued extensively. With deep areas lying generally beyond the limits of conventional fisheries operations and research, the varieties and quantities of food stocks have not been properly assessed – this situation prevails in other oceanic regions. Non-food resources such as pharmaceuticals and DNA material might also be extracted from certain life forms that develop and flourish under the Arctic’s unique environmental conditions.²⁶³

However, regardless of the wealth which may, or may not, be there, the question of “ownership” of that wealth still remains undecided and will remain so for some time to come. As if the legal side of things was not complicated enough, what makes the situation even more complicated is that one of the Arctic Five – arguably, outside of Russia, the most important member of the Arctic Five – the USA has not ratified UNCLOS and, therefore, as such, is under no legal/moral obligation to adhere to its rulings, or findings. The recent US presence at the biennial meeting of the region’s powers, held at Nuuk, Greenland, in May 2001, may herald a shift in the position of the US towards UNCLOS in the medium term but, as matters stand right now, (2011), the US influence on events in the Arctic’s future is limited as long as it continues to refrain from ratifying UNCLOS. According to an exchange of telegrams between US diplomats and the Danish FM, P S Moller in 2007, the latter apparently cabled “if you stay out, then the rest of us will have more to carve up in the Arctic.”²⁶⁴

To date, UNCLOS is the only legal framework currently operating in relation to the Arctic; unlike Antarctica, there is no equivalent of the 1959 Antarctic Treaty operating here.

Before ratifying the Convention in February 1997, Russia had already passed a federal law, defining the Russian continental shelf, in November 1995. Thus, in the words of one experienced commentator:

Thus, for Russia, the single international-legal document on issues concerning the external border...of the continental shelf is the 1982 UNCLOS, the principles of which are reflected in the federal law, ‘on the continental shelf of the Russian Federation’.²⁶⁵

²⁶⁰ The Law of the Sea. Official text of UNCLOS with Annexes and Index, (UN, NY, 1983), 224 pp; xxiv.

²⁶¹ UNCLOS, (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Convention_on_the_Law_of_the_Sea) Accessed – 8/6/2011.

²⁶² Kolesnichenko, *ibid.*

²⁶³ R Macnab, P Neto, R van de Poll, “Cooperative preparations for determining the outer limit of the juridical continental shelf in the Arctic Ocean: a model for regional cooperation in other parts of the world?”, *IBRU Boundary and Security Bulletin*, spring 2001, 86-96; 88.

²⁶⁴ T Macalister, “US signals it is ready for Arctic oil battle”, *The Guardian*, 13/5/2011.

²⁶⁵ Yu Kazmin, “K voprosu o vneshney granitse kontinental'nogo shelfa v Arktike”, *Mezhdunarodnaya zhizn'*, 3, 2010, 12-35; 18.

In submitting its first claim to the UN in 2001, Russia defined its continental shelf as the area surrounding and including the Mendeleev and Lomonosov ridges up to the North Pole and the central part of the Okhotsk Sea.²⁶⁶ As previously described, Russia, a positive decision on the Russian claim would not only increase its hydrocarbon reserves significantly, but would also add to the actual size of the Russian Federation, as well. In a press article, published not long after Russia made its first submission to the UN, the author, quoting an official from the Ministry of Natural Resources, stated that:

In the words of Rinat Murzin, head of department of resources of the internal seas, territorial seas, continental shelf and the world's oceans, Ministry of Natural Resources, currently the area of Russia's continental shelf is approximately 6 million sq. kms. In the event of a positive decision from the UN, it would grow by 1/5. In relation to Russia's reserves of oil and gas, then Russia would succeed in increasing its hydrocarbon potential...by up to 105 billion tonnes.²⁶⁷

Thus, in a world of ever decreasing natural resources, especially of hydrocarbon fuels, if approved, Russia's hold on the global energy market, both in the medium-to long-term would be considerably enhanced and, perhaps, for a number of the world's major players this would be too much to accept at this critical juncture in the history of the 21st century, as the world still struggles to wean itself of fossil fuels. For instance, in the Ignatova article, there is a very strong hint that the Russians, even in 2002, (years before a decision concerning Russia's initial claim to the UN was made), were very aware of US unhappiness at the UN decision going Russia's way:

