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## **STRATEGIC CONTROL OF THE ARCTIC AND POSSIBLE ARMED CONFLICT OF THE GREAT POWERS**

### **Resume**

The geopolitical competition of great powers over the control of strategically important natural resources is an integral part of the political agenda aimed at achieving economic and thus military dominance on a global level. The territory of the Arctic, as the northernmost part of the planet Earth, has large reserves of natural resources (primarily oil and gas), the sovereign control and exploitation of which are contested by the countries that surround (a total of eight of them) this area, but also recently by countries that have granted themselves the status of “near arctic state” like the People’s Republic of China. The trend of accelerated militarization of the Arctic in the period after the closure of the Cold War can be interpreted as a consequence of the damaged relationship between the key actors of international politics and different perceptions of the future global order. The goal of this work is a systematic description of the dynamics of relations between Arctic states with a special focus on the USA (including NATO) and the Russian Federation and their activities in the military-defense sphere. To achieve the projected goal, the technique of content analysis of strategic documents, the technique of narrative analysis and historical comparative analysis was used. The results of this research indicate the increased interest of the great powers in controlling the Arctic, i.e. the natural resources present in this area, as well as the strategically important international traffic corridor, the

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Northern Sea Route. Accordingly, the engagement of the armed forces should enable the unhindered implementation of the defined political-economic activities of the Arctic states with the status of a great power.

**Keywords:** Arctic, natural resources, militarization, control, Northern Sea Route

## INTRODUCTION

The worldwide trend of intensive consumption, population growth at the global level and less availability of non-renewable natural resources such as water, oil, gas and various minerals can be seen as specific indicators of future intra-state and inter-state conflicts. Moreover, geopolitics and control over the exploitation of natural resources are constantly intertwined through the search for power, space and prosperity. Geopolitical competition over natural resources appears as a central issue in the national agenda not only for developing countries (rich in resources) but also for developed countries that consume resources to maintain their economic and military dominance. Seen from the aspect of security sciences, the potential conflict over natural resources is related to sociological, political and economic factors used to understand the context of the emergence and development of such an unstable security situation.

The Arctic, as the northernmost region occupying 6% of the surface of the planet Earth, has been identified as a strategically significant natural resource primarily for the countries that surround it (Canada, Denmark, Iceland, Finland, Norway, Sweden, the United States of America and the Russian Federation) and increasingly for other geopolitical actors (People's Republic of China). It is estimated that 10% of the world's oil production and 25% of gas comes from Arctic sources, including 10% of fish reserves. In addition to the huge quantities of the aforementioned natural resources, the Arctic represents an extremely important corridor for the development of international transport with two legs recognizable as the North-East and North-West Sea Routes. Accordingly, the interest of the great powers in controlling the Arctic Circle becomes particularly relevant after the Second World War, when the two superpowers begin the construction of military bases, airports and warehouses of nuclear weapons, bombers and ballistic missiles. However, after the post-Cold

War stagnation and the establishment of a new mechanism of cooperation between the Arctic states, a new phase of militarization followed, which was further accelerated by the escalation of the Ukrainian crisis in 2014. The paper analyzes in detail the relations between the Arctic states through the formal mechanism of the Arctic Council, as well as the announced process of militarization of the Arctic area. In order to achieve the stated goal, a historical-comparative analysis was applied, the technique of content analysis of key strategic documents of the United States and the Russian Federation, including the analysis of the narratives of the securitizing actors.

### **HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ATLANTIC COUNCIL IN THE RELATIONS OF THE ARCTIC STATES**

The change in the security paradigm at the global level, which began in the eighties of the 20th century, is often linked to the geopolitical processes of controlling strategically important natural resources. The statement by Mikhail Gorbachev, the president of the Soviet Union, on the necessity of future cooperation and the reduction of armed tensions (through demilitarization) between the two powers, given on October 1, 1987, in Murmansk, is considered to be key to the establishment of an international Arctic control mechanism (Atland 2008). Namely the so-called The Murmansk Initiative represents a new Soviet policy that entails a comprehensive analysis of the role of the Arctic region in predominantly non-military forms of security (Issraelian 1992). Generally speaking, the new direction of the foreign policy of the Soviet Arctic does not treat civil cooperation in the field of environmental protection strictly as a confidence-building measure, but with this the USSR fundamentally changed the definition of security (Griffiths 1992, 5) which was practically confirmed by oil spill accidents at the ending of the eighties.

