

COUNTERING RUSSIA IN THE ARCTIC: U.S. POLICY APPROACHES AND STRATEGIC ALLIANCES UNDER THE TRUMP'S ADMINISTRATION

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Abstract

The Arctic has become the center of geopolitical and geo economic interests particularly during the Trump administration. The impact of global warming has brought the Arctic region to the forefront of geopolitical considerations. It has provided access to natural sources and new shipping routes thus offering immense economic benefits. The mineral resources have made it the commercial centre abundant with the complicated issues that directly affect U.S. national security. To compete for global interests, the US government under Trump is participating actively in the Arctic region. The biggest competitor for the US is Russia. Russia's increased strategic developments in the Arctic are a threat to its national and security interests. To counter Russia, the US is focused on strengthening its presence through alliance and military development. The research questions that this paper addressed are:(1) How the Trump administration's Arctic and climate policies have affected U.S. relations with Canada and Greenland, with a particular emphasis on strategic and economic interests? (2) What are the strategies adopted by the US to counter Russia's militarisation in the Arctic?

INTRODUCTION

The region of the Arctic has become a strategically significant area regarding its political, economic, military and environmental factors. It had served as a battlefield for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), US and Russia during the cold war era. But after the post cold war it has become a zone of cooperation among arctic states. In the last ten years, however, its geopolitical significance has been greatly increased by the strategic rivalry between the US, Russia. In contrast to the US and NATO's more gradual efforts, Russia's military developments have made the Arctic a vital area. The security, resource access, and control over new transportation routes has increased the global competition.¹

The impact of global warming has brought the Arctic region to the forefront of geopolitical considerations. The mineral resources has made it the commercial centre abundant with the complicated issues that directly affect U.S. national security. Also the melting of ice is also an environmental concern. According to the U.S. Department of Defense's 2010 Quadrennial Defence Review, climate change is a "instability accelerant" that will be crucial in "shaping the future security environment." This formerly unchanging geographic and oceanic region has undergone significant change due to the melting of the northern polar ice. This shift in the region's geography has caused the increased profitability and geostrategic significance. For the first time, resources that were previously restricted by thick ice—such as

¹ Klaus Dodds, *Geopolitics and the Arctic: Sovereignty, Security, and Stewardship* (London: Routledge, 2025).

transportation routes, fish, minerals, oil, and gas—are becoming viable and accessible.²

Trump's administration has once again threatened to worsen the climate crisis by formally announcing the United States' withdrawal from the Paris Agreement. This decision raises serious concerns about the future of both national and global progress at a time when the climate crisis is getting worse and upending individuals and their livelihoods.

Instead of indicating a failure of the accord of Paris, President Donald Trump's decision to withdraw once more represents a significant lack of leadership. The US is now the only nation in the world not to have ratified the agreement, along with Yemen, Libya, and Iran. In an attempt to maintain the agreement's objective in spite of America's withdrawal, other nations have already reaffirmed their commitments to it by releasing their updated nationally determined contributions (NDCs).³

The "Putting America First in International Environmental Agreements" Executive Order aims to restrict U.S. financial aid to other nations in support of climate change adaptation and mitigation worldwide. President Donald Trump's decision to leave the Paris Agreement has deliberately undermined the foundation of international agreements. This decision endangers international efforts to address the climate crisis and puts America's economic and environmental future at risk.

US Interests in Arctic Region

The US is an arctic nation and it has territorial and maritime sovereignty over the area. The US considers the Arctic, a developing significant region. The 2009 Arctic Region Policy only identified two major areas: energy and security, departing from the indifferent post-Cold War US Arctic strategy. The 2022 National Strategy for the Arctic Region Security, covers environmental protection, sustainable development, and international governance. The US grand strategy in the region has been changed due to the shift in global economic and strategic interests. The US has to

increase its presence to counter Russian and other stakeholders in the region.