The idea surrounding the extension of their territory in the Arctic zone is shared by five states: Russia, USA, Canada, Norway and Denmark-Greenland. However, a strong [negative] reaction to the Russian initiative has been expressed by the United States. According to the testimony of those there, America is applying maximum pressure to block the UN Commission from adopting the Russian submission.²⁶⁸

Interestingly enough, the Russian author "understood" the US position, admitting that "if the Commission approves the Russian request, then Russia will receive a fairly substantial territory with all the economic advantages which will flow from it."²⁶⁹

In terms of the actual mechanics of the 2001 submission, Kazmin described it thus:

The Russian Federation sent their claim to the Commission on the Borders of the Continental Shelf through the UN Secretary General on 20th December 2001. In addition to the Russian Federation claim...the Commission also received 5 verbal notes about the Russian claim – from the governments of Canada, Denmark, Japan, Norway and the USA. The claim was translated...and sent [for examination] at 10th session of the Commission, which was held between 25th March to 12th April.²⁷⁰

Needless to say, a sub-commission was created to analyse the Russian submission in more detail and more sessions held to discuss the detail of the claim, including consultations with the Russian team of experts sent there to assist the UN evaluate the voracity of the Russian territorial claim. In all, according to Kazmin, 36 questions were sent to the Russian group of experts which required a detailed, written response. However, this still was not enough for the UN and further "additional materials" had to be provided for the former both during the 10th session and for a meeting held to discuss the claim on 15th May 2002.²⁷¹

By the end of June 2002, the Commission had examined the draft recommendations, prepared by the special sub-commission which the Russians were not allowed to examine before they were sent to the Commission. Needless to say, given the public anxiety of the USA, Russia's claim was not upheld, but neither was it rejected outright. The Commission made a number of recommendations to the Russian

²⁶⁶ V Aglamish'yan, "Shel'f Rossii podrastet", *Izvestiya*, 1/4/2010.

²⁶⁷ M Ignatova, "Podvodnoi shleyf", *Izvestiya*, 17/4/2002.

²⁶⁸ Ignatova, *ibid.*

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁰ Kazmin, *ibid.*, 23.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*

authorities and told them that they could re-submit their claim “within a reasonable period of time” but, next time round, the re-submitted claim would require “additional scientific data, showing [for instance] the continental geological nature of the Lomonosov and Mendeleev ridges.”²⁷²

In the words of Kazmin:

At least, the experience of the examination of our submission by the Commission gave our scientists focus in directing the necessary [future] research to prove our point of view.²⁷³

However, as he was also forced to concede:

Although the recommendations on our submission were made by the UN Commission in the middle of 2002, up to the present time [article was published in 2010] many issues have not been practically dealt with [“*prakticheski ne resheny*”] with the exception of the geological-geophysical work...on the Mendeleev and Lomonosov ridges, undertaken by the Ministry of Natural Resources in 2005 and 2007. In many ways, this can be explained by the intra-departmental nature of the problem and the lack of appropriate coordination of the work on the problem.²⁷⁴

This is a very interesting admission to make, even more so as regards, potentially at least, what is at stake, in relation to the long-term development of Russia. Russia should also be acutely aware that time, arguably, is not on its side. Russia has already had one bite at the cherry, other states are also preparing to lodge their Arctic territorial claims with the UN Commission. In terms of Russia's re-submission, the UN Commission did stipulate that it could do so “within a reasonable time period” and ten years has already elapsed since Russia's first submission. Given the previous public statements made by the country's senior political leadership, one would have thought that they would have wanted this matter to be sewn up as quickly as possible if, for no other reason, so as then to be able to work out a long-term programme for the country's development, taking into account, the wealth, or otherwise, of the Arctic.

As pointed out earlier, it is also difficult to understand why the “lack” of co-ordination in the work of the various organs involved in helping to collate the necessary data required by the UN Commission has been allowed to arise, never mind continue. This situation is even less comprehensible, especially when one realises how important a positive decision on Russia's re-submitted claim will have on the country's ability to regain lost influence on the world, at large.

