



Promoting a more transparent and accountable NATO

NATO's developing interest in the Arctic

By Nigel Chamberlain, NATO Watch

The view from SACEUR

Admiral James G. Stavridis, Commander of US European Command and NATO Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (SACEUR) said that the melting of the Arctic ice cap opens new opportunities, as well as risks and challenges, that will require increasing cooperation among regional nations.

The US Department of Defense reported that Northern European Chiefs of Defence met in Helsinki recently to discuss what might happen as shipping lanes become ice-free all year round. Stavridis predicted that there will be "more commercial traffic and scientific exploration missions, non-state actors trafficking illegal goods or other illicit cargo, or even just adventurous tourists". In turn, this could result in "manmade disasters like oil spills and ship accidents and the consequent need for appropriate response and rescue capabilities".

He added that cooperation, rather than Cold War confrontation, "can help build trust and focus our efforts in areas of mutual interest to maintain regional security", and suggested that the Arctic Council's efforts can help regional development. He cited the Arctic Council's recent *Search and Rescue Exercise 2012* which was led by Denmark's Greenland Command in a remote area of Greenland's east coast. Canada, Denmark, the Faroe Islands, Greenland, Iceland, Norway, Russia and the United States contributed personnel, authorities, aircraft, helicopters and ships to the exercise in order to evaluate their individual and collective capabilities.

Stavridis also cited this summer's *Exercise Northern Eagle* which brought together US, Russian and Norwegian ships, aircraft and helicopters in the Barents Sea to prepare for rescue and anti-piracy missions. The final stage of that exercise, conducted under Russian command, included the US Navy's destroyer *USS Farragut*, the Russian Northern Fleet's destroyer *Admiral Chabanenko* and the Norwegian coast guard vessel *KV Andenes*.

Finally, Stavridis emphasized the United States' long-term interest in, and commitment to, the Arctic.



(Royal Navy Sea King Mk4 Helicopter Takes Part in Arctic Flying Training – photo credit: UK MoD/ flickr)

No common ground....

In an August *International Relations and Security Network* briefing paper, [Marten Lindberg](#) points out that five of the eight Arctic Council members are also members of NATO but that there is no common ground within the Alliance as to what role it should play in the Arctic. At the 2010 Lisbon Summit NATO declared that its Arctic policies would set aside its traditional role as a force projector and deterrent in favour of monitoring sustainable development and political stability without linking it explicitly to security.

By contrast, a report in July, [Climate Change and International Security: the Arctic as a Bellwether](#), published by the Centre for Climate and Energy Solutions (C2ES) warned: "Although the pursuit of co-operation is the stated priority, most of the Arctic states have begun to rebuild and modernise their military capabilities in the region. The new

military programs have been geared towards combat capabilities that exceed mere constabulary capacity". And [Associated Press](#) reported that military leaders are preparing for a new kind of Cold War in the Arctic, anticipating that rising temperatures there will open up a treasure trove of resources, long-dreamed-of sea lanes and a slew of potential conflicts. The region is already buzzing with military activity that experts believe will increase significantly in the years ahead.

[NATO Watch](#) previewed the movement of major NATO and 'Partnership for Peace' forces into northern Norway in March in preparation for Exercise [Cold Response 2012](#). We suggested that it may have been more than a concerted effort to 'rehearse high intensity Crisis Response Operations in winter conditions within NATO with a UN mandate'.

....as the melting ice opens up new economic opportunities

In a [Foreign Policy paper](#) published at the end of October, James Holmes suggested that an ice-free Arctic Ocean would lead to "the most sweeping transformation of geopolitics since the Panama Canal opened. ... and ... There are commercial, constabulary, and military components to this enterprise. The United States must position itself at the forefront of polar sea power along all three axes".

He said that the nations of the Arctic Council, including five NATO members, will enjoy exclusive rights to fish and tap undersea resources in hundreds of thousands of square miles of water off their shores and that [territorial seas and exclusive economic zones](#) will be rigorously policed during ice-free intervals.

Growing Chinese interest

[China sent its first ship](#) into the Arctic this summer and has been lobbying intensely for permanent observer status on the Arctic Council. Chinese ministers have visited Denmark, Sweden and Iceland offering lucrative trade deals. High-level diplomats have also visited Greenland, where Chinese companies are investing in a developing mining industry, with proposals to import Chinese work crews for construction.

Governance issues and NATO's watching brief

Rights within the Arctic region are governed by the UN Convention of the [Law of the Sea](#), which gives Arctic nations an exclusive economic zone that extends 200 nautical miles from land, and to undersea resources farther away so long as they are on a continental shelf. The US Senate has refused to ratify the Convention.