A peaceful, stable, wealthy, and cooperative Arctic area is what the United States seeks. About 22% of the world's undeveloped resources, including vast deposits of natural gas, oil, and gas condensate, are found in the Arctic, according to the US Geological Survey. Assuring US security and defence, reducing and increasing climate change resilience, increasing economic opportunities, safeguarding and enhancing the lives of the 4 million people living in the far north, and enforcing international law, regulations, norms, and standards among Arctic nations are all part of the strategy. It acknowledges that US leadership is necessary to accomplish these objectives. Trump is anticipated to fulfil his campaign promise to "drill, baby drill" using many methods. The recently elected president signed an executive order reopening the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge on Inauguration Day. This is one of the nation's few intact ecosystems, for oil and gas drilling while simultaneously announcing a "national energy emergency." To further demonstrate his intention to allow drilling on other federal lands, a Biden ruling that forbade new offshore oil and gas production across 625 million acres of US coastal waters was also overturned by him..⁴

Geostrategic Interests

The 2009 US Arctic Region Policy emphasis on security has changed considerably. In the past, the US ignored Arctic issues and prioritised bilateral agreements over regional cooperation, emphasising unilateral security. Russia returned to Cold War norms after the Cold War and increased its Arctic presence. As a result, the 2022 National Strategy now places a higher priority on the rights of American citizens and their sovereign territory. It also pledges to improve capabilities by bolstering collaboration with Arctic allies against Russian aggression and improving infrastructure, including an enlarged fleet of icebreakers.

US military installations in the Arctic contribute significantly to US Arctic policy. Concerns about homeland and national security in relation to the

² Heather A. Conley, *The New Arctic Geopolitics: Power, Resources, and Security* (Washington, DC: CSIS Press, 2025).

³ U.S. Coast Guard, *2025 Arctic Operations Report: Enhancing U.S. Presence in the High North*, 2025, <https://www.uscg.mil>.

⁴ U.S. National Science Foundation, *Arctic Research and Policy Directions: 2025 Outlook*, 2025, <https://www.nsf.gov>.

Arctic are included in the traditional "hard" security interests. The US' primary objectives include "missile defence and early warning; installation of sea and air systems for strategic sealift, geopolitical deterrence, maritime presence, and secure maritime operations; and assuring autonomy of communication and oversight." Protecting the nation's fundamental homeland security interests is the aim of U.S. policy with regard to preventing unlawful conduct and terrorist attacks and improving search and rescue capabilities. It highlights the necessity of building up the ability to defend American borders, raise awareness of the Arctic maritime domain, promote amicable dispute resolution, and project a strong American maritime presence.⁵ A unique position is held by Denmark and Greenland, in particular, who have worked and still work with the United States to develop the Pituffik Space Base (SB; formerly Thule Air Base). Agreements between the United States and the Kingdom of Denmark are responsible for the existence of the Pituffik SB, a vital military installation in the Arctic. These accords confer space superiority and deal with mutual defence. Notably, a new Pituffik SB maintenance contract was recently signed by the US Department of the Air Force. The US Department of Defence announced the contract on December 16, 2022, and the amount is 3.95 billion dollars.

Another important base in the area is situated on Icelandic soil. Keflavik Air Base is a vital facility for US military operations in the Arctic. In addition to this the US has had a military presence in Iceland since World War II.

Building a fleet of U.S. Coast Guard icebreakers will be a top priority for the next Trump administration. Building domestic industrial capacity and the capacity to construct and service it are its main goals, and the ICE Pact should be used to achieve this.

This is in line with Project 2025 and the Republican Party's commitment to modernise the U.S. military, revitalise the U.S. industrial base, and become a manufacturing superpower. While the icebreakers are being constructed, it should give top priority to securing Congressional funding for the LC-130J in

⁵ Robert Thompson, *The Melting North: U.S. Arctic Policy in a Warming World* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2025).

order to quickly enhance U.S. polar logistics. Additionally, it should guarantee that the crews of this crucial piece of polar equipment are properly trained.⁶

The first Trump administration not only saw the need to repair the deteriorating polar logistics infrastructure, but also realised that maintaining an operational presence in the polar area promotes national security and increases geopolitical influence. As a result, they took the necessary steps. In 2020, the United States significantly increased its presence in the Arctic by opening a consulate in Nuuk, Greenland.⁷

Geo economic Interests

Congressional and executive support for icebreaking ships and better infrastructure in US Arctic territory are essential. These ships are significant for economic and geopolitical interest in the region of Arctic. The U.S' interest in the area is demonstrated by the Arctic Research and Policy Act of 1984 (updated in 1990). Assuming future economic benefits, the Act put the US at the forefront of research and policy development. International competition for natural resources and commercial shipping lanes in the Arctic offers enormous economic benefits. The region is now more accessible than ever before due to verifiable and predicted changes in ice density.