Atland explains the Murmansk initiative is significant for two reasons: the first leaders of the USSR were successful in dividing military and non-military issues within the national security paradigm, and secondly, although the initiative did not lead to direct cooperation of the Arctic states in the sphere of defense, certain shifts in their contacts (Atland 2008, 305-306). Finland, as one of the first countries interested in cooperation in the Arctic region, invoking the Murmansk initiative in 1989, organized a meeting of the leaders of eight Arctic countries with

the aim of solving environmental protection problems (Sale & Potapov 2010). Meetings in Rovaniemi (Finland), then in Yellowknife (Canada) and Kiruna (Sweden) lay the foundations for the adoption of the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy.

As one of the first documents establishing the principles and principles of cooperation between the Arctic states, the AEPS foresees a specific structure for future coordination. Namely, in the Declaration on the Protection of the Arctic Environment adopted on June 14, 1991, at the First Ministerial Conference on the Protection of the Arctic Environment, the signatory states Canada, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, the USSR and the USA commit themselves to the full implementation and development of the AEPS including the establishment of a prevention, preparedness and emergency response mechanism in the Arctic. The Arctic environmental strategy as a comprehensive assessment of the state of the environment is focused on various sources of threats to the ecosystem and the consequences of oil, radioactivity, noise, acidification and heavy metals pollution, but without specific obligations of each of the signatories individually. Similarly, Sale & Potapov note that the AEPS has three key limitations: first, although the Strategy deals with the protection of the Arctic environment, no definition of the Arctic is proposed anywhere; second, the Strategy does not establish any rights and obligations for the signatory states as is usual for international agreements; the third organization concerns the absence of the obligation to ratify the agreement of the Arctic states, which in a legal sense diminishes the importance of the Strategy (Sale & Potapov 2010, 140). The aforementioned limitations actually call into question the real motives of the initiators of cooperation in the Arctic region, primarily Finland, which was in the Soviet sphere of interest.

Some authors (Keskitalo 2004; Sale & Potapov 2010) explain the political leadership of Finland saw the Murmansk initiative as an opportunity to change its foreign policy orientation and focus on Western partners. Moreover, the ending of the Cold War forced most European countries to develop better relations with the West and fit into the New World Order more quickly. The possibilities of foreign policy development after Mikhail Gorbachev's speech in Murmansk were fully utilized not only in AEPS but also in achieving the relevant status of Finland for the great powers with a simultaneous focus on the European Union (Keskitalo 2004, 61). It should be noted that apart from Finland, which is primarily guided by its foreign policy interests, the structure and design of the Arctic

Environmental Protection Strategy was developed in detail by Canada as the most interested in controlling the Arctic region. (Keskitalo 2004). Therefore, it was precisely the different interests of the Arctic states and the perception of the future recomposition of international relations that contributed to the creation of a voluntary rather than legally binding Arctic environmental protection strategy.

Nord explains that the year 1990 can be marked as a turning point in the development of the Arctic intergovernmental organization as part of the then new Canadian foreign policy in dealing with the Arctic (Nord 2006). Namely, the concept of the future Arctic Council was presented on November 20 by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, Joe Clark, as a priority in the action of the Government of Canada (Nord 2006). Not long after, at the first meeting of the Arctic states on the occasion of the adoption of the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy in Rovaniemi in 1991, Canadian officials presented a proposal for the establishment of the Arctic Council with all the details about the goals, responsibilities and functions of this intergovernmental organization. According to the Government of Canada, the four most important goals to be left behind in the Arctic Council treaty are:

1. The spread of beneficial contacts between the various peoples inhabiting the Circumpolar North;
2. Improvement of environmental protection for threatened ecosystems in the north;
3. Reducing the military presence in the North (it can be said that this is the motive of the proponent);
4. Ensuring broad recognition of the economic, social and political rights of the indigenous people in that area (Nord 2006, 299).