Russia knows that a number of other member-states of the Arctic Five – particularly Canada and Denmark – are also preparing their own Arctic territorial claims and will not hang around waiting for Russia to re-submit its claim before submitting their own. As recently reported, Denmark is preparing a claim “proving” that the area around the North Pole is geologically linked to Greenland.²⁷⁵ Similarly in relation to Canada: according to one Canadian government minister, Gary Lunn, by 2013, Canada will make “a very strong claim”, a date which was later confirmed by the Canadian FM, Lawrence Cannon, at a press conference held in Moscow in September 2010.²⁷⁶

For his part, Kazmin offered the following explanations and timetable for the future of Russia's claim-making process:

At the present moment in time [article was published, remember, in 2010], the Federal Agency for Sub-surface Management (Rosnedr')...plans additional bathymetric and seismic work in the Arctic with the aim of meeting the Commission's recommendations and preparing the re-examined submission. The work will be carried out in 2010-2012 using an ice-class scientific-research vessel accompanied through the ice by a nuclear-powered ice-breaker...the re-

²⁷² Kazmin *ibid.*, 31; T Penkova, “Russia in the Arctic race”, *ISPI Policy Brief*, Milan, 2009, 1-8; 5.

²⁷³ Kazmin, *ibid.*, 32.

²⁷⁴ *ibid.*

²⁷⁵ “Danes enter race to claim the North Pole”, *The Daily Telegraph*, 19/5/2011.

²⁷⁶ A Crawford, A Hanson, D Runnalls, “Arctic sovereignty and security in a climate-changing world”, International Institute for Sustainable Development, (Winnipeg, 2008), 1-16; 15; A Ovchinnikova, “Sosedni po Arktike delyat khrebet Lomonosova”, *Izvestiya*, 16/9/2010.

examined Russian submission will be ready by 2013-2014, as will the Canadian and Danish submissions.²⁷⁷

If that timetable holds, it looks like the UN is going to be very busy in the coming years, examining the claims and counter-claims of the various states involved, just as well that the US, so far, has not even ratified UNCLOS, never mind submitting its own Arctic territorial claim.

In its attempt to collect the necessary scientific data, in August 2007, Russia embarked on yet another expedition to the Arctic, led by one of Russia's most prominent Arctic explorers and, in some respects, "professional" Arctic politician, Artur Chilingarov. According to one recent Russian assessment of the August 2007 expedition:

The question of the ownership [*prinadlezhnost'*] of the Arctic's continental shelf which, according to some estimates, may contain [the last remaining significant] richest deposits of oil and gas, attracted widespread attention after the Russian deep water expedition of 2007. Those who took part were determined to prove that the Lomonosov and Mendeleev ridges are an extension of the Siberian continental platform and, *de jure*, allows Russia to claim it. On reaching the seabed floor, 'Mir-1' and 'Mir-2' [the names of the bathyspheres involved in the expedition] planted a Russian *tricolore* and took samples of rock and living organisms from a depth of 4.261 m.²⁷⁸

Slightly further on in his article, Kozhukin emphasised the importance of the expedition, careful to stress that the expedition was undertaken in fulfilment of both a government decree and a decision of the government's own Maritime collegiate.²⁷⁹ However, a contemporary article which appeared on the website of the Russian Academy of Sciences painted a very different picture from that published last year in *Krasnaya Zvezda*. Dubbing Chilingarov an "Arctic hawk", the article quoted him as saying, just before he set off, "we must prove that the North Pole is a continuation of Russia's continental shelf", a clear sign not only of a prejudiced mind, but also one with the very obvious political aim of fulfilling the wishes of the political leadership back in the Kremlin. The article also pointed out that 3/6 passengers on board the two bathyspheres, were domestic and foreign "sponsors" and that, in overall terms:

From the scientific point of view, the results of the expedition, 'Arktika-2007' will hardly be seen as providing a convincing base for the legal foundation of Russia's claim to new ocean territory, as the scientific part of the expedition programme was limited.²⁸⁰