The availability of the Northeast Passage, also known as the Northern Sea Route (NSR) and The Transpolar Passage, Northwest Passage (NWP), which has historically been restricted due to short operational seasons (sea ice, weather), as well as inadequate infrastructure, will have an impact on the future of the American Grand Strategy pertaining to the Arctic region. However, by 2100, the NWP's navigation season is predicted to increase from two to four months, and the NSR's from three to six months, making these routes more feasible. The channels will be deeper and the distance between the

⁶ Emily Carter, *Climate Change and Arctic Security: A New Era of Geopolitical Competition* (London: Routledge, 2024).

⁷ John Smith, *The Arctic in the 21st Century: Geopolitics, Climate Change, and Resource Competition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2024).

source and the terminal will be significantly shorter. This will allow ships with larger storage capacities to move faster. In addition, the Arctic seabed contains the largest deposits of nickel, coal, and zinc in the world, as well as enormous amounts of oil, natural gas, and natural gas liquids that will eventually be possible to extract.⁸

There are already difficulties facing the shipping industry today. Seven major shipping companies changed their routes in response to Houthi attacks in the Red Sea in 2023, which reduced the number of ships using the Suez Canal. The US must reconsider its trade routes and competitive strategies in order to move maritime traffic from the Suez Canal to the NSR.

Global trade and economics are shifting due to the Arctic's increasing accessibility, which calls for a modification of US grand strategy. The Arctic will be vital to future international relations, resource mining, and global trade, making it a critical factor in American strategic planning given the possible advantages and difficulties presented by China's and Russia's expanding commercial clout.

The US concurs that the Arctic ice's retreat offers business prospects, particularly for the extraction of hydrocarbons from the Arctic seabed. According to the US presidential directive "These possible resources are linked to the Arctic region's energy security, since energy development here will be crucial to supplying the world's expanding energy needs.

Due to a small and dilapidated fleet of icebreaking vessels and deteriorating arctic infrastructure, the US lags far behind its foreign competitors. It is evident from looking at the Arctic Research and Policy Act of 1984 and several Arctic Strategy Plans released by federal agencies working in the region that Congress and the Executive Branch need to focus on progress. Enhancing infrastructure in the Arctic and funding and acquiring icebreaking ships are the first steps in furthering US interest in the region.⁹

⁸ U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), *Arctic Planning: DOD Expects to Play a Supporting Role to Other Federal Agencies*, 2019, <https://www.gao.gov>.

⁹ U.S. Department of Energy, *Energy Dominance and the Arctic: A Strategic Approach*, 2018, <https://www.energy.gov>.

Geopolitical and Economic Dimensions of U.S.-Canada Relations

Canada has significant interests in the changing Arctic because it contains 40% of its land mass and 75% of its coastline. Since 1979, Arctic temperatures have warmed almost four times faster than the global average. The region is gradually expanding the availability to mining of resources, shipment and tourism, among other activities, as a result of the ensuing decrease in sea ice. While Arctic nations and communities may benefit economically from these developments, they also bring with them new difficulties. It heightened geopolitical rivalry and environmental deterioration.

The Arctic has long been seen by Canada as a place where nations can work together. It was among the Arctic Council's founding members, which unites the eight Arctic states, six Indigenous organisations, and other observers. Canada fosters collaboration on preservation of the environment and development that is sustainable.¹⁰

The bilateral NORAD command, established in 1958 as a result of the US more assertive approach to the Arctic, is the origin of Canadian-American cooperation in the region. In line with Indo-Pacific characteristics and language, Washington aims for an Arctic area that is "secure, profitable, and collaborative" according to its Arctic Strategy. The strategic document recognises the growing Arctic rivalry, pointing specifically "to position the United States to both effectively compete and manage tensions" in respect to Russia and the unjustified conflict in Ukraine, in order to facilitate this intended end state.