Canada's unilateral action by pursuing exclusively its national interests over the other seven Arctic states caused the negotiation process to be prolonged, bearing in mind the individual consultations that had begun for the purpose of revising the founding treaty. The greatest resistance to the original was directed by the United States of America and demands that the Canadian proposal be adapted to the interests of this great power (Nord 2006). The negotiation process was directed in the direction that implied the expansion of the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy to other political areas that are not related to purely environmental issues (Bloom 1999). Despite radical changes to the originally conceived concept and constant return to traditional elements

of multilateral cooperation, on September 19, 1996, in Ottawa, the Arctic states finally reached an agreement on the establishment of the Arctic Council. Accordingly, the members of the Arctic Council are: Canada, Denmark (including Greenland and the Faroe Islands), Iceland, Finland, Norway, Sweden, the United States of America and the Russian Federation (Arctic Council 1996). It is precisely the sovereignty of the aforementioned states that extends above the Arctic Circle.

According to the founding agreement, “The Council was formed as a high-level forum with the aim of providing the means to promote cooperation, coordination and interaction between Arctic states with the inclusion of Arctic indigenous communities and other Arctic inhabitants in relation to common Arctic issues, especially issues of sustainable development and environmental protection on” (Arctic Council 1996). A particularly interesting position noted in the Ottawa Declaration (an integral part of the founding treaty) is that the Arctic Council will not deal with (in the text “it is prohibited”) issues related to military security. The mentioned position has a high level of restrictions on the cooperation of the Arctic states and is often the focus of disputes between the United States of America and Canada on the one hand and the Russian Federation on the other. Moreover, in the document itself, it is possible to see the signatory states are also the ones in charge of controlling the work of the Arctic Council, while other actors like the repeatedly mentioned indigenous peoples are completely marginalized in terms of their role and contribution.<sup>1</sup> Namely, in Article 2 of the Declaration, it is clearly stated that the decisions of the Arctic Council must be made exclusively by consensus of all eight Arctic states. (Arctic Council 1996). Moreover, indigenous groups can have the status of “Permanent Participant”, although with the limitation that their number cannot equal or exceed the number of founders “at any time”(Arctic Council 1996; Arctic Council 2023a).

The Council’s activities are carried out through six Working Groups and one independent Expert Group responsible for a wide range of activities from climate change to emergency response, mental health and sustainable development (Arctic Council 2023a). The development of scientifically based research is the main task of the Arctic Council, which further enables quality decisions to be made in the sphere of environmental protection and Arctic security.

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<sup>1</sup> According to available information from the Arctic Council, there are currently six indigenous peoples’ organizations that have achieved permanent participant status.

The establishment of the Arctic Council is actually the result of the collective political will of all eight Arctic states, while the absence of any legally binding provisions contributed to the loss of the international subjectivity of this organization. The functions of the Arctic Council are limited exclusively to adopting reports, making recommendations, and creating its own rules of procedure (Wilson 2016). Therefore, the rules of the Council are considered by the members to be binding in an ethical and not a legal sense, while everyone can use the Council's forum or not if they consider it appropriate. It has been shown that managing primarily the national interests of the member states completely shapes the role of the Arctic Council, while the degree of their cooperation, in the last few years, is quite low (East-West relationship).

The first period of the Council's work from 1996 to 2013 was marked by the adoption of the Ilulissat Declaration signed by the five most powerful members of the Arctic Council (the "Arctic Five"), namely the Russian Federation, USA, Norway, Canada and Denmark at a meeting held outside the organization. The declaration expressly rejects the need for a "new and comprehensive international legal regime aimed at governing the Arctic Ocean" and calls for respect for the existing cooperation framework (Wilson 2016). According to some authors (Potts & Schofield 2008; Koivurova 2010), the Council was criticized as a strictly discussion forum that could not translate the discussion into concrete policies within the organization itself. A particularly striking move by the Council to grant observer status (in 2013) to six non-Arctic states, namely China, Japan, India, Singapore, South Korea and Italy, can be interpreted as the beginning of the reconfiguration of the so-called "exclusive club of Arctic nations" (Davis 2012; Wilson 2016).