The Arctic Council will determine the countries to be granted permanent observer status, which requires a unanimity vote. Iceland, Denmark and Sweden now openly support China's bid. Contacted by the [IHT](#) in September, the US State Department declined to say how it would vote.

In a [Heritage Foundation paper](#), Luke Coffey argues that the US "should make the Arctic a higher priority for NATO while working to allay the concerns of Canada, which is wary of a stronger NATO presence in the Arctic".

Arctic security was not included in NATO's 2010 Strategic Concept or in the 2012 Chicago NATO Summit declaration, probably due to Canadian opposition, Coffey speculates. He accuses NATO of sitting on the sidelines and proposes several ways that the US can encourage Member States to become actively engaged in the region, collectively.



(Canadian Forces Station (CFS) Alert, Nunavut, Arctic – photo credit: Jerome Lessard/QMI Agency / flickr)

NATO is certainly interested in the prospective developments 'in the High North'. See, for example, a [NATO Review](#) video '[The Arctic: too hot to ignore?](#)' from 2009. And in a January 2009 speech on 'Security Prospects in the High North', the then [Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer](#) asked several questions of his audience:

Should NATO, as an organisation, as an Alliance, discuss the possibility of stepping up its focus in the region? And if so, what form should this take? It might be worthwhile conducting practice search and rescue operations, or even disaster relief exercises But irrespective of the options taken, I think we need to ensure transparency, build trust and work towards cooperation when it comes to these issues.

And he suggested a watching brief for NATO that remains salient today:

If the most appropriate role for NATO in the High North is as part of a 'comprehensive approach', involving other players like the Arctic Council and the EU, then we will need a better understanding of what is already happening, and what is likely to happen in the future. NATO should continue to monitor the developments, upgrade our knowledge and look for opportunities in our day to day business.

The Arctic Council at work

More than 50 delegates from observer states and organisations [met in Stockholm on 6 November](#) to discuss both the Arctic and the Arctic Council. Junior ministers and ambassadors from observer states were joined by ad hoc observers including NGOs such as the WWF to intergovernmental organisations such as the Nordic Council of Ministers.

Research projects such as mapping of the Arctic seabed, air pollution effects on climate change, tundra ecology and changing values related to resource development in the Arctic, were presented. Projects related to marine oil spill prevention, preparedness and response were also discussed, as were procedures for expanding observer participation in the work of the Arctic Council which currently has [26 accredited observers](#) and [10 ad-hoc observers](#) awaiting approval.

A further meeting of senior Arctic officials, representatives of the Arctic Council's Member States, working groups, observers and organisations for Indigenous peoples took place in [Haparanda, Sweden on 14 and 15 November](#). The Council's six working groups reported on their projects including ocean acidification in the Arctic, the Arctic Biodiversity Assessment and the Arctic Ocean Review. Also discussed was the growing business sector interest in the region and how to ensure sustainable development in the Arctic.

Magnús Jóhannesson, Icelandic Secretary General of the Ministry for the Environment, was appointed as first [Director of the Arctic Council's Secretariat](#) at the meeting in Haparanda. The Secretariat's role is to strengthen the work of the Council and in communicating regional issues. It will be based in Tromsø, northern Norway.

Coincidentally, [NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen](#) was in Helsinki, Finland at the same time as the Arctic Council meeting just over the border.

Canada takes over the Chairmanship of the Arctic Council from Sweden in May 2013. Canada has reported resisted calls for NATO to be actively involved in the region. This cautious view is seemingly shared by the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, which adopted a [resolution](#) at its [meeting in Prague](#) last week urging NATO governments to limit their military presence in the Arctic to a minimum "in so far as this is prudent and feasible". The resolution also calls on NATO member states to develop greater transparency with Russia on military deployments and strategies in the Far North and to "work with key international partners to ensure that the Arctic remains a zone of international cooperation rather than a theatre of international rivalry and tension".

(Arctic ice viewed from aboard the Norwegian Coast Guard vessel, "KV Svalbard", during Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's visit to the Polar ice rim – photo credit: UN/ flickr)



Conclusions

1. The lack of information in the public domain regarding NATO's prospective role in Arctic security is a particular concern, especially given Admiral Stavrides's recent pronouncements on the subject. The NATO website, for example, has no reference to Arctic Security or the High North in the [Thematic Index](#).
2. The UN Convention on Law of the Sea is a crucial agreement for framing future economic development in the Arctic region and environmental protection issues must not be downgraded by pressure from political and economic interests.
3. Emergency and disaster preparedness in the region are a natural corollary to economic exploitation but they should not be used as a cover for militarising the Far North. For that reason, an expanded Arctic Council is the more appropriate body to promote regional development rather than NATO, partly as Russia is a Member State of the former and not the latter.