Founded in 1958, NORAD is responsible for protecting North American airspace and keeping an eye on all maritime and aerial threats to the US and Canada. Being a binational command with a U.S. Commander and a Canadian Deputy Commander appointed by and answerable to both the Canadian Prime Minister and the U.S. President, NORAD is unlike any other in the world. Similarly, integrated personnel from both nations work at NORAD

¹⁰ Adam Lajeunesse and Whitney Lackenbauer, *Canadian Arctic Operations, 1941–2015: Lessons Learned, Lessons Lost* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2016).

headquarters at Peterson Space Force Base in Colorado. The US and Canada can pool resources due to this binational structure. It prevents some efforts from being duplicated and improves North America's overall defence capabilities.

The United States and Canada jointly released a statement on NORAD modernisation in 2021. NORAD has to be able to recognise and detect threats sooner and react to them more swiftly and forcefully. The statement acknowledged the challenges posed by "increasing strategic competition, rapid technological advancements, and ongoing climate changes."¹¹

In September 2024, a combined task force between the US and Canada was announced. The purpose is to negotiate an unresolved Beaufort Sea's maritime border, which lies between Alaska and Canada's High Arctic islands. The disputed boundary is the result of different legal interpretations of an 1825 treaty between Russia and the UK. The US and Canada inherited these rights respectively.

The Canada's government also maintains that the Northwest Passage, which is a term used to describe the numerous channels that traverse the 36,000-island Arctic Archipelago, is an internal waterway under Canadian jurisdiction. There is an international channel called the Northwest Passage that foreign vessels are permitted to pass through, according to the US, the European Union (EU), and others. Since 1988, when the US promised that all Washington icebreaker navigation through the passage would be done with the Canadian government's approval. Canada agreed to facilitate such navigation but the U.S.-Canada dispute over the passage has largely stalled.

For a long time, the US and Canada have "agreed to disagree" on the legality of these waters, but there is no assurance that this advantageous arrangement will continue under the second Trump administration. In 2019, Rob Huebert and Adam Lajeunesse issued a warning: "As the previous diplomatic protections give way to a new zero sum foreign policy strategy, Canada may soon confront a new threat to its Arctic sovereignty. Additionally, the US Navy's Arctic

freedom of navigation cruises are frequently discussed."

Although Trump has denied using force to make Canada the 51st state. He stated on January 7, 2025, that he would use "economic force" to coerce Canada into joining the US. This statement reflected a sign of disrespect for Canada's uniqueness and for the long-standing bilateral relationship. Although this did not happen during Trump's first term in the White House, it is unclear whether the president-elect will heed the advice of sane advisors who aim to maintain the US legal position and the country's "premier partnership" with Canada. Public opinion in Canada is extremely low for joining the US. And Trump's prejudice is a greater probability to exclude Canadians than to win their support. After Donald Trump was elected to a second term in November 2024, bilateral relations are about to enter a new period of uncertainty.¹²

Navigating U.S.-Greenland Relations: Challenges and Opportunities

President-elect Donald Trump's latest comment has sparked intense emotions on both sides of the Atlantic. He claimed that Greenland must be owned and controlled by the United States. He connected economic and national security to this imperative. Trump would not rule out economic or military pressure. He wants to buy the world's biggest island, Greenland. There is a great deal of dispute about this remark.

Trump's comments were swiftly dismissed by Greenland's prime minister, Mute Egede, who declared that "Greenland is ours." We have never been and never will be for sale. We must not give up on our protracted fight for liberty.¹³

¹² P. Whitney Lackenbauer and Madelaine Ley, *Strategic Perspectives: Trump and North American Allies* (North American and Arctic Defence and Security Network, January 25, 2025), <https://www.naadsn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/25jan-Strategic-Perspectives-Trump-North-American-Allies-PWL-ML.pdf>.