The second period of functioning of the Arctic Council, from 2013 until today, has not significantly changed the originally defined way of management in which the national interests of the Arctic member states are highly privileged. At the ministerial meeting in Reykjavík held on May 20, 2021, the Strategic Plan of the Arctic Council for the period from 2021-2030 was presented, the content of which is strictly ecological in nature (Arctic Council 2021). However, in the last part of the documents, entitled "Stronger Arctic Council", it is precisely stated that "cooperation with relevant public and private bodies should be improved, including the Arctic Coast Guard Forum and the Arctic Economic Council, as well as international institutions that reflect the connection between the Arctic and the rest of the world" (Arctic Council

2021, 23). The Arctic Coast Guard Forum can be seen as a channel for security dialogue between the United States of America and the Russian Federation when other channels are blocked (Østhagen 2015), which has been very relevant in recent years.

## **PROJECTION OF MILITARY POWER AND CONTROL OF THE ARCTIC**

The establishment and development of the Arctic Council as an international organization with solid legal and institutional foundations and a formally unlimited mandate to manage the Arctic region were accompanied by the emergence of new political, economic, environmental and military threats with a wide potential to threaten a large number of states. However, with the Ottawa Declaration, the resolution of military and thus a part of security issues is completely excluded, despite the deployment of military forces in the Arctic dating back to the Cold War period. The necessity of expanding cooperation in the defense sphere is discussed by Willis in the work “Arctic Council: Supporting Stability in the Arctic”, when he explains that the armed forces are the only ones who have the ability to apply appropriate monitoring instruments outside of their responsibility and are trained to act in such a way inhospitable environment (Willis 2013). Certain steps towards the introduction of military forces in the implementation of the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy, that is, the part related to responding in emergency situations, were made in 2011 with the adoption of the Agreement on Aviation and Maritime Search and Rescue in the Arctic. The security dilemma that arises from the introduction of certain forms of so-called soft security, as it turned out in the following years, is a prelude to a low-intensity conflict primarily between the most powerful signatories/founders of the Council of the United States of America (along with other Western countries) and the Russian Federation. It should be noted that the People’s Republic of China has also become one of the dominant security actors in controlling the Arctic in recent years.

Already in 2008, the European Union was actively involved in the security discourse related to the control of the Arctic. In the report of the European Commission entitled “The European Union and the Arctic Region” as the main problems in the management of the Arctic, the “fragmentation of the legal framework, the lack of effective instruments, the absence of a comprehensive policy-making process, as



well as gaps in participation, implementation and geographical scope” are cited (European Commission 2008, 10). In addition, the interest in the policy of managing the Arctic, as expected, did not bypass even the most powerful military-political alliance, i.e. NATO.

In 2012, the International Institute for Strategic Studies in the report “Forum for Arctic Climate Change and Security, Military Cooperation” states that in terms of NATO leadership, the Arctic needs a security management system that will include a military component (International Institute for Strategic Studies 2012). A decade later, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg (Jens Stoltenberg) told the daily *Politico* that this organization “must increase its presence in the Arctic” in view of the increasing activity of the Russian Federation and the People’s Republic of China, which sees itself as “a country close to the Arctic” (*Politico* 2023). By systematically reviewing the national strategic documents of individual countries/great powers, it is possible to see the importance of establishing control over the Arctic region for political, military and economic reasons.

In October 2022, United States officials presented the National Strategy for the Arctic Region, which clearly envisions future security activities in the context of controlling the Arctic. The strategy is based on four interrelated pillars: first, security; other climate change and environmental protection; third, sustainable economic development; fourth, international cooperation and governance (The White House 2022). A particularly interesting part of the strategy refers to the sphere of security, where it is stated that “the US priority is to protect the American people, sovereign territory and people. In this regard, the US intends strengthening the military and civilian capacities needed to defend American interests in the Arctic, an area that has been neglected so far.” The Strategy further states “we will continue cooperation with Arctic allies and partners in support of achieving these goals and managing the risks of further militarization or unintended conflict, including those resulting from geopolitical tensions with Russia.” These improvements should “contribute to the national security and livelihood security of the State of Alaska” (The White House 2022, 8-9). Therefore, it can be concluded that the national interest of the USA is the control of the Arctic primarily through the process of militarization.