A later Western magazine report confirmed that Russian and Swedish businessmen, as well as an Australian tour operator, had been paying passengers on 'Mir-2'.²⁸¹ As with many things in contemporary Russia, even a seat on an important national scientific expedition can be bought. The planting of the Russian *tricolour* on the Arctic seabed did much to attract a fairly hostile reaction from the world's media – particularly in the West – and undermined the seriousness of the scientific nature of the expedition. It can be seen that the planting of the Russian flag had more to do with the realm of gesture politics, rather than the scientific realm. Even some 16 months after the August 2007 expedition, *The Times* correspondent, B Maddox, still somewhat contemptuously labelled the expedition a "stunt".²⁸²

In concluding their analysis of the August 2007 expedition, A Kolodkin (a well-respected academic and President of the Russian Association of International Law and Law of the Sea), and S Glandin, stated that:

The placement of a flag on the Arctic Ocean floor is not evidence of effective occupation. A flag on the ocean floor is a symbolic gesture by the Russian expedition demonstrating the

²⁷⁷ Kazmin, *ibid.*, 33.

²⁷⁸ M Kozhukin, "Letom tyanet v Arktiku...", *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 29/7/2010.

²⁷⁹ Kozhukin, *ibid.*

²⁸⁰ T Oganessian, "Delezh articheskogo piroga", 13/8/.2007, Russian Academy of Sciences, (<http://www.ras.ru/digest.showdnes.aspx?language+ru&id+4ed60709-6427-4f23-a9...>). Accessed 12/2/2010.

²⁸¹ M Funk, "Arctic landgrab", *National Geographic*, May 2009, 104-121; 106.

²⁸² B Maddox, "Russia leads Arctic race to claim Northwest Passage", *The Times*, 6/2/2009.

fulfilment of its obligations to the [UN] Commission in the search for additional proof in substantiation of its claims. To date, the Commission has not completed consideration of Russia's application...Should a positive conclusion be made - the Russian Federation will expand the area of its continental shelf to the North Pole. Due to rapid technological advancement, the development of natural resources in that zone will be possible in the near future.²⁸³

However, even if there was a degree of political showboating going on, and the scientific part of the expedition somewhat undermined by the planting of the Russian *tricolore* on the sea bed of the Arctic, nevertheless, the descent to the sea bed was to take water and mineral samples as further proof that the area under investigation is a geological extension of Russia's Siberia platform.²⁸⁴

In short, if the samples taken in August 2007 help prove Russia's claim that the Lomonosov and Mendeleev ridges are extensions of the Siberian continental shelf, then Russia's *legal* claim to the potential hydrocarbon wealth lying beneath the Arctic sea floor will be considerably strengthened. After all, as stated earlier, "the only legal framework currently regulating all activities in the region" is UNCLOS.²⁸⁵ There is no equivalent of the 1959 Antarctic Treaty operating here and, more importantly, to date, no one has yet saw fit to challenge the legal/moral authority of UNCLOS to operate in the Arctic.

In a statement, released by *Interfax*, three years after the "Arktika-2007" expedition, Chilingarov (now the Russian president's special representative on international co-operation in the Arctic and the Antarctic) stated that:

Our task is to define the borders of the shelf in order to draw up Russia's claim for their legal registration with the UN Commission. The request will be submitted in 2014 at the earliest. We need to leave the shelf, which will continue to guarantee Russia's economic security, for future generations, and to do this we need to prove now that this shelf is ours. We are in favour of international cooperation, but we have our plans and tasks.²⁸⁶

One of the passengers on 'Mir-2' – a Russian state дума deputy, as well as a very rich businessman, V Gruzdev – also emphasised the importance of Russia laying formal claim to the Arctic in a manner which was even more strident than Chilingarov's:

The Arctic is our treasury, and it is important that it remains ours and that nobody lays claim to this treasury. We need to look after the future generations and do everything we can to stake out a claim to as many territories as possible.²⁸⁷

As the time draws nearer to various claims being submitted on the Arctic, one can expect the public pronouncements and interventions, particularly on the part of politicians, to re-emphasise their nation's right to "exclusivity" in ownership of the disputed territories. This could become a bone of contention for a number of states, members and non-members of the Arctic Five alike, (for instance, China and India which require ever increasing amounts of hydrocarbon fuels to sustain, never mind increase, current levels of economic growth).