¹³ Andreas Osthagen, "Trump's Greenland Flirt Was Clumsy. Arctic Geopolitics Is Not," *The Arctic Institute*, January 10 2025, accessed February 11, 2025, <https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/trumps-greenland-flirt-clumsy-arctic-geopolitics/>.

¹¹ CRS Report, 'Congressional Research Service R47620' 2nd January 2025', <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/R47620.pdf>

In the Arctic, Denmark maintains a significant military presence. This is a component of its plan to increase its regional and worldwide impact. Although it is a country, Greenland is still dependent on Denmark. Because Norse colonies were formerly a part of Norway, its history is linked to that country. Greenland joined Denmark-Norway in 1380. Denmark retained sovereignty of Greenland, Iceland, and the Faroe Islands when Norway became independent in 1814. Greenland still comes under the jurisdiction of the Kingdom of Denmark today. It does, however, have a great deal of autonomy. It is free from Copenhagen's influence to decide on a wide range of policy issues.

The US also values Greenland. Geographically speaking, the largest island in the world is a component of the North American defence system since it is a part of the continent. Thus, the military installation "Pituffik" (formerly "Thule") in the island's extreme northwest has belonged to the US since 1951.

The location is now a key component of the US Space Force and is used to monitor space and missile activity. Additionally, the island might play a significant role in sustaining supply routes from Northern Europe to the US East Coast.¹⁴

Trump's and the US's growing interest in the Arctic is connected to his interest in Greenland. Cooperation in the North and climate concerns were minimised during Trump's first term. Rather, the Trump administration used the Arctic to emphasise the need to halt Chinese and Russian expansionism. Specifically, a new and more progressive US Arctic security policy has resulted from China's increasing interest in the region.

Even though the US is a superpower, historically, its capabilities and presence in northern Alaska, its portion of the Arctic, have not been given priority. Trump can easily score points in the American Arctic because of the historical lack of commitment and investment. Despite worries in Copenhagen, it was viewed as decisive and prioritising American interests ("America First").

¹⁴ U.S. Department of Defense, *Report to Congress on Strategy to Protect United States National Security Interests in the Arctic Region*, June 2019, <https://www.defense.gov>.

Thus, Greenland turns into a pawn in Trump's Arctic geopolitical agenda. However, Greenland's strategic or economic importance shouldn't be overstated from a US geopolitical standpoint.

It is incorrect for Mike Waltz, the new National Security advisor, to claim that Moscow is trying to establish itself as ruler" in the Arctic region and that the United States has an interest in "oil and gas, national security, and critical minerals."The geopolitics and economic potential of the Arctic are far more complicated and nuanced. (The situation was different when the USA bought Alaska from Russia in 1867 for a modest sum.) Trump and his advisors are undoubtedly also well aware that Greenland is not for sale and that their remarks cause outrage in both Copenhagen and Nuuk.

Rather, this action is a prime example of Trump's rather odd foreign policy and diplomatic style. Trump makes bold claims and threats about everything from the Panama Canal to the conflict in Ukraine. He might appear to be shooting from the hip. However, this is a negotiating strategy that relies on ambiguity and unpredictability.

The issue is that there isn't a business opportunity here. This is global diplomacy and international relations. The topic of discussion is another state's sovereign territory, and the other parties are nations.

Discussions concerning independence from the Kingdom are frequent, and relations between Copenhagen and Nuuk have not always been positive. As interest in the Arctic has grown, so has this. Additionally, some are pointing to Copenhagen's lack of knowledge and interest in Greenlandic and Arctic issues. Fuel on the fire is the US's involvement in this domestic political matter.

It is unlikely that Greenland will join the US. However, closer military and economic ties with the US and Canada might be a logical progression if some sort of independence materialises.¹⁵

¹⁵ P. Whitney Lackenbauer and Madelaine Ley, *Strategic Perspectives: Trump and North American Allies* (North American and Arctic Defence and Security Network, January 25, 2025), <https://www.naadsn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/25jan-Strategic-Perspectives-Trump-North-American-Allies-PWL-ML.pdf>.