Within the framework of the first security pillar, three strategic goals are presented that should be fulfilled within the defined time frame from 2022 to 2032. The first goal concerns “improving understanding of

the Arctic operational environment” by investing in the modernization of equipment and assets dedicated to: observation, mapping, weather, water and sea ice forecasting, disaster preparedness and satellite coverage to enable efficient trade and ensure maritimately and air security. The second strategic objective is called “presence exercise in support of priority objectives” and has a special significance for the aforementioned militarization of the Arctic. Namely, the US armed forces should enable “homeland defense, global projection of the military and power and deterrence objectives”, whereby special attention is paid to the expansion of the US Arctic Coast Guard’s icebreaker fleet to support the presence in the American Arctic and, if necessary, in the European Arctic. The last strategic goal, which unites the previous two, refers to “maximizing unity and efforts with allies and partners.” The maximization of cooperation with the Arctic states, as stated, is primarily motivated by improving common security and deterring aggression in the Arctic, especially from the Russian Federation. It also calls for increased interoperability and a focus on training and exercises including coordination with “NATO Allies and Arctic partners to defend NATO’s security interests in the region while reducing risks and preventing unintended escalation, especially during this period of heightened tensions with Russia” (The White House 2022, 9). Therefore, military and security analysts of the USA recognize the Arctic as a place of potential conflict with the Russian Federation and at the same time demand the active participation of NATO in the implementation of control and surveillance activities in this region.

The administration of US President Joseph Biden (Joe Biden) pays special attention to the Arctic Executive Steering Committee and the Arctic Research Commission as key institutions responsible for implementing various activities in the Arctic.<sup>2</sup>Of course, as in the case of the adoption and implementation of the National Strategy for the Arctic region, the American National Security Council, which unites the work of the aforementioned institutions at the federal level, has a decisive influence. However, any long-term military confrontation of the USA with the countries presented as the main competition in the Arctic, primarily the Russian Federation and possibly the People’s Republic of China, is not possible because of limited capacities, bearing in mind that the armed forces are untrained and unequipped to carry out war

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<sup>2</sup> Read more about the *Transatlantic challenge of the Biden administration* in: Lišanin 2021.

activities in an unfavorable weather environment characteristic for low temperatures.

The change in the geopolitical situation on the European continent, which was initiated by the implementation of a special military operation in Ukraine, raised the issue of relations between the Arctic states. Namely, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Norway, the USA and Iceland make a decision to refuse cooperation with the Russian Federation within the Atlantic Council, even though this country has the role of chairman for the period from 2021 to 2023. The suspension of coordination with the largest acting state can lead to the collapse of the Atlantic Council, which further causes the emergence of new international conflicts in this region. Abie Tingstad, assistant director of the RAND Corporation, explains in the article “Putin’s actions in Ukraine spread north” that increased military activity could cause a collision, nuclear accident or other. It is a misunderstanding that continues to rapidly increase tensions between Russia, the Western Arctic states and even the People’s Republic of China (Tingstad 2022). The most likely escalation of the conflict is supported by the fact that any possible incursion (real or apparent) into the Northern Sea Route and the Barents Sea, i.e. its vast northern border, Russia could treat as a threat (Tingstad 2022). In addition, the presence of the People’s Republic of China in the Arctic, which since 2014 has been investing significant funds in the exploration and exploitation of gas and oil in the part of the Arctic under the control of the Russian Federation (Tingstad 2022), is an additional incentive to overcome the new crisis. Therefore, the limited ability of the US to maintain a military presence in the Arctic is one of the basic motives behind the announced formation of the NATO Arctic Command (NATO Arctic Command, ARCCOM), including close cooperation with the Baltic states, which the Russian Federation views as a threat to its national interests.