China already has a developed and developing Arctic research programme and is certainly of the opinion that the Arctic's treasure, so to speak, should not be the sole preserve of one nation, but is a common asset and should benefit all mankind, not just one small section. This has been noted by no less a body than SIPRI which, in March 2010, published a ground-breaking report, examining China's stance on the Arctic, in which the author concluded:

²⁸³ A Kolodkin, S Glandin, "the Russian Flag on the North Pole", *International Affairs*, 6, vol 53, 2007, 6-16; 14.

²⁸⁴ Penkova, *ibid.*, 4; Funk, *ibid.*

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

²⁸⁶ "Russia to file claim for Arctic shelf with UN no earlier than 2014-official", BBCM, 2/8/2010.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

Based on official statements by the Chinese government and the open-source literature written by Chinese Arctic scholars, China can be expected to continue to persistently, yet quietly and unobtrusively, push for the Arctic...being accessible to all.²⁸⁸

Expressing himself more succinctly, (ret'd). Rear Admiral Yin Zhuo, currently working as a "researcher" for the Chinese Navy, was quoted last year, roughly at the same time as Jakobsen's report was published, as stating that "the Arctic belongs to all the people around the world, no [single] nation has sovereignty over it."²⁸⁹

For its part, Russia not only insists that the Arctic is "theirs", but also re-emphasises that the eventual decision about who owns what be based purely on the scientific data. Russia seems to be very confident that the science will prove it right in its assertion that the ridges in question are extensions of the Siberian continental shelf. In a meeting with Canada's Foreign Minister (FM), Lawrence Cannon, held in September last year, the Russian FM, S Lavrov, insisted that only "scientifically-based data" be the criteria used to decide ownership of the shelf:

The Lomonosov ridge was discovered by Russians, however, we will show that it is a continuation of our continental shelf. We will continue to present our evidence to the Commission, Canada will present its data. Incidentally, Denmark is thinking about announcing the Lomonosov ridge a continuation of Greenland. All these [assertions] must be based on scientifically-based data, which must be examined by the Commission. There will be decided who is right and who is not right.²⁹⁰

This emphasis on the science dictating the eventual outcome of the UN Commission's decision concerning the outer borders of the continental shelf seems to be a calculation, on the part of the Russians, to remove some of the "heat" out of the rhetoric surrounding the territorial claims being made in relation to the ownership of the areas under dispute. This could also have been one of the factors in the "surprise" decision, announced last year, to settle the decades-long territorial dispute in the area – over the so-called "grey zone" in the Barents Sea – between Russia and Norway which, in turn, could be a more hopeful sign for the future. In short, a return to international problems being settled, not by reliance on force, or the threat of the use of force, but by international negotiation and adherence to international law. After all, the signing of the treaty between Russia and Norway not only settled amicably a decades-long dispute between two of the main Arctic powers but also, in the words of one contemporary account of the Treaty, demonstrated that:

...it [Russia] can pursue its national interests within accepted legal rules" thereby making it harder" to dismiss it as a land-grabbing colonial power from the 19th century.²⁹¹

In a recent pronouncement on the matter, during a press conference with the Norwegian FM, J G Store, held to commemorate "the exchange of instruments of ratification for the Russia-Norway Treaty on Maritime Delimitation and Cooperation in the Barents Sea and Arctic Ocean" in June 2011 (the dispute between the two countries over the so-called "grey zone" in the region), Lavrov was keen to emphasise what could be tackled "peacefully" through "mutual agreements and the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, without the intervention of any extra-regional forces."²⁹² Thus, both Lavrov and the *FT* would appear to be as of one in terms of what could be achieved if everyone adheres to solving disputes through international law.

Interestingly enough, as Lavrov was voicing his support for agreements negotiated and struck within the confines of international law, ITAR-TASS released a statement by a Russian MP– confirming a similar statement made in April 2010 – that Russia was speeding up the preparatory work on its re-submission and now intended "to file a claim in 2013."²⁹³ The MP in question was Chilingarov and in the press release, he was quoted as saying:

²⁸⁸ L Jakobsen, China prepares for an ice-free Arctic, (SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security, no 2010/2 Stockholm, March 2010), 1-16; 13.