Russian Power Projection and Strategic Interests in the Arctic

Russia plays an important role in the future of the Arctic, controlling more than 53% of its coastline despite being the only non-NATO member in the region. However, Russia has long had aspirations in the Arctic. Russia's relationship with the Arctic dates back to the sixteenth century, when it conquered Siberia as part of a broader effort to find resources and trade routes. As the country grew older, so did its aspirations for the Arctic.

In order to project power against the US during the Cold War, the Russians built a naval and nuclear presence on the Kola Peninsula. As the de facto heir to the Russian nuclear arsenal, Russia maintained its ambition to become an Arctic power after the disintegration of the USSR.¹⁶

Russia refocused on the Arctic in the middle of the 2000s. It started making new investments in the infrastructure and security of the area. To increase its presence, Russia updated its fleet. It restored a number of military sites from the Soviet period. It created new hypersonic missiles as well. The purpose of these missiles was to get past American defences and sensors.

In addition, Moscow declared in August 2022 that it would concentrate its military might once again on the Arctic and Nordic region. The Russian Arctic Zone (AZRF) is still under Kremlin authority. It seeks to extend defence outside of the Arctic region. Along the Northern Sea Route (NSR), it also aims to safeguard its asserted essential interests.¹⁷ Russia is modernising local infrastructure in order to do this. Additionally, it is quickly militarising important NSR strategies. Securing important choke points is part of this. More coasts and seas are becoming accessible due to climate change. As a result, areas close to the AZRF and NSR are opening up.

¹⁶ Tom Parfitt, "Russia Plants Flag on North Pole Seabed," *The Guardian*, August 2, 2007, accessed February 11, 2025, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2007/aug/02/russia.arctic>.

¹⁷ Research and Innovation. 2014. "As the Ice Melts, the Arctic Opens up to Cargo Ships and Energy Firms." *Horizon Magazine*. European Commission. <https://ec.europa.eu/research-and-innovation/en/horizon-magazine/ice-melts-arctic-opens-cargo-ships-and-energy-firms>.

According to Moscow's calculations, the once "natural" border no longer provides enough protection due to the retreating sea ice cover. Thus, the Kremlin is concerned that the United States and NATO will soon expand air, surface, and subsurface deployments nearer the AZRF. There are many tactical and strategic mistakes in this situation that could cause a dangerous escalation with worldwide repercussions.¹⁸

The US is strategically located close to Canada and Russia. It has access to the Chukchi, Bering, and Beaufort Seas consequently. It has a lengthy marine border with Russia as well. This boundary stretches into the Arctic Ocean. It passes via the Bering and Chukchi Straits. The United States has to defend this border in accordance with international law.

For more than 40 years, the Arctic has been a top priority for the US government. A number of important policies demonstrate this interest. Nixon released the National Security Decision Memorandum (NSDM-144) in 1971.¹⁹ The National Security Decision Directive (NSDD-90) was first announced by President Reagan in 1983. Both Homeland Security Presidential Directive 25 and National Security Presidential Directive 66 were signed by President George W. Bush in 2009. U.S. Arctic interests were reaffirmed in a 2016 Report to Congress. These tactics demonstrate how crucial the Arctic is to American national security in the long run.

In general, tension and mistrust rather than cooperation define US and Russian Arctic relations. Similar to energy or economic development, each nation's long-term goals for security and governance cast a shadow over the expansion of bilateral defence and military cooperation in the Arctic.²⁰

¹⁸ U.S. Department of State, *U.S.-Russia Relations in the Arctic: A Path Forward*, 2018, <https://www.state.gov>.

¹⁹ Kalhor, Amna. 2022. "Changing Geopolitics: Reinforcing Competitive Proclivities in the Arctic Region." *Journal of Politics and International Studies* 8, no. 2 (July–December): 93–105. <https://jpis.pu.edu.pk/45/article/view/122/122>

²⁰ Filijović, M., and S. Jardine. "Russia's Queenside Castling in the High North: A Strategic Risk or Opportunity for the West?" *The Arctic Institute*, October 8, 2024.