As a country whose northern borders are mostly located in the Arctic, the Russian Federation has the most modern equipment and means for carrying out a series of scientific, military and economic activities. The Russian Arctic is a territory inhabited by about 2.5 million inhabitants and extends over 24,000 km including: Murmansk Oblast, Nenets, Yamalo-Nenets and Chukotka Autonomous Oblasts and Komi Republic, northern municipalities of Arkhangelsk Oblast, Krasnoyarsk Oblast, Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), Republic of Karelia, archipelago and islands in the Russian part of the Arctic Ocean (Arctic Council 2023b). In addition, the Russian Federation controls 53% of the coast

of the Arctic Ocean and thus the largest Exclusive Economic Zone at a distance of 370 kilometers from the continental part in accordance with the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. Accordingly, as the key national interests of the Russian Federation in terms of presence in the Arctic, the following can be stated:

- Use of the Arctic region as a strategic resource base of the Russian Federation through the solution of the issue of socio-economic development of the state;
- Preserving the Arctic as an area for peace and cooperation;
- Preserving the unique ecosystem of Arctic;
- Use of the Northern Sea Route as the national unified transport line of the Russian Federation in the Arctic (Arctic Council 2023b).

Since the Russian Federation strengthened its positions in the Arctic during the time of the Soviet Union through the construction of military and civil infrastructure, this type of activity has taken on a new and more intense form in the last few years. Namely, on October 26, 2020, a new Strategy for the development of the Russian Arctic zone and ensuring national security until 2035 (Кремль 2020) was adopted by the decree of President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin (Владимир Владимирович Путин) which represents continuity in terms of developing all the necessary Arctic control capacities. Seen through the prism of security sciences, the Strategy pays special attention to Article 18, clearly stating “that in order to ensure military security, protect and preserve the sovereignty of the Russian Federation through the effective exploitation of available natural resources (independently or in cooperation with other actors) and the control of the Northern Sea Passage. In order to preserve the state borders of the Russian Federation, constantly maintain the necessary level of combat readiness of the general-purpose units of the armed forces and other military formations, depending on the forecasted nature of military dangers and military threats to the Russian Federation in the Arctic” (Кремль 2020, 15). In addition, comprehensive provision of combat and mobilization readiness at the level necessary, to solve the problem of violent pressure and aggression against the Russian Federation and its allies is foreseen, including the implementation of all types of activities in the exclusive economic zone and the continental shelf of the Russian Federation in the Arctic (Кремль 2020, 16). Therefore, the Arctic region has strategic importance for the defense of the Russian Federation against potential aggressors that may

come from the eastern direction, ie. Bering Strait or from the western part via the bases stationed in Greenland and Norway.

The construction of naval and air bases of the armed forces of the Russian Federation, after a long period of stagnation from the time of the Soviet era, has been especially intensified since 2014 and the introduction of economic sanctions by Western countries led by the USA. From the perspective of the Russian Federation, natural resources in the Arctic provide a good enough basis for economic stability and social well-being. Precisely for this reason, the oil infrastructure and gas terminals require the undertaking of a series of preventive defense measures, which was confirmed by the construction of 10 search and rescue bases, 16 deep-water ports, 10 new air bases (out of a total of 14) and 10 air defense installations (РИА новости 2021a). Special attention of military strategists was attracted by the completion of the decades-long construction of the state-of-the-art military base “Arctic trefoil” (Арктический трилистник) on the island of Alexander Land, Franz Josef Land archipelago in the very north of the Russian Federation. The main task of this base is to provide anti-missile and anti-ship defense, and the garrison includes “Onyx” and “Bastion” missile complexes with a range of over 600 kilometers. The high defense range covers the entire Russian north and thus the Arctic area.