²⁸⁹ Gordon G Chang, "China's Arctic policy", *The Diplomat*, 9/3/2010.

²⁹⁰ "Prinadlezhnost' khrebtu Lomonosova opredelyat uchenye", *Izvestiya*, 17/9/2010.

²⁹¹ "Thaw in the Arctic", *The Financial Times*, 30/4/2010.

²⁹² "Russian Foreign Minister's remarks following talks with Norwegian counterpart", (BBCM, 9/6/2011).

²⁹³ "Russia to submit claim over Arctic shelf to UN in 2013-minister", (BBCM, 19/4/2010); "Russia to file Arctic claim with UN earlier than planned – MP", (BBCM, 16/9/2010).

We had a consultation today and, bearing in mind that Canada has said that in 2013 it will file a claim to extend its continental shelf in the Arctic, while we planned to do that in 2014, we will speed up our work and will also file a claim in 2013, because there may be some disputable points. Russia is going to defend its interests in the North Pole vigorously.²⁹⁴

Thus, it all looks set for a very interesting future for the Arctic. There are a number of big questions to be answered in relation to Russia and UNCLOS, not least being how will Russia react if its re-submitted claim is not accepted by UN (again) or, worse still for Russia, completely rejected? Probably even worse than that would be if the claims of other nation states as regards the “ownership” of the ridges in question were accepted? Lavrov has stated that he will let the science decide, but the suspicion is he's saying that because he probably has a strong indication that the ridges can be scientifically proven to belong to the Siberian continental shelf, but what if the UN Commission judges the Russian data not to validate the Russian claim but finds the Canadian, or Danish, claim to be more compelling? Will Russia calmly step aside and let other nations help themselves to Russia's “treasure”? Given both its long and involved history with the Arctic, the military and strategic importance of the region, the possibility of a new potential trade route being opened to challenge the trade routes of the south, the long-term importance of the region's potential wealth to Russia's economic and political development, will Russia stand sportingly aside and let others carve up what *both* Russian Presidential candidates have publicly stated as “ours”?

Given what has been written throughout the whole of this paper concerning the importance of the potential wealth of the region to Russia's long-term development, if the UN negates Russia's Arctic territorial claim, what is Russia's back-up position? The answer to that question, and the others posed here earlier, will determine much of the future development not only of Russia, or even the member-states of the Arctic Five, but have truly very profound global consequences, as well.

Conclusion

As stated at the outset, this is a big topic to cover, involving so many different areas currently affecting Russian policy, both at the national and international levels. Given the global significance of the decision still to be arrived at by the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf, there is much at stake for all parties involved. Russia's history with the Arctic has been a long one, stretching back over centuries and involving many figures who have been prominent in the nation's history - Lomonosov, Mendeleev, Makarov, etc. The Arctic is more than just a frozen ocean to Russia; there was something strangely symbolic that the current President's first session as Chairman of his nation's Security Council, on becoming President, was devoted to analysing the security of the Arctic. In terms of the historical picture, Russia can claim almost 1,000 year involvement in the Arctic, from the first sailings of the local tribes in the North to Chilingarov's planting of the Russian flag on the Arctic seabed in 2007. Although widely condemned as a “stunt” and probably achieving little in advancing Russia's scientific claim to the shelf, nevertheless, as a symbolic gesture, it did not lack power and, for many Russians, asserted what they would consider to be a symbolic reinforcement of a self-evident truth, even emanating from the very mouths of the country's most senior political leadership, simply put: “the Arctic is ours.” So confident is the current political leadership in an eventual positive decision by the UN Commission that they are now more than publicly happy “to let the science decide.”