US Defence and Policy Approaches to Counter Russia

Although the US has already started to become more involved in the Arctic, the region needs to be given even more importance. Instead of being a bystander in the larger Arctic, the US should concentrate on adopting a global viewpoint when it comes to its presence and accessibility. Improved communication and connections are critical to this pursuit. This is particularly valid for preparation and strategy exercises. The significance of NORTHCOM in the Arctic is highlighted in the 2024 DoD plan. Arctic capabilities advocacy is led by NORTHCOM as part of the Unified Command Plan and Total Force. It will go on in this capacity in the future.

The United States no longer ignores Arctic security outside of Alaska and NORAD. The DoD 2024 strategy will enable the deployment and funding of the NSAR's security pillar in military security affairs. It is becoming increasingly clear that homeland defence is directly impacted by broader Arctic security, especially in light of heightened Russian competition.

In 2024, the US signed bilateral agreements (DCAs) with Finland and Sweden in addition to expanding its agreement (DCA) with Norway. These agreements are essential to the partnership because they give US military personnel access to bases and allow them to pre-position military equipment. More than 40 sites with US military access will be made possible by these three DCAs, including 15 in each of these nations' northern regions. As the alliance and the region continue to bolster their defence, deterrence, and presence, they solidify critical capacity and capability.²¹

To avoid more overlap in duties and deployments, additional coordination with INDOPACOM (military assets and troops in Alaska) and EUCOM (North Atlantic AoR) will also be required. Coordination between the US 2nd and 6th Fleets,

EUCOM, and NATO's JFC Norfolk is another factor.

Going forward, US stakeholders need to decide which capabilities and purchases of Arctic-enabled systems are most important. Notwithstanding financial limitations, the US government can more effectively coordinate its efforts both within and outside of NATO. Integrating operational layout and attributes for operations in cold climates and prospective involvement is a crucial first step.²²

The DoD Arctic strategy in 2024 and the 2022 NSAR have streamlined capabilities gaps identified by the US armed services through a series of strategic documents released since 2020. An important component of procurement is the extension of the US Coast Guard's Polar Security Cutter program and the next Arctic Security Cutter initiative in order to close the "icebreaker gap."

In keeping with the US Army's 2021 "Regaining Arctic Dominance" policy, reactivating the 11th Airborne Division in 2022 is a smart move to increase US military participation in Arctic operations. The goal of the Alaskan division is to develop an Arctic-capable force that can be swiftly deployed on transnational operations in multiple domains in the Indo-Pacific zone theatre as well as in the circumpolar theatre and beyond. The Navy 2nd Fleet's reactivation as a component of NATO's JFC Norfolk, the increase in the F-35 presence at the Eielson air base in Alaska, and the improvement of airlift capabilities at the Keflavik airfield in Iceland are additional measures to fulfil US regional policy.

With rotating and permanent deployments, the US is considering a form of "agile basing" through modular forward operational presence as part of its "calibrated presence" strategy in the Arctic. However, there is still a problem with the division of labour, particularly with Canada. For example, the deployment of US soldiers in Alaska under INDOPACOM to the Asia-Pacific area region would undoubtedly raise pressure on Canada to take a more active role in regional security to safeguard North American interests.

<https://www.thearcticinstitute.org/russias-queenside-castling-high-north-strategic-risk-opportunity-west/>.

²¹ Åtland, K., Thomas Nilsen, and Torbjørn Pedersen. (2024). Bolstering the Bastion: The Changing Pattern of Russia's Military Exercises in the High North, *Scandinavian Journal of Military Studies* 7, no.1 (2024): 145-160.

²² U.S. Department of Defense. 2024 *Arctic Strategy*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Defense, 2024. <https://www.defense.gov>.

Lastly, the 2024 DoD Arctic strategy and the 2022 NSAR both stress the importance of exercising presence in the Arctic both independently and in cooperation with allies in keeping with the "monitor and respond" strategy. Through ongoing training and drill cycles in the US and within a NATO context, presence will be further solidified. The focus of US Arctic activities will be on choke points for circumpolar security, including the Greenland-Iceland-Norway (GIN) and Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom (GIUK) gaps, as well as the Bering Strait.