According to the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, because of the enormous importance of the Arctic for national interests, on December 15, 2014, the Joint Strategic Command “North” was established as a powerful formation of the Navy that has the status of a military district (Министерство обороны РФ 2018). The construction of modern military infrastructure in the north of the Russian Federation can also be interpreted as a deterrent strategy for NATO, bearing in mind that the Northern Fleet has a larger number of submarines and warships (RIA News 2021b). For example, the frigate “Admiral Gorshkov” and the nuclear submarine “Severodvinsk” became the first carriers of hypersonic missiles “Zirkon”. (РИА новости 2021б). Accordingly, the Northern Fleet is gradually turning into a full-fledged “army within an army”, where the command has the main forces and means that allow it to operate both in the Arctic region and beyond its borders - protecting the borders of the state or projecting the force factor (Газета ЗП 2021). The Northern Fleet has the function and capabilities to operate in the waters of the Arctic Ocean, including entering the North Atlantic.

According to researchers Paul & Swistek from the German Institute for International and Security Affairs, the Arctic security dilemma is becoming increasingly intense because of the growing military ambitions of the Russian Federation and to some extent the People's Republic of China (Paul & Swistek 2022). As an example, they cite Sweden, which in its new strategic document from November 2020 identifies "new military dynamics in the Arctic region." Data that in the period from 2021 to 2025, this country will increase its external expenses by 40% and even by 85% compared to the level of 2014 (Paul & Swistek 2022). Also, the USA and other NATO members have partially answered the question of how they will react to the increased engagement of the Russian Federation in the Arctic and North Atlantic region (Paul & Swistek 2022). The authors conclude that the measures they have implemented – armaments, exercises and redeployment of operational resources – must be embedded in a well-balanced combination of deterrence, defense and dialogue.

Contrary to the analyzes of Western experts on the Russian militarization of the Arctic region, Elena Karanauhova (Елена Каранухова) in the article "Possibility of armed conflict in the Arctic in the 21st century," explains the genesis of the relations of great powers in the matter of controlling the Arctic from the 20th to the 21st century. The author's basic conclusion is that, under the current circumstances, an armed conflict in the Arctic is not possible, but there are certain risks (Карнаухова 2021). The first risk of the militarization of the region arose "due to the interrupted communication between the Russian Federation and Western countries after the crisis in Ukraine in 2014, although the Russian side makes proposals for its restoration. Arctic contradictions bring us back to the question of the need to renew or modify the Russia-NATO Council. However, it would be dangerous to reduce the Arctic agenda to exclusively relations between Russia and the Alliance – this could expand the Baltic-Black Sea conflict system, as well as strengthen NATO's claims to be the key guarantor of security in the Arctic. At the same time, such a channel of communication should not be built on the basis of the Arctic Council, which may lead to the securitization of its mandate. A possible way out of that situation is the formation of a forum on security in the Arctic with the participation of the military Arctic and sub-Arctic states, as well as observer states of the Arctic Council. The development of the current Russian-Norwegian cooperation through the General Staff could encourage others to do so" (Карнаухова 2021). Another risk concerns NATO's military provocations in the Arctic Ocean

under the pretext of ensuring free navigation in the Northern Sea Route. The last risk is the Arctic case brings us back to the issue of information security.” The experience of the collapse of the Soviet Union suggests that to defeat the enemy, it is not at all necessary to conduct military operations on any territory. The wars of the future (more precisely, today's) are wars of a hybrid nature with an emphasis on countermeasures in the information space and attacks on critical infrastructure. The abundance of negative publications about the “war in the Arctic” is proof of that” (Карнаухова 2021). The author notes that cyber attacks by Western intelligence agencies on Russian infrastructure intended for strategic deterrence in the Arctic are a particular cause for concern.