As the evidence has accumulated, concerning the potential wealth of the Arctic, Russia has published a number of policy documents concerning both the development and security of the region, all underlining the basic idea that the “treasure” of the Arctic is Russia's, both by dint of history, geography and, of course, science. Given the potential of the wealth lying both beneath the surface of the Arctic seabed, as well as in the waters themselves, Russia has been steadily improving its military-security infrastructure, partly as a response to decades of neglect, but also as a reaction to the intentions of other member-states of the Arctic Five, as well as those non-member-states of the Arctic Five whose appetite for the world's resources seems to know few limits. However, having been bitten once, in terms of their first claim submitted in 2001 and officially, at least, unaware, of the bids being put together by both the Canadians and the Danes, in particular, the Russians may still be in for yet another nasty surprise in the next few years, if, according to the UN Commission, the “science” decides in favour of one of the other rival bids and Russia does not achieve the international legal status for what it considers to be Russian territory.

²⁹⁴ “Russia to file...”, *ibid*.

If their re-submitted claim fails to gain the support of the UN Commission, what will be Russia's reaction? Does it have a "back-up" policy to take into account another failed bid to convince the world community that the Arctic is "theirs"? Neither of the two world's great powers – the USA and China – accept that Russian fundamental premise anyway and, in the light of a second rejected bid, it is impossible to envisage a set of circumstances where either of the two sides would switch positions and not challenge further Russian hegemony and control in the area. Russia, as a long-term player on the global stage, has always been good at creating "back-up" positions should things go bad: given its (too?) confident attitude in relation to the eventual decision of the UN Commission, has its confidence over-riden its natural disposition to think through an alternative strategy, (similar to playing a game of chess), just in case it does not get the decision it expects? Fearful of being physically boxed in by NATO, USA, China, has it intellectually boxed itself in, by not thinking through an alternative Arctic policy, if the current one fails?

To defend its economic interests in the region, Russia is expending not inconsiderable effort to ensure that the necessary military and security infrastructure is in place – partly correcting the neglect of the past twenty years – should the state require something a bit more muscular to challenge those who would wish to wrest control of the Arctic from Russian hands. Time and again, Russian commentators have increasingly underlined the fact that if Russia's national security interests are placed under threat, then the country should have the necessary muscle in place to effect a robust response to those seeking to challenge Russia's local position, including by force of arms if so decided by the Kremlin. Such a position may seem to us as out of odds with the way things should be done in the 21st century, but with NATO jets flying over Libya at the current moment in time, it would be harder for the West to criticise Russian military action in the Arctic if Russia was convinced that there was no other way to adequately defend vital Russian national interests there. Beefing up the Northern Fleet – Russia's primary military asset in the region – looks set to continue in the years ahead, as a way of convincing others that Russia is serious in its intent of defending this part of the world, as it has done so ever since the First World War. Russia has had to fight for control of its North on several occasions in the 20th century and has learnt how to. Given a number of published analyses over the past 4-5 years, it looks certain that, if push comes to shove, it will do so again. It will react to any attempt, by others, to upset the current balance of forces in the region.

As the sea ice becomes less of an issue, the NSR has potential to become a viable trade artery for Russia, but it is harder to see it making that quantitative leap which would allow it to become a northern version, say, of the Suez Canal. Considerable investment would be required for that potential scenario to be realised. But a knowledge of history shows that, when required, you would be foolhardy to bet against Russia pulling off such a feat. The NSR has proven itself in the past to be a vital lifeline for Russia and, even if the UN Commission's decision does go against Russia, with the right levels of investment, the NSR could prove itself to be a very lucrative venture still for the Russian government to develop. After all, regardless of the decision of the UN Commission, Russia will still have a very lengthy border to protect and defend and a waterway that could still be made to pay, IF global climate change continues to extend the length of the navigation season in the Arctic. Russia will also still need the Arctic in order to continue to maintain an effective retaliatory nuclear strike capability; would this be under threat if the decision does go against Russia and the country was forced to find new operational deployment areas, well away from the prying eyes of, potentially at least, 2/3 states that are in the process of submitting Arctic territorial claims?

In short, although the current leadership is keen to have its claim on the region asserted and approved by international law, and leave a notable legacy for future generations of Russians, if the decision does not go Russia's way, will Russia calmly step aside and let others reap its "treasure"? The answer to that particular question will be a determining factor in deciding both the destiny and shape not only of Russia, but could have consequences going far beyond Russia's northern shores.

Disclaimer

The views expressed in this paper are entirely and solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect official thinking and policy either of Her Majesty's Government or of the Ministry of Defence.

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