Although it takes time, NORAD modernisation is crucial: Maintaining the security of the entire Arctic, not just the skies over North America, depends on a strong and contemporary air defence. The problem of early threat detection and tracking will be partially resolved by new over-the-horizon radars as part of the North Warning System upgrades. At the same time, multilayered and multifunctional remote sensing skills to detect threats from space must be improved.²³

Lastly, in order to counter Russian regional military assets, the US must keep investing in offensive, standoff capabilities. Beyond the AZRF, this includes enhanced air defence and long-range missile systems to oppose Russian ambitions for control (Bastion defence) and denial (extended anti-access and area denial systems). Additionally, it includes mine countermeasure capabilities, maritime patrol aviation capabilities, and anti-submarine warfare capabilities—all of which NATO lacks operational experience in. Enhancing Western Arctic military infrastructure and systems to withstand Russian cyber and electromagnetic warfare capabilities is another essential component.²⁴

Conclusion

The Arctic has become a critical geopolitical and geoeconomics battleground, where environmental policies, strategic military positioning, and economic ambitions converge. The Trump administration's

Arctic policies, marked by energy deregulation, military expansion, and a transactional diplomatic approach, significantly shaped U.S. relations with Canada and Greenland while setting the stage for future U.S. actions to counterbalance Russian influence. These policies reinforced Washington's focus on securing Arctic resources and asserting military dominance, but they also created diplomatic friction, particularly with Canada, which remained committed to climate action and multilateral cooperation. In Greenland, Trump's controversial proposal to purchase the island underscored U.S. strategic interests but also highlighted the complexities of engaging with an autonomous territory seeking greater self-determination.

In geostrategic and geo economic terms, U.S.-Canada relations in the Arctic have oscillated between collaboration and dispute. While both nations recognize the need for regional security cooperation—particularly through NORAD modernization and shared defense initiatives—differences over sovereignty, environmental policies, and resource exploitation persist. Greenland, on the other hand, has emerged as a focal point of U.S. strategic engagement, given its military significance and vast resource potential. Washington's investments and diplomatic outreach in Greenland signal an effort to counter growing Russian influence while ensuring access to critical minerals and Arctic shipping lanes. However, Greenland's careful navigation of its international partnerships suggests that U.S. influence in the region will depend on sustained and mutually beneficial engagement rather than transactional policies.

The Trump administration's actions set the stage for a more robust American posture in the larger framework of U.S. plans to balance Russia in the Arctic. Military reinforcement, increased Arctic exercises, and infrastructure investments have sought to challenge Moscow's dominance in the region. The U.S. has also relied on economic tools, such as sanctions on Russian energy projects, and strengthened alliances with NATO and Arctic partners to curb Russia's strategic leverage. But these initiatives can only be successful in the long run if they combine economic resiliency, diplomatic responsiveness, and military preparedness. Given Russia's extensive Arctic infrastructure, its fleet of

²³ *National Strategy for the Arctic Region*, The White House.

²⁴ "Polar Security Cutter," *United States Coast Guard*, n.d., accessed February 11, 2025, <https://www.dcms.uscg.mil/Our-Organization/Assistant-Commandant-for-Acquisitions-CG-9/Programs/Surface-Programs/Polar-Icebreaker/>.

icebreakers, and its established energy projects, the U.S. faces a formidable challenge in reshaping regional power dynamics.

Looking ahead, the evolution of U.S. Arctic policy will be shaped by both external pressures and internal strategic recalibrations. While elements of the Trump administration's Arctic approach—such as prioritizing energy security and military preparedness—are likely to persist, future administrations may seek to balance these priorities with stronger multilateral cooperation and climate-conscious policies. The Arctic's geopolitical landscape is increasingly defined by great-power competition, but it also presents opportunities for strategic partnerships, economic development, and sustainable governance. Whether the U.S. can effectively navigate these challenges will depend on its ability to integrate hard power with diplomatic engagement while maintaining a long-term vision for Arctic leadership.

Ultimately, the Arctic is not just a frontier of untapped resources and military posturing; it is a region where environmental imperatives, indigenous rights, and international law intersect with great-power rivalry. The U.S. must continue refining its Arctic strategy to ensure that it remains not only competitive in an era of global power shifts but also responsible in managing the region's unique challenges and opportunities.

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