One of NATO's largest military exercises in the last thirty years called “Cold Response” was held in 2022 in the Arctic with the participation of over 30,000 soldiers, 220 aircraft and 50 vessels from 27 countries. The participation of Norway as the host state of military tactical exercises, including the cooperation of Finland and Sweden, is particularly significant for the interpretation of the security situation and tensions surrounding the membership of these Baltic state in NATO. The Secretary General of NATO, in a conversation with the armed forces that participated in the exercise, stated that with these activities, “we show the unity and strength of NATO in action” (NATO 2022). On the other hand, the reaction of the Russian Federation to refuse to send its representatives to monitor the military exercise indicates this country's disagreement with NATO's increased military activities in the Arctic. Furthermore, the Russian Federation has activated a NOTAM (Notice to Airmen) danger zone west of the Lofoten archipelago outside the main exercise area of NATO forces. However, an activated hazard warning does not indicate what weapon will be used within the hazard zone. Therefore, the actions of militarizing the Arctic through the implementation of military exercises and the construction of military infrastructure contribute to the creation of a security dilemma whose negative consequences can be reflected in international security.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis of the Arctic area as a natural resource of strategic importance for the countries that surround it, involves monitoring the political, economic, military, security and social aspects of real cooperation or possible conflict. The paper systematically describes

the role and importance of the Arctic Council as an intergovernmental organization whose basic task is to coordinate the activities of the Arctic states, primarily in the field of environmental protection, while military forms of cooperation are completely excluded. However, each of the signatories is guided exclusively by their national interests, which has a negative impact on the work of the Council, bearing in mind that the decisions made are not legally binding. Since the Arctic Council does not have executive powers, any form of cooperation is mainly reduced to voluntary participation, which in the case of accidental situations caused by anthropogenic or natural action can represent an extremely limiting character.

The second part of the paper contains a systematic analysis of the relationship of the Arctic states (with the status of great powers, ie. the USA and the Russian Federation) towards the Arctic as an important geostrategic area rich in natural resources. The results of the analysis of strategic documents show that the control of the Arctic represents one of the national interests, that is, energy stability, and then political, economic and social, will depend on the exploitation of resources that are above the world average in this area. In addition, the Northern Sea Route, as a corridor for international traffic, greatly shortens the distance between countries and trade centers on the East-West route. It is for these reasons that the Western Arctic states, led by the USA, are bringing up the issue of the militarization of the Arctic, accusing the Russian Federation of intensive construction of military air and naval bases. The paper also presents data related to the existing military potential of Russian Federation, linked to the dynamics of the armed crisis in Ukraine that began in 2014. On the other side, the more frequent military exercises of NATO members and the announced greater presence of armed forces, primarily the USA, have a significant impact on the disruption of the security situation in the northernmost part of the planet Earth. Based on the existing data, it can be concluded that political and military tensions over the control of the Arctic in the future may have negative consequences for international security, bearing in mind the fact that a certain reconfiguration of the international order implies a fight over strategically important areas rich in natural resources.



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## **СТРАТЕШКА КОНТРОЛА АРКТИКА И МОГУЋИ ОРУЖАНИ СУКОБ ВЕЛИКИХ СИЛА**

### **Сажетак**

Геополитичко надметање великих сила око контроле стратешки важних природних ресурса саставни је део политичке агенде усмерене ка достизању економске а тиме и војне доминације на глобалном нивоу. Територија Арктика као најсевернијег дела планете Земље располаже већим резервама природних ресурса (пре свега нафта и гас) за чију се суверену контролу и експлоатацију надмећу државе које окружују (укупно њих осам) ово подручје али у последње време и земље које су себи доделиле статус „близу арктичка држава“ као штп је НР Кина. Тренд убрзане милитаризације Арктика у периоду након завршетка Хладног рата може се тумачити као последица нарушених односа кључних актера међународне политике и различите перцепције будућег глобалног поретка. Циљ овог рада јесте систематичан опис динамике односа арктичких држава са посебним фокусом на САД (укључујући НАТО) и Руску Федерацију и њихових активности у војно-одбрамбеној сфери. Ради постизања пројектованог циља коришћена је техника анализе садржаја стратешких докумената, техника анализе наратива и историјско компаративна анализа. Резултати овог истраживања указују на повећано интересовање великих сила за контролу Арктика односно природних ресурса присутних на овом подручју као и стратешки важан међународни саобраћајни коридор Северни морски пут. Сходно томе ангажовање оружаних снага треба да омогући несметано спровођење дефинисаних политичко-економских активности арктичких држава са статусом великих сила.

**Кључне речи:** Арктик, природни ресурси, милитаризација, контрола, Северни морски пут